How Social-Emotional Learning can improve the teaching of Complicated Narratives of Israel to American Jewish Teenagers & Curricular Adaptation

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The contribution of this thesis: American Jews have lots of feelings about Israel that often lead to conflict. This thesis seeks to answer how educators and clergy in the field can work to sow the intensifying internal American Jewish conflict over the Jewish State. By reflecting on how they can teach American Jewish teenagers a new "*Mussar* Mindset" to be reflective on their feelings when learning different complicated narratives about Israel, this thesis and capstone imagine what it might look like to use the wisdom of *Mussar* and of Social-Emotional Learning to help teenagers as they become Jewish adults. Additionally, teaching teenagers this particular mindset using Jewish wisdom would not only be rather appealing to many of them today, but it would be especially helpful at their developmental moment and especially amidst the uncertainty of the time.

The goal of the thesis: This thesis seeks to answer two questions. 1] How are Israel Educators and Jewish Educators in the field already teaching particular Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) skills to teenagers in order to facilitate discussions on complex issues associated with Israel? 2] What might a new paradigm in Israel Education look like that is dedicated to teaching SEL skills to teenagers?

The subdivision/s of topic: Israel-Education, Social-Emotional-Learning, Mussar, Jewish-Education.

The kinds of material (text, secondary sources) used: 15 Interviews with educators in the field, secondary sources, some Jewish texts.

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At the center of my "village," are my parents Jodi and Eric Gischner who always taught me to value Jewish Tradition and taught me to be in touch with my emotions from a young age, as well as my brother and fellow educator Zachary Gischner and my partner Rachel Abrams. As my rocks, their love, understanding, and support throughout this process has been immeasurable.

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Introduction

"You know, everyone has lots of ways of feeling.

And all those ways of feeling are fine.

It's what we do with our feelings

that matter in this life."

– Fred Rogers[1]

I remember feeling uneasiness in the pit of my stomach all morning. I would describe the emotion as a mixture between feeling disappointed and nauseated, with a hint of feeling exposed and insecure. Reflecting back on that moment, I had sensed a clash between my deeply held values and my emotions, but only first was able to reflect on this emotional conflict while pausing to reflect, standing on the rooftop of a partially constructed building in the *Dheisheh refugee camp*, located just south of Bethlehem in the West Bank. I was in *Dheisheh* as a part of *Encounter's* 4-day *"Emerging Jewish Leaders Intensive Cohort*" cohort in the winter of 2018-2019. *Encounter* is an educational organization which designs

[1] Fred Rogers (Smart is the New Sexy), "Life Advice from Mister Rogers," Youtube video, February 1, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RtlrjvRPD5w.

reflective programs to bring Jewish Professionals into the West Bank to listen to Palestinians sharing their stories and deeply held beliefs.

In this private moment atop the structure, standing high above the region, I reflected on my internal reactions to seeing billboards, posters, and random stickers across *Dheisheh* with the image of Yasar Arafat. When I walk through new places, I often like to soak up as much as possible and remember intentionally looking all around as we walked through the camp between listening to Palestinian speakers. Reflecting on viewing image after image of the deceased leader of the Palestinian Liberation Organization and the Palestinian National Authority, I remembered the physical signs: hands sweating and heartbeat intensifying. I reflected on my emotions in the moment: quick spurts of feeling deeply alone and overwhelmed, a sense of confusion and worry, and anger. I remember feeling frustrated and somehow violated, yet deeply curious about the community I was walking within. Unpacking those feelings atop the structure, I remember feeling disturbed that the residents of *Dheisheh* would choose to honor such a figure, who I was taught from a young age was essentially the essence of evil.

That said, I also reflected on what it might mean to see Arafat from their perspective. Being that the residents of *Dheisheh live* under a military Occupation, the Palestinian residents of the camp rightfully so do not appreciate Israel's role in their lives and are both conditioned and taught to fear the Israeli army and the powers that be that govern the State of Israel. Arafat's role in the political drama of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict aside, I questioned why I -- a liberal rabbinical student studying in the Reform movement -- would feel such feelings regarding Arafat with whom the 13,000 Palestinian residents living in a 1-kilometer camp proudly look up to as a symbol of hope. I questioned why I -- an American

citizen who not only could travel throughout the West Bank and Israel freely, but also who would be returning to my cushy apartment in New York City -- could feel such feelings about Arafat martyrdom when seeing the standard of living in *Dheisheh*?

Section A: American Jews have A LOT of feelings about Israel

These questions led me to an even scarier question: if these were my emotional reactions to seeing Arafat's face plastered all over a refugee camp, what intense emotions were my congregants feeling? What were my students feeling? How were Jewish Educators and clergy dealing with similar intense emotions? How were our American Jewish politicians dealing with intense emotions around Israel? And: how do all of these "big feelings" affect the American Jewish Community writ-large in how we react to one another?

These questions led me to wonder what may be the deepest question of them all: are American Jews reflecting on their feelings about the complicated narratives within the story of the State of Israel while yearning to understand how and why others might feel the way that they do?

Jews in general have a lot of "big feelings" about Israel. As an example, one only needs to take a quick peek on social media, and into the comments section on a typical article from publications such as *Haaretz* or t*he Times of Israel* to see said intense feelings. We see it live on Facebook and Twitter nearly every day, with Jews left and right calling each other "nazis" and "kapos" over issues such as annexation, Occupation, Israeli law, security, antisemitism, racism, terror, and injustice. When I read and see such harsh comments, I read these emotional reactions to be by-products of a particular disillusionment and sense of

dissonance over Israel. Dov Waxman argues that these "bitter and polarizing" emotional responses might threaten "to divide the American Jewish Community."[2] From issues of antisemitism and extermination, to Occupation and Annexation, from claims of apartheid to claims of promoting racism, these passionate debates happening online and in congregations can become quite ugly.

Section B: The History: It hasn't always been this way

Increasingly so, this American Jewish divide often has become the "third rail" in many communities so much so that clergy, educators, and other leaders choose to not engage with it in programming or spiritual events. But it has not always been this way. Historian Gil Graff recalls the mid-twentieth century as a time where a "heightened Jewish identity" was nurtured due to an understanding of the horrors of the Holocaust in conjunction with "pride in the newly established State of Israel."[3] The creation of Israel "engendered pride in Jewish identification"[4] which was only amplified following the *Six-Day War* in 1967, which "brought a dramatic escalation in the number of and participation levels in programs for American High School and college students in Israel."[5] By the nineties, the Reform and Conservative Movements had adopted language in official documentation that speaks about the inherent Jewish connection to the State of Israel.[6] Throughout these periods, many

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[2] Dov Waxman, *Trouble in the Tribe: The American Jewish Conflict Over Israel.* (Princeton and Oxford, Princeton University Press, 2016), 2.
[3] Gil Graff, *And You Shall Teach Them Diligently: A Concise History of Jewish Education In the United States 1776-2000* (New York, G & H Soho Inc., 2008), 7.
[4] Ibid., 80.
[5] Ibid., 95.
[6] Ibid., 109-110.

communities emphasized narratives about Israel that lacked nuance. Alex Sinclair offers the metaphor of "the Israeli David's desperate miraculous victory over the unprovoked, genocidal Arab Goliath" to help unpack how many American Jews framed, and many still frame, Israel's conflicts with its neighbors.[7] On the teaching of this singular narrative, Laurie Zimmerman writes,

> as a Jewish educator, I have always been troubled that the Jewish community encourages critical thinking when teaching ancient Jewish texts—encouraging students to consider multiple voices, give expression to minority perspectives, and ask difficult and challenging questions—but when teaching about Israel and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, it usually avoids, or even squelches, this kind of complex thinking."[8]

In recent years, Barry Chazan argues that diverse narratives, including of "non-Jewish" voices, are an "existential reality of the State of Israel and contemporary life" and should be an integral part of the Israel educational experience.[9] Voices like Zimmerman, Sinclair, and Chazan have been becoming increasingly louder over the years, causing a shift in the American Jewish educational system in which more and more educators and clergy are open to teaching complexity within the story of the State of Israel through diverse narratives. That said, as of late this all has become more challenging given the growing divide in the United States over social issues, politics, and over what universal norms and values define us as a nation.

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[7] Alex Sinclair, *Loving the Real Israel: An Educational agenda for liberal Zionism* (Teaneck, Ben Yehuda Press, 2013), 8.
[8] Laurie Zimmerman, *Reframing Israel: Teaching Jewish Kids to Think Critically About the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*, http://reframingisrael.org, 5.
[9] Barry Chazan, "Diverse Narratives," *Aleph Bet of Israel* Education, 2nd ed. (Chicago, Aleph Bet for Israel Education, 2015), 90.

