

There Is No Separation

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Separating Jewish and Israel education sounds strange to me although I am aware it exists in the field. For me they have always been intrinsically entwined—in my home, in my day school, in my Jewish summer camp, in my youth group, in my role as an educator and a Jewish communal professional. I know this is not true for everyone. So perhaps that is where we need to start in a post-October 7 world. There is no separation.

I will leave it up to the formal Jewish educators to determine curriculum for literacy. As experiential educators we are responsible for a huge portion of Jewish identity formation. When it comes to Israel—as one of my cherished mentors Julia Koschitzky z'l said—“What the eyes don't see the heart can't feel”. Now more than ever, we need to ensure that young people experience Israel firsthand. We must agree that a Jewish education without an immersive Israel experience is incomplete.

Jewish day schools, Jewish summer camps, and Jewish youth groups should all have an Israel experience available as part of their program. Campus & Community-based trips, 101 trips, internships, volunteer opportunities, and career-oriented young professional programs should be available for all



young adults. Jewish community professionals should all have an immersive Israel experience. And all of these with Israeli counterparts as an integral part of the program.

On November 19, I had the privilege to come to Israel and bear witness with many of my esteemed colleagues. My broken heart is still absorbing what I heard from the many Israelis we had the honour of meeting. My tear-filled eyes are trying to envision what future Israel experiences will look like. My mind is reeling with questions. Who will write the answers to “why Israel?” for our upcoming generations. Are we prepared to be the authors of a new narrative? What parts of October 7 are we going to integrate into our programs and itineraries and for which age groups? Are we ready to provide this crucial personal journey that will be relevant, authentic, and meaningful?

Perhaps we can start with not being afraid of “the Z word.” Zionism does not need to be a word we are hesitant to use. Can we please be proud to be Jews and Zionists? We do not need to be apologetic for believing that Israel has a right to exist as a homeland for the Jewish people. That is not to say that we also don’t need to be more intentional and thoughtful in our explanations of the complex relationship between Israel, Israelis, and Palestinians. The subject should not be avoided. And certainly, we can differentiate between the Palestinian people and brutal terrorist organizations like Hamas.

Young Jewish adults on and off campus are for the most part ill equipped to stand up to the Israel and Jew hatred (antisemitism) they are facing. We have not adequately prepared enough of them. We must do a better job to prepare them and those coming after them to deal knowledgeably and effectively with the new realities in Israel and at home. We want them to both want to and be able to.

As part of the 18x18 pedagogy that I was a part of, I now always ask the question, "What do our participants need to know, feel, and be able to do" as a result of our teaching? I suggest we use this framework to answer the question, "What should Israel Education look like in a post October 7 world?"