

NYU Steinhardt School of Education
Ph.D. Program in Education and Jewish Studies
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Israel Education in Flux

Catalogue Description

The course investigates recent educational and research efforts regarding “Israel education” – the teaching and learning about Israel aimed at American Jews. We will examine longstanding debates and tensions in this field, as well as the new developments and directions in a variety of sectors, including day schools, travel tours (like birthright), Israel studies in the university. We will develop a critical, analytic, perspective about this important case of transnational education.

Overview

Israel education has emerged as a new enterprise for what would otherwise seem like an old field because the educational challenges educators face are different than they were in the past. Indeed, the very phrase *Israel Education* signals that something is afoot. After all, there has always been some connection between “Israel” and Judaism/Jewish civilization, beginning with the bible, the prayer book and so on. With the birth of Zionism and then the founding of the State of Israel, there was an enterprise of *Zionist* education. Only recently, in the past decade, did people begin to speak of *Israel* Education.

In more distressed and distressing political climate of the 2000-present period there is now a widely shared sense among educators in American and in Israel that they can no longer count on a positive connection to Israel arising by default from the surrounding environment. As a result there has been a great deal of activity to revisit and refigure teaching and learning about Israel for American Jews.

Consequently there has been renewed attention to the enterprise of educating American Jews about Israel, leading to questions such as: What are/should be its aims and purposes; What are/should be its means (core practices and processes); Who offers it and for whom?

As we shall see, many of these questions arise because the field is now in flux and contested in a number of different ways. There is a debate about the extent of the “distance” between US Jews and Israel and the dynamics affecting it. There are differences of opinion within the US Jewish community about Israeli policies and because of the often-negative world reactions to some of Israel’s actions. There are questions about how these concerns relate to the educational enterprise of teaching and learning about Israel, about the ways that the American Jewish community educates (i.e. thinks and learns) itself (children and adults), and about the place and the role of Israel in the life of the Jewish people. The very contested, “live” quality surrounding Israel education makes it ripe for investigation, as it challenges us to think about what is worth studying, how and why and for whom.

In addition “Israel education” offers a lens for investigating the sociology of American Jewish education, and also a means looking at the evolving relationship between American Jews and Israel.

Descriptive Questions:

What constitutes “Israel Education”?

How has this educational enterprise been conceptualized and enacted (and by whom)?

Where and in what forms is Israel taught to American Jews?

What kind of teaching and learning about Israel takes place in the US Jewish community? (and beyond)?

What is the state of research in the area?

Analytic Issues

How can we contextualize the emergence of “Israel education” historically and sociologically?

What analytic /conceptual frameworks have been employed to take stock of the field?

How does the case of Israel education compare to other examples of diaspora education?

What are the implications of defining the contours of the field differently, in light of Zionist thought on the one hand and in terms of transnational and diaspora education on the other? What are the implications of these alternative framings for thinking about education?

Goals

- To induct students into the field of research in “Israel education” by studying recent developments in this arena
- To bolster students’ critical, analytic perspective regarding the work of purveyors of Israel education
- To support students in developing a perspective about what research is needed in this field education

COURSE REQUIREMENTS & POLICIES

1. *Participation*: Students are expected to come to class prepared to discuss the readings and to participate in other learning activities. Being an active participant involves not only speaking skills but also listening skills. Since the course will be run as a seminar, your participation will enhance your learning as well as the learning of others.
2. *Reading*: Students are expected to complete all reading assignments. Some of the things to pay attention to include the following:
 - the author’s argument, underlying assumptions, supporting evidence
 - key concepts and their meaning
 - connections to other readings and to your evolving sense of your own work in Jewish education

Come to class prepared with 3-4 “talking points”—brief notes on issues/ideas/questions/confusions that particularly struck you for each assigned reading.
3. *Précis of Readings and Presentation*: Once during the semester you will prepare a short written overview (3-4 pages double spaced) for one of the sessions. You should summarize the various perspectives in that week’s readings, providing some representative illustrations of the author(s)’s claims (i.e., some well-selected quotations and citations); Finally, you should have questions prepared for discussion. Each presenter will bring enough copies to share with the other seminar members and do a presentation and discussion of the précis.