Section C: American Jews Care about Israel

Regardless of how one might critique or reflect on the particular politics of this conversation, it is clear that American Jews today deeply care about Israel. Lisa D Grant and Ezra Kopelowitz cite various studies between 2008 and 2012 arguing that American Jews are more attached to Israel than ever, claiming that the next generation might have stronger ties to the Jewish State than their parents. (Sasson, Kadushin & Saxe, 2008; Sasson et al., 2010 and 2012)."[10] Sivan Zakai adds that "despite the fact that Israel plays an increasingly contentious role in American Jewish discourse, American Jews have 'stepped up' their political activism, philanthropic giving, travel, and cultural ties to Israel."[11] According to the 2013 Pew Research Study approximately seven in every ten American Jews said that they were emotionally attached to Israel. In the 2000-2001 National Jewish Population Survey, researchers found that similarly, roughly seven in ten American Jews felt attached to Israel.[12]

Elliot Cosgrove recently wrote an article entitled: When American Jews talk about Israel, we're really talking about ourselves," in which he argued that "far too many Jews have made support for Israel a substitute for Judaism."[13] I have observed this phenomenon in my own generation, noticing that many of my socially-conscious peers have rather strong moral opinions about the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict, Zionism and anti-Zionism, and about

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[10] Lisa D. Grant and Ezra M. Kopelowitz, *Israel Education Matters: A 21st Century Paradigm for Jewish Education.* (Jerusalem, Center for Jewish Peoplehood Education, 2012) 17.

[11] Sivan Zakai "Connection and Disconnection: The Paradox of Israel Education in the Digital Age" *CCAR Journal,* Spring (2018), https://www.brandeis.edu/mandel/projects/current/learning-israel.html, 121-122.

[12] "Chapter 5: Connection With and Attitudes Toward Israel," *Pew Forum,* October 1, 2013, accessed December 24, 2020, https://www.pewforum.org/2013/10/01/chapter-5-connection-with-and-attitudes-towards-israel/

[13] Elliot Cosgrove, "When American Jews Talk about Israel we're Really Talking about Ourselves," *The Jewish Daily Forward,* May 22 2019, accessed December 21, 2020, https://forward.com/opinion/424779/when-american-jews-talk-about-israel-were-really-talking-about-ourselves.

what Israel should or should not do. That said, many of these peers do not have strong relationships with the Jewish Community or Jewish practice. I note this not to critique the choices of American Jews but to emphasize that for many American Jews, a connection to Israel is often an incredibly strong marker of Jewish Identity. Adding to this claim, Sinclair writes that "sometimes people feel that [nuanced conversations challenge] the very foundations of their Jewish identity and relationship with Israel."[14] Being that the relationship to, or frankly the ambivalence about, the State of Israel for American Jews is one of the strongest markers of Jewish belonging and identity, it is no surprise that discussing challenging issues associated with the Jewish State can become deeply emotional.

Section D: The Point of Conflict

It is no surprise that especially in recent years, differences among American Jews have become the flashpoint of conflict. For instance, there is a source of major contention around the social justice initiative ***Black Lives Matter*** within the American Jewish Community. In August 2016 the ***Movement for Black Lives***, one of over fifty Black-led organizations, issued a platform which referred to the State of Israel as an "apartheid state" and equated the Occupation of Palestinians as a "genocide."[15] While many Jewish organizations condemned the statements, some went so far as to argue that they would disassociate themselves with any group aligned with movements who promoted the phrase

[14] Alex Sinclair, *Loving the Real Israel: An Educational agenda for liberal Zionism* (Teaneck, Ben Yehuda Press, 2013), 66.
[15] "Black Lives Matter platform says Israel an 'apartheid state' committing 'genocide,'" *Jewish Telegraphic Agency,* August 3, 2016, accessed December 21, 2020, https://www.jta.org/2016/08/03/united-states/black-lives-matter-platform-says-israel-an-apartheid-state-committing-genocide.

"*Black Lives Matter,*" conflating the assertion that Black lives do indeed matter with an organization within the larger movement who produced a document with troubling claims about the State of Israel.[16] On these threats, Shais Rishon writes,

> Don't get me wrong, I was as baffled as anyone else by the platform drafters' decision to dilute focus from the conditions of systemic racism here in America to wade into the murky waters of the Israel/Palestine debate. However, I was even more dismayed by those in the Jewish community who responded with strongly worded repudiations of the Black Lives Matter movement without having ever made the same spirited declarations of support for it in the first place.[17]

In my experience, it is as if some American Jews simply equate the phrase "*Black Lives Matter"* with Anti-Zionism and thus antisemitism and ultimately within this worldview, anyone who promotes the idea that *Black Lives Matter* cannot be trusted.

This is far from the only contentious issue in the American Jewish milieu. Others include challenges surrounding multiculturalism; issues of intersectionality, the exclusion of Jews of Color, LGBTQ+ Jews, and multi-faith Jewish households; as well as disheartening issues that sit tandem to the rise of antisemitism in the United States and a growing distance from the Holocaust. This all is in addition to the ongoing Israeli Occupation of the Palestinians, which often acts as a wedge between different Jewish groups. One recent example of the furthering of this divide was in mid-2020 when the Israeli government hoped to annex large swaths of the West Bank. Similarly, the Trump administration's controversial decision to move the United States capital to Jerusalem in May of 2018 further facilitated the ongoing division between particular worldviews.

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[16] "Jewish Groups Condemn Black Lives Matter Platform for Accusing 'Apartheid' Israel of 'Genocide,'" *Haaretz,* May 8, 2016 and October 4, 2018, Accessed on December 21, 2020. https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/jewish-allies-condemn-black-lives-matters-apartheid-platform-1.5421194.

[17] Shais "Manishtana" Rishon, "Dear Jews, Black Lives Can't Only Matter When You're Criticizing The Movement," *TabletMag,* August 10, 2016, Accessed on December 21, 2020, https://www.tabletmag.com/sections/news/articles/dear-jews-black-lives-cant-only-matter-when-youre-criticizing-the-movement.

Section E: American Jews are Living in a Deeply Divided America

As I write this thesis in the height of the global Covid-19 Pandemic of 2020-2021, American Jews are living in the most deeply divided moment of our lives. The Pandemic has increased tensions and anxieties in the United States, uncovering deep systemic inequalities within a nation already deeply divided. The rise of fascist and extremist politics underscored by politicians peddling conspiracy theories and "fake news," continues to further divide the United States and sow mistrust in our political leadership and in the population.

Technology and the advent of social media make it easier to spread false information at alarming speeds.[18] "Our brains are faster at processing opinions [that] we agree with"[19] most likely because we "experience genuine pleasure," writes Claudia Hammond about Sara Gorman and Jack Gorman's research, continuing that we experience a "rush of dopamine when processing information that supports [our] beliefs."[20] On Facebook, Instagram, and other social media platforms, we are primarily "siloed" into like-minded communities that continue to confirm our beliefs, even if said information is not totally true. In a study that Facebook published following the 2016 Presidential Election, they noted that "approximately 1 in 4 Americans visited a fake news website from October 7-November 14, 2016."[21] What makes these statistics even more troubling is that many who consume these false news stories

[18] Brian Resnick, " Intellectual humility: the importance of knowing you might be wrong," *Vox, January 4, 2019, Accessed January 1, 2021.* https://www.vox.com/science-and-health/2019/1/4/17989224/intellectual-humility-explained-psychology-replication?fbclid=IwAR1yv-duyLOx6XmT1ynQOEZvezWqUn2yyQVo0K1Hx2ZFinE2oItX5Iy-oO8.

[19] Claudia Hammond, "The Surprising Reason People Change Their Minds," *BBC,* June 22, 2018, Accessed January 1, 2021, https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20180622-the-surprising-reason-people-change-their-minds.

[20] Ibid.

[21] Andrew M Guess, Brendan Nyhan, and Jason Reifler, "Exposure to untrustworthy websites in the 2016 U.S. election,"Accessed December 20, 2020, http://www.dartmouth.edu/~nyhan/fake-news-2016.pdf.

are also often reading accurate news as well, which only further muddles misinformation with fact.[22]

Reflecting on human history, Hammond writes that when we lived in "small bands of hunter-gatherers, our ancestors were primarily concerned with their social standing, and with making sure that they weren't the ones risking their lives on the hunt while others loafed around in the cave." Today it is on social media where we emotionally deal with these similar human feelings of wanting to have social standing among our community. Hammond adds the important layer to this discussion that although in the past there was "little advantage [to] reasoning clearly … due to actual danger threatening [their] lives," that today we still do not reason clearly in these experiences on social media.[23] And that said, Hammond argues that it is human nature to be "more likely to look out for, notice and remember anything that confirms opinions we already hold" when we traverse the internet or flip the channels on our televisions.[24]

At its extremes, South Dakota nurse Jodi Doering recently tweeted about how many of her patients dying from Covid-19 do not believe that the virus is even real. She writes,

> "they tell you there must be another reason they are sick. They call you names and ask why you have to wear all that 'stuff' because they don't have COVID because it's not real…. And then they stop yelling at you when they get intubated…."[25]

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[22] Michael Kan, "Facebook Was Biggest Distributor of Fake News, Study Finds," *PC Magazine, January 2, 2018, Accessed January 2, 2021,* https://www.pcmag.com/news/facebook-was-biggest-distributor-of-fake-news-study-finds.

[23] Claudia Hammond, "The Surprising Reason People Change Their Minds," *BBC,* June 22, 2018, Accessed January 1, 2021, https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20180622-the-surprising-reason-people-change-their-minds.

[24] Elizabeth Kolbert, "Why Facts Don't Change Our Minds: New discoveries about the human mind show the limitations of reason," *The New Yorker,* February 20, 2017, Accessed December 21, 2020. https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2017/02/27/why-facts-dont-change-our-minds.

