

Everything Has Changed: Reflections on Israel Education in the Shadow of October 7

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On October 7, the world shook. For so many Jews and Israelis globally, there was a deep and dark sense that the world changed seismically on that day, and that there would forever be a before and an after 10/7 as it related to Israel, a place so many of us call and consider home. As a scholar and an educator of Israel (especially around issues of conflict and the broader region), and as an individual with deep personal connections, I remained glued to every nugget of news that emerged and found myself seeking to understand, relate to, and connect with all that was happening.

Yet, despite feeling at times overwhelmed with information, I also sensed deeply that I couldn't fully understand, fully relate, fully be there from where I was. Thus, when the opportunity arose to join many dear colleagues and friends to travel to Israel to learn, show support, and connect anew, I knew that this was an essential professional and personal necessity. Having returned home, I know that the experience deepened my connection and understanding and provided lessons, insights, and perspectives that will



inform my own thinking and what I bring to my learners.

Like many others, from October 7 on, I read and watched story after story about the victims, hostages, and heroes of the day and all the days that followed. I read the statistics of the displaced, and their plight in the aftermath of the attacks. Yet, little prepared me for the experience of walking into the David hotel near the Dead Sea and meeting the displaced families of Kibbutz Be'eri, one of the hardest hit Kibbutzim in the Gaza Envelope. In this encounter, we not only heard the personal stories of members of the Kibbutz from that day, but we also heard about the everyday struggles and deep challenges that they have encountered every single day since, being refugees in their own country. We could see and feel the devastation, but also the resilience of a community that had seen the worst of humanity. Listening to the story of an extended family of Bedouin heroes, including Ismail Alqrinawi, who saved their nephew, along with dozens of young adults fleeing the Nova festival, helped me understand the terror they faced that day, but also the shared present and future. It highlighted the embedded, entangled, and complicated layers of Israeli society, while also providing hope for the future. Each story we heard was different and shed light on the many layers and complexities of the experience of October 7 and Israel more broadly.

Even before I left for Israel, the consistent headline was that "everything had changed" after October 7. In the midst of a crisis, it is often hard to know what will

change and what will return. Even while we were there, some restaurants opened, kids were returning to school (albeit in a limited fashion), and adults were returning to work. What was clear was that some societal and political assumptions that had guided Israel seemed to have been thrown into question or even shattered on October 7. Among the most obvious were the relationship and, importantly, the responsibility of the state and government to its citizens and the diminished sense of invulnerability (militarily, societally, and otherwise). More than I could learn from news reports, the experiences and feelings people shared helped me to understand the challenges and opportunities in rebuilding lives and society amidst feelings of deep insecurity. They also allowed me to reflect on my own assumptions, providing ways to reframe how I think about and teach a range of topics on Israel, and especially the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

October 7 had and will have a significant impact on Israel. How will October 7 and its aftermath impact Israel education? The experience reemphasized for me the necessity for personal connection and stories, which allow deep and qualitatively different understanding and meaning. Some of the many important questions that we will face as Israel educators include: How do we relay individual experiences as well as the broader collective experience and memory of this period? How do we understand and continue to bring authentic diverse narratives together and hold complexity within our educational settings? How can we balance the teaching of the events of October 7 and their impact,

with the broader history of Israel and the conflict? Where will these histories intersect and diverge in the future?

In addition, the events of October 7 have had a global impact, on world Jewry in ways unrecognizable in recent memory. As such, we will need to grapple with how these events in Israel have affected and will shape the relationships and connections of Israelis and global Jewry, and especially their sense of Peoplehood and collective destiny, an area that has been core to Israel education. Finally, my experience with fellow educational leaders from Israel and North America highlighted the need for diverse approaches and methods for tackling these and many more questions. We shouldn't do this alone. This moment offers the opportunity to work collaboratively in new ways to craft an Israel education for new realities and to address the things that have forever changed—and those that have endured.