4. *Seminar Paper (10-15 pages double spaced)*

Possible topics

a) compare the conceptions of Israel education as embodied in two particular settings e.g. (a school, a camp, a travel/tour or gap-year program, with different kinds of sponsorship)

b) examine the debate about “distancing”

c) choose another topic to be decided in consultation with me.

Make a proposal to me about what you intend to work on by ____.

A hard copy of the paper is due on ____ at 5PM – and submit it ALSO by email.

Criteria for Grades:

Participation 40%

Response Paper 25%

Final paper/project 35%

Class Attendance and Participation: If you must miss or arrive late to a class for any reason, please let me know in advance. If you miss a class, you will be expected to send me a short reaction piece (2-3 pages) about the readings for that week’s seminar.

Evaluation of Student Performance

Written assignments will be evaluated primarily according to the following criteria:

- Do they respond adequately to the questions being asked in the assignment?
- Do they reflect ideas presented in the readings and class discussion?
- Do they represent original, thoughtful, and reflective thinking about the issues?
- Are they comprehensive and comprehensible?
- Have they been completed according to the specifications for the assignment?
- Are they free from grammatical, spelling, and mechanical errors?

I may create more specific grading rubrics for assignments as well.

Your class participation will be assessed in terms of your involvement, cooperation, attitude, effort, and professionalism in this course.

Special Accommodations: Any student attending NYU who needs an accommodation due to a chronic, psychological, visual, mobility and/or learning disability, or is Deaf or Hard of Hearing should register with the Moses Center for Students with Disabilities at 719 Broadway, 2nd floor; (212) 998-4980 (telephone and TTY); www.nyu.edu/csd.

Students are encouraged to discuss specific needs with me sometime during the first two weeks of the semester; accommodations will not be made retroactively.

Academic Integrity

It is expected that all assignments completed in this course will be the product of your own original thought and effort, unless otherwise indicated. Sources should be cited responsibly and

credit given where it is due in order to avoid plagiarism. Other forms of scholastic dishonesty include (but are not limited to): cheating on assignments; submitting the same paper, or substantially similar papers, to meet the requirements of more than one course without the consent of all instructors involved.

Outline of sessions

I. Taking stock of the field historically

- a. Wertheimer, J. (2008). American Jews and Israel: A 60-year retrospective. *American Jewish Yearbook*, 108, 3–79.
- b. Barry Chazan (1980) Palestine in American Jewish Education in the Pre-State Period. *Jewish Social Studies*, Vol. 42, No. 3/4 (Summer - Autumn, 1980), pp. 229-248
- c. Alan Mintz (2011) *Sanctuary in the Wilderness: A Critical Introduction to American Hebrew*, Stanford U Press. Part I, The Hebraist World

II. Contested Issues: The debate on “distancing”

- a. *Contemporary Jewry*, (2010, vol 30: 2-3) “Are Israel and Young American Jews Growing Apart: Debating the Distancing Hypothesis” Special Issue.
- b. Theodore Sasson, Benjamin Phillips, Graham Wright, Charles Kadushin and Leonard Saxe (2012). Understanding Young Adult Attachment to Israel: Period, Lifecycle and Generational Dynamics. *Contemporary Jewry*, 32:1, 67-84,
- c. Shmuel Rosner and Inbal Hakman (2012) The Challenge of Peoplehood: Strengthening the Attachment of Young American Jews to Israel in the Time of the *Distancing Discourse*. Jewish People Policy Institute, Israel.

III. Calls to Action

Who is making these calls? To whom are they addressed?

Karen Abrams Gerber and Aliza Mazor (Spring 2003). **Mapping Israel Education: An Overview of Trends and Issues in North America**. The Gilo Family Fund. San Francisco (pdf)

Jehuda Reinharz, (2003). **Israel in the Eyes of Americans: A Call for Action**.
<http://bir.brandeis.edu/bitstream/handle/10192/22991/Pres.pdf?sequence=1>

(2012) Mapping the Landscape: The Emerging Field of Israel Education. iCenter
[http://www.theicenter.org/sites/theicenter.org/files/Mapping the Field of Israel Education.pdf](http://www.theicenter.org/sites/theicenter.org/files/Mapping%20the%20Field%20of%20Israel%20Education.pdf)

Horowitz (2012) Defining Israel Education.
<http://www.theicenter.org/sites/theicenter.org/files/bethamie%27s%20report.pdf>

IV. Philosophical Stances

Arnold Eisen and Michael Rosenak (1997) *Teaching Israel: Basic Issues and Philosophical Guidelines*.
<http://www.jewishagency.org/NR/rdonlyres/05584E5A-ED59-45BF-8485-E5F5481B6496/73230/teachingisrael.pdf>

Sinclair, A. (2006). "A Conservative Jewish Educational Approach to Postzionism." *Conservative Judaism*, 59:1,29-58.