[25] Jodi Doering (@JodiOrth), *Twitter*, Nov 14, 7:32, Accessed on Dec 23.

This is all to say, that it is extremely valuable to frame our conversation about the increased division and emotional turmoil amongst American Jews within the larger historical reality that faces Americans. Today in the United States and around the world, it is often even harder to discern fact from fiction, social media from reality, or accurate reporting of social or historical events to opinion pieces that falsify fact.

Section F: The Problem: I'm Concerned about our Teenagers

With all of this uncertainty and division both as both Americans and as American Jews, I am deeply concerned about our teenagers living within this highly polarized milieu. Reflecting on the rise of violent media in the early 2000s, Jeffrey S. Kress and Maurice J. Elias write that "Jewish youth are not shielded from these societal forces-- they come to school with the same emotional and social issues as their peers."[26] This comment seems even more relevant today. Zakai adds that to today's young people are truly "digital natives," arguing that "today's youth know only an era in which information is easily accessible."[27] And with that, our current generation of teenagers are entering into our challenging public discourse at a time when their brains are entering into their "second period of heightened malleability," notes Laurence Steinberg. He continues, saying that "if we expose our young people to positive, supportive environments, they will flourish. But if the environments are toxic, they will suffer in powerful and enduring ways."[28] One could argue that in the United

[26] Jeffrey S Kress and Maurice J Elias, "Social and Emotional Learning in the Jewish Classroom: Tools for a Strong Jewish Identity" *Journal of Jewish Communal Service* Spring/Summer 2001, Vol 77, 182.
[27] Sivan Zakai "Connection and Disconnection: The Paradox of Israel Education in the Digital Age" *CCAR Journal,* Spring (2018), https://www.brandeis.edu/mandel/projects/current/learning-israel.html, 121.
[28] Lawrence Steinberg, *Age of Opportunity: Lessons from the New Science of Adolescence* (New York, First Mariner Books, 2015), 9.

States, our teenagers are coming-of-age within a toxic digital and social environment, and that the supreme division both in the American Jewish Community and in the United States writ-large could have lasting consequences on their mental and emotional health.

It's important to underscore here how challenging adolescence is on young people. David S. Yeager writes that "just when academic work becomes more difficult and friendships become less stable, the brain's method of processing emotions undergoes a dramatic transformation. The onset of puberty—which marks the beginning of adolescence—causes changes in brain structure and hormone activity that can make even minor social difficulties like peer rejection extremely painful and hard to deal with." Continuing, Yeager discusses how adolescents are only first learning how to deal with "new, intense emotions."[29] I can only imagine that learning how to navigate such raw emotions within our increasingly divided American society, and increasingly divided American Jewish Community, can be even more challenging for teens as compared to the adults in their lives. It's also worth noting that many teens also fear the increase in school-based gun violence and propaganda over the past few years, resulting in raised levels of anxiety for teens across the United States.[30]

While it is already difficult to be a teenager, our contemporary reality makes this period even more difficult for them in regard to the development of critical thinking skills. In a 2015-2016 study from the *Stanford History Education Group* of Middle School, High School, and college students across 12 states, researchers learned that "our 'digital natives' may be able to flip between Facebook and Twitter while simultaneously uploading a selfie to

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[29] David S. Yeager "Social and Emotional Learning Programs for Adolescents" *The Future of Children*, Volume 27, Number 1, Spring 2017, 74.

[30] Rachel Ehmkhe, "Anxiety Over School Shootings: Finding proactive ways to deal with worried feelings," *ChildMind.org,* Accessed January 2, 2021. https://childmind.org/article/anxiety-school-shooting.

Instagram and texting a friend. But when it comes to evaluating information that flows through social media channels, they are easily duped."[31] Between the mixed political and social messages that they are receiving, our teens are growing up in one of the most divisive times of our lifetimes. How much more challenging must it be to be a teenager?

Section G: Why use SEL?

After tracing our shoes on computer paper, we switched drawings with a partner and stood on top of their shoe prints as a visual representation of literally standing in someone's shoes. It was in this moment at the end of the "Social, Emotional, and Spiritual Learning in Jewish Education Conference" conference held on the New York campus of the *Hebrew Union College - Jewish Institute of Religion* in October of 2019 when I first was driven to explore how Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) might aid in the teaching of complex narratives about the State of Israel to teenagers.

According to the *Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning* (CASEL), SEL is the

> process through which all young people and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions and achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions.[32]

Kress and Elias write that SEL "promotes growth in areas related to one's ability to successfully navigate the complex social and emotional tasks involved in developing a strong

[31] "Evaluating Information: The Cornerstone of Civic Online Reasoning: Executive Summary," *Stanford History Education Group,* https://stacks.stanford.edu/file/druid:fv751yt5934/SHEG%20Evaluating%20Information%20Online.pdf.
[32] "SEL is…," *Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL)*, Accessed December 21, 2020, https://casel.org/what-is-sel.

and healthy identity."[33] Historically SEL goes by many names, as identified by Evie Rotstein: "spiritual education," "character education," and "whole person learning." In the Jewish Community, we have historically referred to this form of education as ***Mussar***,[34] described by Alan Morinis as "a Jewish spiritual tradition that offers insights and guidance for living by directing us to pay attention to the impact that our inner traits have on our lives."[35]

Although the term "Social-Emotional Learning" (SEL) was only established by CASEL in 1994,[36] one could argue that some of SEL's earliest roots were in the ancient world. In Plato's ***The Republic***, he suggested creating a holistic curriculum that included both subjects such as math and science alongside a curriculum on ethics.[37] For the Jewish People, the earliest seeds of the ***Mussar*** Movement developed by Israel Salanter are often attributed to the ***Book of Proverbs*** and later rabbinic texts such as ***Pirkei Avot***.[38] That said, the contemporary origins of SEL began in New Haven, CT where Dr. James Comer began a program called the ***Comer School Development Program*** in the late 1960s. The program focused on two elementary schools that were low-achieving and low-income, and predominately African American. Comer's program established a "collaborative-

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[33] Jeffrey S Kress and Maurice J Elias, "Social and Emotional Learning in the Jewish Classroom: Tools for a Strong Jewish Identity" *Journal of Jewish Communal Service,* Spring/Summer 2001, Vol 77, 182-190.
[34] Evie Rotstein, "Part-Time Jewish Education Harnessing the Power of Social-Emotional Spiritual Learning," *eJewishPhilanthropy*, May 30, 2017, Accessed November 1, 2020, https://ejewishphilanthropy.com/part-time-jewish-education-harnessing-the-power-of-social-emotional-spiritual-learning/.
[35] Alan Morinis*, Every Day, Holy Day: 365 Days of Teaching and Practices form the Jewish Tradition of Mussar* (Boulder, Trumpeter Books, 2010), vii.
[36] "History," *Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL)*, Accessed December 21, 2020, https://casel.org/history.
[37] "Social and Emotional Learning: A Short History," *Edutopia,* October 6, 2011, Accessed December 21, 2020, https://www.edutopia.org/social-emotional-learning-history.
[38] Jan Katzew, "Introduction to Mussar," (Class lecture, Mussar, Hebrew Union College – Jewish Institute of Religion, August 24, 2020).

management team" of parents, teachers, the principal, and a mental health specialist who made decisions that led the schools to exceed national averages by the 1980s. Behavioral challenges declined and students did better academically in the schools, transforming New Haven and Yale into the "de facto hub of SEL research," where Comer is still the *Maurice Falk Professor of Child Psychiatry* at the *Yale Child Study Center* today.[39] A familiar instance where one might have encountered SEL techniques is on children's television, in such programs like the *Magic School Bus, Sesame Street,* or *Mister Roger's Neighborhood*.

CASEL Board Chair Timothy Shriver said that stronger social and emotional skills "such as knowing how to get along with different people and deal with stress" can help learners to reach personal goals, "build stronger communities, and help heal the nation." Speaking in 2018 about the divisive state of the United States, Shriver added that "young people need help developing their social and emotional skills – especially today, when they are facing vitriolic national dialogue and so many tragic, life-altering events."[40] And on a more individual level, Elias and Tobias argue that the development of "emotional intelligence is more highly correlated with career success than are academic skills" themselves, arguing that those who have learned particular social-emotional skills are, as a few examples, able to handle stress more effectively, find "creative solutions to problems," and anticipate and solve conflicts better and thus are able to get farther ahead in life.[41]

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[39] "Social and Emotional Learning: A Short History," *Edutopia,* October 6, 2011, Accessed December 21, 2020, https://www.edutopia.org/social-emotional-learning-history.
[40] "New Research Shows U.S. Students Feel Unprepared Without Social and Emotional Skills," *Allstate* Foundation, November 2018, Accessed December 21, 2020. https://allstatefoundation.org/new-research-shows-u-s-students-feel-unprepared-without-social-and-emotional-skills.
[41] Maurice J. Elias and Steven E. Tobias, *Boost Emotional Intelligence in Students: 30 Flexible Research-Based Activities to Build EQ Skills (Grades 5-9)*, (Minneapolis, Free Spirit, 2018), 3.

New research argues that teens themselves genuinely wish that their schools did a better job at teaching them social and emotional skills, as can be found in CASEL's study from November 2018: "*Respected: Perspectives of Youth on High School & Social and Emotional Learning*."[42] I would add that the need to support teens in the development of their SEL skills is even more important today, as we as a collective human family are facing intense emotional challenges due to the Covid-19 Pandemic. That is to say, it is no wonder why so many supplemental religious school programs that transitioned to virtual learning did so along with SEL-based curricula. Discussing SEL in Jewish schools, Nancy Parkes and Evie Rostein argue that SEL should be a seamless addition to your average Jewish curriculum, arguing that "key outcome of Jewish education is ultimately to create a Jewish learner, who is also a caring and empathic individual, grounded in Jewish values, and who lives their life accordingly."[43] SEL generally results in learners receiving better grades, having increased mindfulness, regulating their emotions more effectively, having stronger active listening skills, and better relational skills.

SEL activities paired with reflection can be some of the most important educational experiences as young people develop as teenagers. At this age, they encounter "biological changes [that] create a more intense thrill from risky behavior, especially when it may win peers' admiration," writes Yeager, adding that while "adolescents expect more autonomy and independence" SEL programs can help guide them in making these new decisions in more

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[42] "New Research Shows U.S. Students Feel Unprepared Without Social and Emotional Skills," *Allstate* Foundation, November 2018, Accessed December 21, 2020. https://allstatefoundation.org/new-research-shows-u-s-students-feel-unprepared-without-social-and-emotional-skills.

[43] Nancy Parkes and Evie Rotstein, "Social Emotional Learning Initiative," *eJewishPhilanthropy*, October 25, 2018, Accessed December 21, 2020. https://ejewishphilanthropy.com/social-emotional-learning-initiative.

mature ways.[44] Educational programs that discourage teenagers from being autonomous are not overly helpful in their development because they go against how they naturally act in the world.[45] Yeager likens these programs to a parent telling their child "how to make their personal choices," arguing that the "null effects shouldn't surprise us." That said, when educational programs "offer adolescents a route to feelings of status and respect, it's likely that they'll internalize acquiring skills and apply them in the real world."[46] And these programs when done well, work phenomenally. They increase critical thinking skills, support teens in practicing and learning emotional regulation, raise emotional intelligence, help learners to name their emotions, and much more. And I ask, what would it look like to frame an educational program for teens through the lens of SEL competencies?

Section H: Introducing the rest of the thesis

This thesis will reflect on two major questions. First, how are Israel Educators and Jewish Educators teaching SEL skills to teenagers in order to facilitate discussions on complex issues associated with Israel? In response to this question in chapter 1, I will introduce the educators whom I interviewed to learn more about their educational philosophy vis-a-vis teaching complexity while also being thoughtful about a learner's emotional and spiritual health.

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[44] David S. Yeager "Social and Emotional Learning Programs for Adolescents" *The Future of Children*, Volume 27, Number 1, Spring 2017, 74.
[45] Ibid., 84.
[46] Ibid., 82.

In chapter 2, I will reflect on a major commonality discussed by each of the educators: the power of facilitating relationships when teaching about Israel. Thinking about the fact that "many young Jews today," in the words of Sinclair, "are seeking a relationship with Israel that contains both commitment and critique,"[47] chapters 3 and 4 will reflect on the philosophies that each of the educators has regarding teaching complexity. While the former will reflect on the varying reasons why each of the educators felt that teaching complexity is valuable, the latter will reflect on their philosophies through research in psychology and SEL to further determine particularly valuable skills taught to teenagers when teaching complexity. Another commonality that I discovered among a large majority of the educators surveyed, which I will discuss in chapter 5, was their establishing particular norms and values in their learning spaces when planning to teach challenging topics vis-a-vis Israel. This too is thought of a value in teaching social-emotional skills because creating learning environments where learners feel safe to practice the skills is of utmost importance.

My second question of this thesis will ask, borrowing wisdom from the educators surveyed, what could a new paradigm in Israel Education focused on teaching complex narratives look like if it was designed with the goals of teaching via CASEL's Five SEL Competencies through the language and wisdom of *Mussar*? Chapter 6 serves as a conclusion and discussion on how one might effetely use this new paradigm in teaching complexity about the story of the State of Israel. Finally, Chapter 7 will complete this thesis with my *Masters in Religious Education* (MARE) Capstone, which will summarize much of

[47] Alex Sinclair, *Loving the Real Israel: An Educational agenda for liberal Zionism* (Teaneck, Ben Yehuda Press, 2013), 2.

this research; include ideal priority learner goals, objectives, *Enduring Understandings*, and *Essential Questions*; an example of a curricular outline, and two sample scripted lessons.

Being that human beings are emotional creatures, it is no wonder that Bahya ben Asher argued that at the moment of creation, human beings were gifted *sekhel,* intelligence, and *nefesh,* their emotional life-force.[48] On the intersection between the intellect and our emotions, Parkes and Kress argue that "emotions play a key role in not only our learning, but also in how we internalize that learning so that we *live it*."[49]

[48] Rabeinu Bahya, 5:2.

[49] Nancy Parkes and Jeffrey Kress, "Values + Social and Emotional Learning = Powerful Jewish Learning," *eJewishPhilanthropy*, November 20, 2018, Accessed December 21, 2020, https://ejewishphilanthropy.com/values-social-and-emotional-learning-powerful-jewish-learning.

CHAPTER 1: Introducing the Educators

"I think the conversation about Israel
is [best when we] allow people to express their opinions,
without judgement,
and are open to hearing and learning
different [perspectives]."
– Dr. Lori Sagarin

Section A: Research Methodology & Description of Interviews

As part of my research, I interviewed a selection of fifteen Jewish and Israel Educators via *Zoom* video conferencing software to learn about their philosophies and practices in regard to teaching about Israel to adolescents. See *Appendix A* for full list and details about each educator interviewed. Each of the interviews was recorded and then transcribed using software from the company *Temi*. The educators interviewed for this study came from different political and social backgrounds, ages, and included a mix of women [9] and men [6]. The study involved both clergy and non-clergy educators with American and Israeli backgrounds, and educators working with teens and adults from around the United States.

My three major goals in facilitating these interviews were to 1) learn what is important to each of the educators when teaching about Israel, 2) what was important to the educators when teaching complexity, and 3) how each of them approached their learner's social-emotional well-being when teaching challenging topics within the story of the State of Israel. Due to the fact that Kress and Elias argue that oftentimes many programs implement SEL objectives without even identifying them as helpful to their learner's emotional or spiritual health,[50] I was interested in interviewing scholars and educational leaders in the field to parse out how and when SEL was being used in teaching about Israel.

This chapter will introduce each of the educators and scholars interviewed, the programs that they are involved with, as well as if they promoted educational advocacy or non-advocacy based educational experiences.

Section B: Who were the Educators? Who are Educational Advocates?

Of the fifteen educators four interviewed were congregational educators: including Lori Sagarin, Director of Congregational Learning at *Temple Israel* of Skokie and consultant at the *iCenter for Israel Education*; Barak Stockler, Director of Youth Engagement at *Congregation Kol Ami* of White Plains, NY; Rabbi Maura Linzer, the educational leader at *Temple Beth El of Northern Westchester*; and Rabbi Mara Young, the Associate Rabbi-Educator of *Woodlands Community Temple* in Westchester, NY. I also spoke with Helene

[50] Jeffrey S Kress and Maurice J Elias, "Social and Emotional Learning in the Jewish Classroom: Tools for a Strong Jewish Identity" *Journal of Jewish Communal Service* Spring/Summer 2001, Vol 77, 15.

Drobenare, the Executive Director of *Young Judaea Sprout Lake*, who worked with a similar demographic as Sagarin, Linzer, Young, and Stockler.

In addition, I interviewed three individuals who are involved with programs that teach teachers. These include Abby Pitkowsky, the Director of the Westchester Region and of Israel Education for the *Jewish Education Project*. Pitkowsky organizes a program called *Kushiot* with *Makom,* "the Education Lab of the Jewish Agency" in Israel,[51] which brings a cohort of Jewish Educators from the New York Metropolitan area to Israel primarily to learn how to engage their learners using the "Four Hatikvah Questions of Israel Education," developed by Robbie Gringras. According to the booklet from *Makom*, "4HQ," as it is often referred to, "is a way to listen to Israel conversations, and a way to think clearly about Israel issues…" and listen for the "underlying questions" people ask.[52] Pitkowsky connected me to Gringras who I also interviewed. Finally, I interviewed Barry Chazan who serves as Academic Dean of the *iCenter for Israel Education*'s MA Concentration in Israel Education, as well as the Founding Director of a major program at *Spertus Institute*'s Master of Arts in Professional Studies.

Another set of interviews were with individuals involved in a variety of non-congregation based Jewish education. Among them was with Avi Posen, Assistant Director of *OpenDor Media* which creates "*Unpacked for Educators*," an online resource of videos "by Jewish Educators, for Jewish Educators" for use in educational settings. Posen and his team's videos have been used by approximately 375 educational institutions and by over

[51] "Home," *Makom Israel,* https://makomisrael.org.
[52] Robbie Gringras, "Israel in Real Life: The Four Hatikvah Questions" *Makom Israel* and the Jewish Agency, 10.

36,000 thousand students,[53] many of which in the United States. I also spoke to Leah Solomon, the Chief Education Officer of *Encounter*, an organization that brings Jewish Professionals into the West Bank to speak to Palestinians. Although Solomon does not teach teenagers, I chose to speak to her because she and her *Encounter* staff teach emotionally challenging information about Israel.