Ezra Kopelowitz (2003) *Between Mifgash and Shlichut: Paradigms in Contemporary Zionist Education and the Question of the Ideological Relationship between Israel and Diaspora*. <http://www.jewishagency.org/NR/rdonlyres/A5F275E0-8ACB-4D51-9B0E-35D11EE701D2/0/EnglishVersionofThreeideologicalparadigms.pdf>

V. Israel Education in American (Day) Schools

Pomson, Alex and Deitcher, Howard (2010). "Day School Israel Education in the Age of Birthright." *Journal of Jewish Education*, 76: 1, 52 — 73.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/15244110903572965>

Zakai, Sivan (2011).

Ezra Kopelowitz (March, 2005). *Towards What Ideal Do We Strive? A Portrait of Social and Symbolic Engagement with Israel in Jewish Community Day Schools*. Survey commissioned by RAVSAK and The Jewish Agency for Israel. Jerusalem.

Barry Chazan (2000). *Through a Glass Darkly: Israel in the Mirror of American Jewish Education*. In *Beyond Survival and Philanthropy: American Jewry and Israel*, ed. Allon Gal and Alfred Gottschalk (Cincinnati: HUC Press), pp. 123-130.

VI. Israel Trips and Ethnography

Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (2002). "Learning from ethnography: Reflections on the nature and efficacy of youth tours to Israel". In *The Israel Experience: studies in youth travel and Jewish identity*, by Harvey Goldberg, Samuel Heilman, and Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (Jerusalem: Studio Kavgraph, Andrea and Charles Bronfman Philanthropies, 2002), 267-331.

VII. Birthright I: "A word from our sponsors"?

Leonard Saxe and Barry Chazan (2008) *Ten Days of Birthright Israel: A Journey in Young Adult Identity*. Brandeis Series in American Jewish History, Culture, and Life.

VIII. Birthright II: Critical Considerations

Kelner, Shaul (2010). *Tours that Bind: Diaspora, Pilgrimage and Israeli Birthright Tourism*. NYC: NYU Press.

Jillian L. Powers (2011). Reimagining the Imagined Community: Homeland Tourism and the Role of Place. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 55(10) 1362 –1378.

IX. The emergence of "Israel Studies" in the Academy

Shenkar, Miriam (2012). *The Politicization of Israel Studies*. Beersheva: Ben Gurion

University of the Negev Press

Examination of the development of Israel studies in the university. What factors have led to the location of Israel studies outside Middle Eastern studies and instead in Jewish studies or Near Eastern Languages and Culture departments? The choice of where to locate Israel studies chairs and centers involves questions of national and global identity. How are these identities conceptualized by scholars in the field? How they are reflected in the location of Israel studies within the university?

X. Contests and Critiques about Israel and American Jewry

Sasson, Theodore. (2010) "Mass Mobilization to Direct Engagement: American Jews' Changing Relationship to Israel." *Israel Studies*, summer, pp. 173-195.

Alex Sinclair, Ofra Backenroth, Roberta Bell-Kligler (2010). "Breaking Myths, Building Identity: Practitioner-Researcher Reflections on Running an Israel Seminar for Jewish Education Graduate Students." *International Journal of Jewish Education Research*, (1), 49-74.

Gringras, R. (2011) Hugging and Wrestling.

<http://makomisrael.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/11/MAKOMWrestlingandHugging.pdf>

XI. The effects of the protracted [Israeli- Palestinian, Israeli Arab] conflict on education and identity

Roundtable on loyalty and criticism in the relations between World Jewry and Israel.
Israel Studies 17:2 (2012)

XII. Emerging Educational Developments

Kesher Hadash

Encounter

Kivvunim

NOTE: Meeting dates, topics, and readings are subject to change in consultation with the class.