In addition to the above, I spoke with four educators who are associated with programming that specifically caters to teenagers, many of which focus on Israel. Due to the fact that three of the four educators that I spoke with operate within advocacy organizations, I analyzed what each of these educators said through the lens of Grant and Kopelowitz's definition of advocacy-based education. They write that "in the field, Israel advocates are understood to be those whose stated agenda is to support and defend Israel," They continue that "in the advocacy context, education is about imparting knowledge about Israel and skills that train the advocate to defend Israel."[54] This definition nearly perfectly describes the teen program at *Club Z.* In her interview, Director of Education Naya Lekht, mentioned that the "Club's" major goal is to create, in her words, "a network of proud, articulate, knowledgeable Jews slash Zionists who stand up to antisemitism," and by antisemitism, Lekht clarified that she means "mostly anti-Zionism seemingly broadly defined." It's worth noting the demographics of this organization. Lekht mentioned that "85% of our teens are from secular Russian speaking homes. They're not affiliated with any religious institutions. [Many of the teens] don't know anything about how to be Jewish ritually," making *Club Z* their main regular Jewish experience (October 2020, interview). Grant and Kopelowitz's

[53] "About," *Unpacked for Educators,* Accessed Dec 15, 2020, https://unpacked.education/about.
[54] Lisa D. Grant and Ezra M. Kopelowitz, *Israel Education Matters: A 21st Century Paradigm for Jewish Education.* (Jerusalem: Center for Jewish Peoplehood Education, 2012) 8.

definition also loosely describes *IfNotNow* Chicago's teen program from spring 2020, where interviewee Aviva Schwartz was a leader, or "trainer" as she referred to herself and her team. Although Schwartz's goal was not to help her learners to "support and defend Israel," in Grant and Kopelowitz's jargon, she and her team similarly hoped to impart a particular worldview on her learners with tools that they could use to take political and social actions within this worldview (October 2020, interview). Where *Club Z* yearns to create a generation of leaders who can "defend Israel," *IfNotNow* hopes to, from their website, build "a movement of Jews to end Israel's Occupation and transform the American Jewish community."[55] In short, both Lekht and Schwartz described advocacy-based educational programs designed to instill their organization's particular worldview and provide learners the tools to implement said worldview. And also, verbatim, Lekht explicitly identified *Club Z*'s philosophy as one that "has to [include] education mixed with advocacy" (October 2020, interview), and Schwartz inferred that their ultimate learner objective was to impart their worldview on their learners (October 2020, interview).

The third educator who operates a teen program within an advocacy organization was Miri Kornfeld, the Executive Director of High School Affairs from *StandWithUs*. Unlike Schwartz and Lekht's programs, it is less clear that Kornfeld's program clearly fits within an advocacy-based educational framework. One could argue that her High School program is also an advocacy program due to the fact that *StandWithUs* organizationally has similar advocacy-based goals as *Club Z*. Even Kornfeld's biography on the website reads that she yearns to "[provide her learners] with the support and tools they will need to become leaders

[55] "Home," *IfNotNow,* https://www.ifnotnowmovement.org.

and Israel advocates on their future college campuses and in their communities."[56] That said, in her interview she spoke in detail about how she carefully negotiates between education and advocacy-based education. For instance, she passionately reflected on how many of her learners share different opinions about Israel and argued that this is a value of her program, while at the same time also noting particular advocacy-based requirements including having learners create "four Israel programs for their communities throughout the school year" and get involved in their Israel Club at school or make it about "more than just falafel and camels essentially" (October 2020, interview). Although I'm not sure if she would identify these requirements as advocacy work, she also said that "as an Israel education organization we actually are not allowed to take any political stances nor are we allowed to support one political leaning or another either in Israel or in America," except for the belief that Israel has the right to exist (October 2020, interview). This caveat is not much of a surprise, as congregational educators Sagarin and Linzer nearly said these words verbatim. This begs the question, if one argues that a red line of their program is that Israel has the right to exist, is that advocacy-based education? For the purposes of this study, I do not think so because many of the educators who spoke passionately about that particular red line, also spoke equally as passionately about the importance of including and instilling diverse and complex narratives. That all said, in regard to Kornfeld and her program, for the purpose of this study I am choosing not to identify her program as advocacy-based education, nor as an educational venture free from advocacy unlike the programs and educational voices above. One additional interesting and important fact about *StandWithUs'* High School programming that differs from the rest, is that they explicitly welcome non-Jewish participants. Kornfeld

[56] "StandWithUs High School: Our Team," *StandWithUs,* https://www.standwithus.com/hs-team.

mentioned that after several of her Jewish teens suggested opening up the program to their Christian and Muslim friends, that the program dynamics improved with the additional diversity (October 2020, interview).

The final educator of the four who operates a teen program is Rabbi Loren Sykes, Principal of *URJ Heller High*, the Reform Movement's High School-in-Israel program, and the incoming director of *NFTY-in-Israel*. Unlike the previous three programs, Sykes' two programs are not advocacy based, even going so far as to mention the following in his opening remarks,

> I will tell you what we are not… we are not an Israel advocacy program. We are an Israel education and engagement program... I tell my students at the beginning of the semester that my goal is not for you to think the same way that I do about Israel. (September 2020, interview).

I would argue that most other educators in this study would agree with this language in describing their own programs-- specifically around engagement with Israel as well as Sykes' language around helping his learners to develop particular skills to make their own decisions about the material.

It is also important to clearly identify Solomon's work with Encounter as another non-advocacy program. She was proud of the fact that she has welcomed individuals from across the political spectrum on Encounter trips and mentioned her goals are not to change anyone's mind, but rather to help facilitate the listening of Palestinian voices so that Jewish professionals can improve their leadership on the issue of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict. Solomon emphatically stated that her goal is not for participants to return to their jobs as advocates for any particular cause. She mentioned how Jews and Palestinians are intertwined in history, and how critical it is to understand a multiplicity of voices when making leadership decisions (November 2020, interview).

In addition to the Israel educators described above I also interviewed SEL expert Jeffrey Kress, the Bernard Heller Professor at the William Davidson School of Jewish Education of the Jewish Theological Seminary. Kress sits on the Leadership Team of the *Social, Emotional, and Spiritual Learning Collaborative* with previously mentioned experts in SEL: Rotstein, Elias, and Parkes.

Overall, I really appreciated the wisdom from my participants in writing this thesis as their words from the field combined with the scholarship helped me greatly to develop a comprehensive argument.

Chapter 2: The Power of the Relationship

"When I can see myself

in someone else's story,

it changes the way that I see them."

– Leah Solomon

"Teaching American Jewish youth to understand and feel connected to Israel," writes Zakai, "is increasingly viewed as an integral part of Jewish education in the United States."[57] By and large, every educator that I interviewed spoke to the power of relationships. From discussions on creating strong learning communities built on relationships to the importance of helping their learners develop a strong relationship with the subject matter at hand, most of them spoke about relationships as if it was one of their primary goals in teaching Israel. For example, when asked to reflect on their ideal *Enduring Understandings* and *Essential Questions* when teaching Israel to teenagers, most educators spoke in terms of relationships.

[57] Sivan Zakai "Connection and Disconnection: The Paradox of Israel Education in the Digital Age" *CCAR Journal,* Spring (2018), https://www.brandeis.edu/mandel/projects/current/learning-israel.html, 122.

Sagarin questioned, “what are the challenges with diaspora Jews engaging with Israel?” (October 2020, interview), while Sykes asked, “what is your ‘space’ in the conversation of Israel?” and “what is your connection to Israel going to be?,” adding that the *NFTY-in-Israel* program is designed to help learners “just [get] a taste and start to build a connection [to Israel]” whereas in Heller High “we’re able to build a much deeper connection” (September 2020, interview). Drobenare spoke in terms of ownership, adding that “Israel [is] yours,” because you have your own unique “connection to Israel,” raising up the question of how Israel is relevant in the lives of her learners, wondering “where do I fit in if I’m living in the diaspora, to a country 5,000 miles away that doesn't have much relevance in my life?” (October 2020, interview). Similarly, Kornfeld asks “why does this even matter to me?” and “how does Israel fit into my story?” arguing that other educators should ask themselves how they can facilitate a relationship between their learner and Israel so that they can see how it affects them as individuals. She warns that it is valuable to form this emotional connection to Israel because without it, teaching the complexities could be that much more challenging (October 2020, interview). Linzer and Drobenare too, spoke about the importance of facilitating a non-complex relationship between learners and Israel before diving into the challenges that face the Jewish State today. As an overall learner objective, Young adds that at the end of the day, she wants her “teens to be like, yeah, the politics are really difficult and this is a real country with interesting stuff going on, and I’m connected to it because I’m Jewish” (October 2020, interview).

A helpful educational frame within the discussion about nurturing a relationship comes from Joseph J. Schwab, who suggests four commonplaces of education: “the learner, the teacher, the milieu, and the subject matter,” adding that they are all of “equal rank” and

that none of them should "be allowed to dominate" within an educational context.[58] Schwab would argue that all four commonalities need to be taken into account in order to develop educational content where "the ultimate criterion must be what is best, or good, or satisfying to the learner [and thus]… as a human being, and as a citizen,"[59] to which within the context of teaching about Israel to American Jewish teenagers, I might add, it is important to think of the learner's identity as a Jew, as a teenager, as a member of a particular Jewish movement and/or synagogue, and as an American citizen, etc. For most of the educators beyond Lekht, they spoke passionately about the power of the relationship among learners and between a learner and their teacher. And many spoke in relational terms when speaking about facilitating a relationship between learners and the material.

Section A: Peoplehood is a Relational Construct

On "Passover or [when] you're fasting, you feel like there's a whole bunch of other people that are also doing it," wrote an anonymous teenager in Los Angeles, continuing "when you know other people are doing the same stuff you feel more connected with them, you're going through similar situations as them."[60] Similarly, several of the educators that I interviewed, spoke of the value of teaching about the interconnectedness of Jewish Peoplehood when exploring Israel with a learning community of teenagers. Grant and Kopelowitz write that "Israel education… is a looking glass into the very core of Jewish

[58] Joseph J. Schwab, "Translating Scholarship into Curriculum," in "The Practical 3: Translation into Curriculum in School Review," August 1973, 10-11.
[59] Ibid., 14.
[60] "Generation Now: Understanding and Engaging Jewish Teens Today," *Jewish Education Project,"* April 2016, 12.

belonging, or the manner in which Jews fashion a connection to the Jewish People."[61] Several of the educators spoke of the value of Peoplehood in relation to teaching Israel, like Linzer who mentioned that Peoplehood is often a "value of the month" in her religious school in order to facilitate the feeling of Jewish belonging. Reflecting on this educational choice, Linzer expressed the value of Jewish Peoplehood, mentioning that "we try … to instill the notion of peoplehood long before they get to studying about the Land of Israel. Otherwise, it's no different for the kids then visiting Italy, right? Or visiting Japan?" (October 2020, interview).

When asked to reflect on her ideal *Enduring Understandings* in teaching Israel, Pitkowsky mentioned that she keeps the idea that "Israel is core to a blossoming Jewish identity" in the back of her mind while teaching (September 2020, interview). Similarly, Lehkt mentioned that one of *Club Z's* three educational pillars is the concept of Jewish Peoplehood. Kornfeld put it bluntly when she argued that at the very least, one has to have a "connection" to Israel "because you're Jewish. So, you have some sort of connection" (October 2020, interview). Contextualizing this connection, Chazan argued that this kinship described among Jews is simply "one of the aspects of being a human being. [And ultimately,] the idea that we are a part of a tribe or group" (interview, September 2020). This group mentality often helps to drive the relational goals that the educators discussed.

That all said, researchers from the *Jewish Education Project*'s 2016 study titled "*Generation Now: Understanding and Engaging Jewish Teens Today*," wrote about how discussions around Peoplehood often make Jewish teens "uncomfortable about feeling part of

[61] Lisa D. Grant and Ezra M. Kopelowitz, *Israel Education Matters: A 21st Century Paradigm for Jewish Education.* (Jerusalem: Center for Jewish Peoplehood Education, 2012) 6.

a ‘club’ that excludes non-Jews” and would actively “choose not to participate in certain kinds of Jewish experiences for this reason,” warning Jewish Educators to be careful about how they frame the concept.[62] This is where Kornfeld’s model of including non-Jewish participants in *StandWithUs’* High School programming is most likely effective. Although teens writ-large do not want to feel like they are excluding their non-Jewish loved ones, the 2016 study also illuminates that they view relationships with their Jewish friends “as somehow different from friendships they had with their non-Jewish friends,” albeit it is often difficult for them to express *why* this is the case. Reflecting on the mixed feelings, one older anonymous teenager interviewed by the study who was identified as “highly connected” to the Jewish Community, reflected

> When I’m at camp I feel completely different than when I’m here. It gives me a sense of what the community is really like and how everyone really treats each other. I don’t know how to say it -- but I feel more connected and more safe around people. Safe is the wrong word, but more comfortable around people.[63]

The study also identified that many teenagers feel connected to their Jewish roots through exploring Jewish history as a lens to help them “better understand who they are and where they fit into the world,” identifying their yearning to study the Holocaust, as an example, as a part of a “very tribal desire to understand the history and persecution of ‘our people.’” The study identified a “commitment to social action” being a “dominant feature of their lives,” strengthened by “the fact that the Jews" have been “persecuted more than anyone else throughout world history” being a “source of resilience and even pride.”[64] These connections to Jews of past and present are all relational in nature.

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[62] “Generation Now: Understanding and Engaging Jewish Teens Today,” *Jewish Education Project,”* April 2016, 9.
[63] Ibid.
[64] Ibid., 15.

Thinking about Grant and Kopelowitz's metaphor identifying Israel Education as a "looking glass into the very core of Jewish belonging,"[65] it is clear from the 2016 study that Jewish teens feel that sense of belonging to the Jewish People and frankly to Israel, reflecting on how every teen surveyed "in some way related Israel to their Jewishness,"[66] although most of the educators that I interviewed seemed to feel like it was their job to instill this relation. Most of the educators surveyed either inferred that one of their goals was to help learners feel a sense of belonging to the Jewish People or feel a connection to Israel, as if they were not feeling these connections before.

Section B: The Jewish People's Connectedness to Israel is a Relational Construct

Beyond the quality of the Jewish People being a sort of comforting "home" for teenagers, several of the educators I interviewed discussed their decision to specifically identify Israel as, in the words of Sagarin, "the enduring historic homeland of the Jewish People, period" (October 2020, interview). Sykes admitted that this is the only political position that *URJ Heller High* takes, "leaving out the question of borders" and other messy political issues, albeit he admitted that "we believe in a two-state solution" because this is the official policy of the Reform Movement (September 2020, interview). Pitkowsky nuanced this position a bit, arguing that Israel is "another homeland [for the Jewish People]" (September 2020, interview). I found it interesting that Pitkowksy was the only educator who referred to Israel as "another" home, as compared to the rest who spoke about it as "the"

[65] Lisa D. Grant and Ezra M. Kopelowitz, *Israel Education Matters: A 21st Century Paradigm for Jewish Education.* (Jerusalem: Center for Jewish Peoplehood Education, 2012) 6.
[66] "Generation Now: Understanding and Engaging Jewish Teens Today," *Jewish Education Project,"* April 2016, 16.

homeland. That all said, it seems like some of the educators that I interviewed were out of touch with how many teens understand Israel in their lives, as the 2016 Jewish Education Project study identified that at least for "higher-connected" teenagers, most of which *already* identify Israel as either "the" or "another" "'homeland' when describing their connection to the Jewish state." They spoke similarly of the lower connected teenagers, but they tend to have a different connection. And at the end of the day, any teenager who chooses to engage in an Israel Program like *NFTY-in-Israel* or *Club Z*, or in a Confirmation class at their local synagogue most likely would be considered one of these "higher-connected" teenagers as per the 2016 study and ultimately would already have a more emotional connection to Israel as well as a more "direct...connection to Jewish life [and] the Jewish Community."[67]

Pitkowsky offered a social-emotional frame to support teenagers in thinking about the concept of home. She spoke passionately about the challenges that many teens have with the question of home, discussing how many might say things like "my home is camp, and I loved camp [but]… I also live at this house; ... or sometimes I spend part of the time at mom's and part of the time at my dad's, those are my two homes…" She was not the only educator to speak about Israel as a home using this sort of educational framing (September 2020, interview). Young for instance asked the *Essential Question* of, "how can you have multiple homes?" Continuing, she also posed, "can Jews have multiple homes?" (October 2020, interview). Sykes asked, "why is it important for the Jewish People to have a state of our own?" (September 2020, interview). And finally, Pitkowsky asked, "can you have more than one home?" (September 2020, interview). Home is often an emotional place for many

[67] "Generation Now: Understanding and Engaging Jewish Teens Today," *Jewish Education Project,"* April 2016, 16.

people, and questions about home are so prominent in the minds of adolescents today. That said, I found it interesting that although every educator that spoke about Israel in familial terms also spoke about Israel as being home, none of these educators discussed the myriad of non-Jews who have historically called the Land of Israel their home too.

Section C: There is a Value to Teaching an 'Ongoing Relationship' with Israel

Most of the educators spoke of the value of teaching an "ongoing relationship" with Israel, in the words of Pitkowsky, meaning that it takes more than to just feel a connection, but that it is crucial to maintain the relationship with the Jewish State. In the *Unpacked for Educators* Curriculum, Posen pointed out one of their "*affective goals"* which yearns for students to "develop an emotional attachment and connection to Israel, Israelis and the Israeli story." A "*cognitive goal*" of their Curriculum is for learners to "think more about their own relationship with Israel."[68] Similarly, Drobenare mentioned that at *Young Judaea Sprout Lake*, "for our eighth graders, [the main educational goal vis-a-vis Israel] would be really be solidifying an understanding of the arc of their relationship and the challenges in relationship" (October 2020, interview). Linzer adds that at *Temple Beth El of Northern Westchester*, "we want to make sure that all of our kids have a relationship with Israel as a foundation upon which to kind of complicate things for them" (October 2020, interview). It seems that *IfNotNow Chicago's* teen program had a similar goal. Although Schwartz didn't explicitly say that facilitating the formation of a relationship between learners and the

[68] "Curricular Outline: Toward a Mature Engagement with Israel," *Unpacked for* Educators, Accessed November 1, 2020, https://unpacked.education/curricular-outline/ascending-level-of-sophistication.

material was a goal, she did mention that she wishes that her learners walk away saying, "here's how I actually relate to this," this meaning the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict, "on a human level" (October 2020, interview). Gringras and Young both spoke about the value of facilitating a caring relationship between learners and Israel and Israelis. On challenging topics, Gringras adds that "if you have your teens caring enough about Israel to get upset about it...you're in a great situation if teens are getting upset about it" (October 2020, interview).

Section D: Teaching an "Ongoing Relationship" through Relationships

There were several concrete ways that the educators spoke about facilitating relationships between their learners and either Israelis or Palestinians. Sagarin, Linzer, and Young all participate in the *ShinShinim* program through the Jewish Agency which brings recent High School graduates from Israel to volunteer in communities in the United States for ten months.[69] Linzer mentioned that her synagogue's participation in the program was an important experience for both the recent Israeli graduates and her entire community (October 2020, interview). The three spoke about how bringing young Israelis into their communities helps to demystify the other, and make Israelis "real," in the words of Young, and for American Jewish teens and them "real" for the Israelis. Young mentioned that the *ShinShinim* program is valuable primarily because it helps Israelis to facilitate caring relationships with Jews in the Diaspora and they with Israelis, saying that "I want American

[69] Alan Rosenbaum, "Israel's youngest emissaries: The 'ShinShinim'" November 28, 2019, Accessed December 21, 2020, https://www.jpost.com/israel-news/israels-youngest-emissaries-the-shinshinim-609292.

Jews to care about Israel and I want Israeli Jews to care about what's happening in the Diaspora" (October 2020, interview). On the relational approach, Sagarin mentioned that there is a real value in "bring[ing] the stories of people [to learners]" (October 2020, interview).

Similarly, Solomon spoke about the development of relationships between American Jewish Professionals and Palestinians living under an enduring Occupation in the West Bank through meals, home hospitality, and social gatherings (November 2020, interview). Thinking back to my own childhood in synagogue meeting Israelis, my Birthright Trip as a college student as well as the trip I recently led, and my experiences as a camp professional I can attest from my personal experience that this "*mifgash,*" "*connection,*" experience is incredibly powerful. Facilitating the development of relationships by bringing Israelis and Jews of the diaspora together quite possibly is one of the most helpful ways to make Israel a relational experience.

Forming meaningful relationships with other human beings helps people to connect with what others find meaningful and important in their lives. And these relationships can encourage people to transform in powerful ways. For example, in an article titled "I was an Anti-Abortion Crusader. Now I support Roe v. Wade," Evangelical Minister Rob Schenck spoke about the moment he changed his mind while incarcerated for his "activism in the early 2000s" where he met fellow inmates who were from poor and minority neighborhoods in Alabama. The experiences of meeting people struggling with "rudimentary life skills" who were "in a state of perpetual panic about money… feeling victimized by their very existence" led to Schenck "feeling hollow inside," reflecting on how churches involved with the anti-abortion movement had failed to actually help people with basic humanitarian

services.[70] Forming relationships can transform the hearts and souls of human beings and helps us to better understand and empathize with other people's situations. Vis-a-vis the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict, Solomon spoke about particular Jewish Professionals who have been participants in *Encounter's* programming having similar moments of empathy when meeting Palestinians, learning their struggles living under an enduring Occupation thus informing their leadership on the issue.

I think that most of the non-advocacy educators would argue that facilitating relationships between learners and Israelis and/or Palestinians is the best way to help learners be in that "ongoing relationship," described by Pitkowsky (September 2020, interview). Developing emotional ties with a person from halfway around the world is easiest when interacting with them interpersonally, although I can imagine that the popularization of video conferencing technologies will make these "*mifgashim*," even easier as we move forward in history. Zakai predicted this back in 2018, writing that living in an "era of unprecedented global connectivity, Jewish youth who do not live in Israel have opportunities to witness the sights and sounds of life there though video-conferencing platforms, social media, live-streaming newscasts, and other forms of digital communication."[71] That all said, facilitating relationship development is not the be-all-end-all of helping learners to become emotionally attached to "the other." Storytelling and artistic expression can both be incredibly helpful tools to use in activities designed to help learners develop a relationship with cultures different from their own.

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[70] Rob Schenck, "I Was an Anti-Abortion Crusader. Now I Support Roe v. Wade." *The New York Times,* May 30, 2019, Accessed June 3, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/05/30/opinion/abortion-schenck.html.
[71] Sivan Zakai "Connection and Disconnection: The Paradox of Israel Education in the Digital Age" *CCAR Journal,* Spring 2018, 121.

Section E: Storytelling is a Valuable Activity

"Story and storytelling," writes Rami M Shapiro, "are at the core of what it means to be human."[72] For the educators interviewed, although often one of their primary goals was to facilitate these human connections through relationship building, many emphasized the importance of storytelling to better understand differing perspectives and cultures. In addition to sharing stories in small interpersonal groups, several educators spoke of the value of panel discussions and listening to individual speakers as a means to teach about complexity and bring multiple narrative perspectives to a learning community. Often followed by a question-and-answer section, these modes of in-person storytelling were often praised by many of the educators who I interviewed. Writ-large, each of the educators that discussed storytelling as a valuable activity argued that this mode is an intimate format to share the humanity of another human being.

Sykes, Sagarin, and Gringras spoke passionately about panel discussions. Sykes mentioned that they are a valuable educational practice, describing one of his favorite educational activities that he facilitates for his teens at *URJ Heller High*, involving four different panelists who each share their worldview vis-a-vis the "solution" to the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict. Sykes spoke about how oftentimes they like to bring people from the different denominational worlds, including a reform rabbi who most often speaks about the Reform Movement's stance on having a "two state solution" (September 2020, interview). That said, Gringras critiqued panel activities arguing that they are often "quite boring," emphasizing the importance for multiple voices on the panel, "at least three [different] people

[72] Rami M Shapiro,"Our stories our selves: The Jewish chaplain as midrashic healer," *Journal of Jewish Spiritual Care,* 2003 *6*, 3–6.

on the panel… but if you're going to have the panel... it's more representative of [Israel if] you have at least seventeen different people who will totally disagree with each other, [assuming that] all seventeen of them have a good point" (October 2020, interview). On a similar note, Sagarin argued for the importance of a multiplicity of narratives, adding that,

> "once you meet two Israelis, you've got two narratives of Israel...I think [that] the more Israelis that [learners] encounter, the more complex the narrative will be in them. And the better they'll be suited to sort of accept those complex narratives" (October 2020, interview).

Whether they meet said voice interpersonally, as a part of a seminar, or as one voice of many on a panel, most of the educators encouraged and prioritized the learning of human stories from real human beings.

On a similar note, Solomon and Pitkowsky were the only educators who spoke about the educational value of listening to the stories of Palestinian in person. Solomon argued that this activity helps learners to really understand Palestinians differently than when reading a textbook or news article (November 2020, interview). Similarly, Pitkowsky spoke about the value of both Israeli and Palestinian guest speakers who speak to her *Kushiot* cohorts. She spoke of the value of their reflecting on their life, their perspective, and even on a particular issue(s) that directly affect them (October 2020, interview). Adding another layer to this conversation, Solomon argued that hearing from relatable speakers has the power to change hearts and minds (November 2020, interview).

On the subject of listening to and becoming acquainted with relatable voices, even if the relationship is one-sided, Samantha Schmidt reported that television shifted the heteronormative cultural views about gay men and lesbians in the 1990s and 2000s. Schmidt reflected on research from social scientists who noted what was a "growing visibility of gay people in popular culture," like Ellen DeGeneres and fictional characters from the NBC

sitcom "Will & Grace," which "began to trigger a major shift in attitudes." This arguably led to "more positive… attitudes towards," and to the normalization of gay and lesbian celebrities and characters.[73] Similarly, when American Jews meet Israelis and Palestinians both interpersonally as well as in seminar-like settings where they only have the opportunity to form a one-sided relationship with them in learning their story, the visibility has the power to transform culture. Solomon spoke in detail about the normalization of Palestinian voices in American Jewish-discourse vis-a-vis Israel, and how programs like ***Encounter*** can help to transform how leaders make decisions (November 2020, interview). Similarly, Linzer and Sagarin spoke to the value that the ***ShinShinim*** have in their communities, transforming culture by normalizing Israeli voices. When I say "normalization," I mean the process by which a group of people learn how people who are members of a foreign culture are similar and different from them as well as how they compare based on how they assumed they existed in the world. This "normalization" gives learners a chance to learn about Palestinian and Israeli dreams, fears, yearnings, and in general what is important to individual human beings.

When Young argued that it was important for her to "make Israel real" for her learners, a statement that most of the non-advocacy-based educators inferred, I think she would agree that this "normalization" is what she means (October 2020, interview). Forging connections and relationships help learners to form emotional ties to people living halfway around the world.

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[73] Samantha Schmidt, "Americans' views flipped on gay rights. How did minds change so quickly?," *The Washington Post,* June 7, 2019, Accessed November 21, 2020, https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/social-issues/americans-views-flipped-on-gay-rights-how-did-minds-change-so-quickly/2019/06/07/ae256016-8720-11e9-98c1-e945ae5db8fb_story.html.

Section F: There is much value in using Artistic Expression in teaching Israel

Rachael Kessler writes on the power of human beings connecting to the stories of other humans, writing that "connecting their own experiences to larger themes in the human story, students begin to realize the thread of purpose and meaning running through their life."[74] Several of the educators that I interviewed spoke about the value of using artistic expression -- such as music, theatre, dance, visual arts, and poetry -- to help facilitate their learner's connection to other human stories. Writing on artistic expression in Israel Education, Vavi Toran equates art to an "x-ray of life," writing that "art and culture provide a reflection on the heart of the people and the pulse of society; they bring to the surface themes and ideas that may not find expression in other ways."[75] Chazan and Solomon both spoke about how the arts touch people deeply and help to convey a person's humanity and thus forge emotional connections that "normalize" other cultures and human lives. Solomon argues that "different kinds of art can provide a window into the encounter with any person [and can help a learner see others] as fellow human beings" (November 2020, interview). Mentioning that he does not like textbooks, Chazan spoke about the emotionality of art, arguing that art helps learners to "get inside the heart and soul of Israelis, who I believe are the most diverse collection of Jews that exists" (September 2020, interview). Speaking to the value of using art to help Jews to learn about Palestinian culture, Solomon added that art "touches people in a human sort of way, as opposed to reading facts on paper," continuing, "I mean, it sounds ridiculous. And I hate to talk about humanizing Palestinians because really like," pausing, "we have to actually say that" (November 2020, interview).

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[74] Rachael Kessler, *The Soul of Education* (Alexandria, Association and Curriculum Development 2000), 68.
[75] Vavi Toran, "Israeli Arts and Culture: The Ability to Engage," *Aleph Bet of Israel* Education, 2nd Ed. (Chicago, iCenter for Israel Education, 2015), 67-68.

Solomon spoke in detail about how Palestinian artistry and poetry aids her learners, describing art as a "universal language" that connects "human beings to human beings." She continued, "there's something very universal about it. Like, [art is a medium] you can see yourself through." She added that art helps her learners to see themselves in another person's story, reflecting on her own experience, saying "when I can see myself in someone else's story, it changes the way that I see them. And I think that, you know, doing that through things like food, dance, music, poetry, those sorts of things" (November 2020, interview). Toran ensures that the

> arts and culture provide a reflection on the heart of the people and the pulse of society; they bring to the surface themes and ideas that may not find expression in… other ways. They frequently serve as a commentary on a particular culture by showing an x-ray of life under certain circumstances at a given time and place.[76]

Arguably, this is why Solomon and Chazan argued that sharing artistic expressions can be such a successful activity. Being that art is fueled on emotion, used in an educational setting it can help learners forge connections across time and space.

Using artistic expression is one of the primary techniques used by the *iCenter* to facilitate emotional ties and relationships between their master's students and Israel and Israelis. David Bryfman spoke about this relational "I-Centered approach" to Jewish and Israel Education, arguing that the *iCenter for Israel Education* embraces Martin Buber's "I-Thou" interactions of educators with their learners, and between the learners [and] themselves."[77] As an example, I took an elective offered at a conference titled *"Teaching Israel: Television through a Relational Approach"* taught by Sagarin where she spoke about

[76] Ibid., 67-68.

[77] David Bryfman "A Learner-Centered Approach," *Aleph Bet of Israel* Education, 2nd Ed. (Chicago, iCenter for Israel Education, 2015), 30.

how it can be helpful for Israel Educators living in the diaspora to listen to podcasts that can help keep them 'up to date' on different Israeli cultural phenomena.[78] Underscoring the importance of also being a lifelong learner and consumer of Israeli media and art, Sagarin emphasized the importance of educators having expertise in particular forms of artistic expression *before* using it to facilitate a relationship between learners. On the acquisition of knowledge, relationship, and artistic expression, educational philosopher Nel Noddings argues that because "knowledge is important ... it is best acquired in relation. It is useful to know something about a group's literature and art" to help facilitate a connection to the material. In essence, by helping a learner to understand a culture from a different perspective, art can help a learner understand why this information is important to them.[79]

Toran comments on the power that artistic expression can have not only on the "minds of students," but also to their "hearts and souls." She refers to art as "the common language" that "gets a hands-on appreciation of society in the deepest sense.[80] For many learners, artistic expression aids them in discovering not only what is important to another culture, but also helping them to understand what is important for their soul in connecting to said culture. For example, Solomon referenced Lama Abuarquob, a Palestinian activist and educator at the *Dar Essalaam Girls' High School* in Bethlehem. In her presentation to groups, Abuarquob describes how she gives her students an anonymous poem about Jerusalem. She hides the fact that the poem was written by Israeli poet Yehuda Amichai from her students when they first read the text. She mentioned that each year, her students

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[78] "Teaching Israel Television through a Relational Approach" iCenter for Israel Education, elective taught by Lori Sagarin, May 22, 2019

[79] Nel Noddings, *The Challenge to Care in Schools: An alternative Approach to Education,* 2nd Ed, (New York, Teachers College Press, 2005), 114.

[80] Vavi Toran, "Israeli Arts and Culture: The Ability to Engage," *Aleph Bet of Israel* Education, 2nd Ed. (Chicago, iCenter for Israel Education, 2015), 68.

always resonate with how Amichai connects to Jerusalem. When she reveals that the poem was written by a Jewish poet, her students are often shocked. They question, "how can a Jew connect to Jerusalem in the same way we do?" Abuarquob praises this activity as one that facilitates connection between her Palestinian students and Israelis and reminds them how they all love Jerusalem. And that said, in thoughtfully relaying this story to groups of Jewish Professionals many of whom have a deep relationship with Jerusalem, Abuarquob underscores the fact that we all have a relationship with the city furthering her ultimate goal of connecting Jews with Palestinians and Palestinians with Jews vis-a-vis poetry (November 2020, interview). I borrowed Abuarquob's activity for my curricular adaptation, which can be found in Unit 2, Lesson 8 which is located in full in chapter 7, page 150-153.

Chazan described poetry as "creations done by real people" (September 2020, interview). Arguably, poetry can become even more powerful when teachers choose particular works that they believe will resonate deeply with their learners, such as how Abuarquob's students connect to Jerusalem. Sagarin praises the idea of using artistic works that resonate with one's learners, discussing how one of her teachers recently did "a really [good job] bringing in … [Israeli] music that has social justice messages that we want our students to be aware of" (October 2020, interview). From television, music and rap, theatre, dance, paintings and digital art, art has the power of connecting learners to others viscerally.

Section G: The Problem of Sentimentalizing Approaches

Of all of the educators who discussed artistic expression, three stand out from the rest. First, Solomon was the only educator who spoke about sharing Palestinian artwork and

culture with her learners. She spoke deeply and passionately about the importance of using art to facilitate a connection between her learners and Palestinians. Although *Encounter* is designed mainly around listening to Palestinian speakers, artistic expression is often used as another means for that "encounter." As an example, she described a recent exhibit at the *Palestinian Museum* in Ramallah on Palestinian embroidery and how this artform is often appropriated in Israel. Reflecting on this as an educational activity, she inferred that the goal would be to facilitate a relationship between her learners and Palestinian culture (November 2020, interview). Noddings would probably support Solomon's approach, arguing that humanizing people by sharing their cultures in thoughtful ways is critical because "perhaps the greatest danger to moral association with distant others is the tendency to sentimentalize."[81] On that same note, Noddings reflects on how teenagers are often "easily swayed" by approaches that, "at a distance," allow for individuals to "judge not even by appearances but by reports of appearances," making it "often so difficult to assess" who they really are as human beings. She calls on educators working with teens to help them form respectful and thoughtful relationships with other cultures.[82]

For this reason, I believe that Noddings would critique the work of Lekht and Schwartz because they have chosen to engage in sentimentalization of Palestinians and Israelis. Schwartz inferred and gave examples about how *IfNotNow* Chicago's teen program spoke about Palestinians mainly in terms of their role as victims within the story of the enduring Occupation (October 2020, interview). On the opposite end, Lekht spoke about

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[81] Nel Noddings, *The Challenge to Care in Schools: An alternative Approach to Education,* 2nd Ed, (New York, Teachers College Press, 2005), 110.
[82] Ibid., 111.

how *Club Z* educators teach about Palestinians as if they were the enemy of the Jewish People (October 2020, interview). Noddings writes that

> "human beings should not be branded evil and therefore expendable because they belong to the side we oppose on a particular issue. When we attempt to act at a distance, we have to ask what effects our acts will have on concrete human beings."[83]

Similarly, Kress noted that it is not of value to frame conflicts as "us vs. *them*," arguing that when *they* are "evil doers" who understand the world completely counter to our values that it is not helpful to a learner's social-emotional development. Kress also added that there is much value in exposing people to voices that they might disagree with and to nuanced voices in general so that they are not too surprised when they hear these voices outside of an educational context (November 2020, interview).

Unlike many of those I interviewed who value the use of storytelling, art and culture, Lekht noted that artistic expression is simply not a priority in her work, mentioning that "I know there's a move sometimes to teach about Israel, through pop culture or arts, or posters, or songs. [But] we don't do that either. [My curriculum is] very history heavy.... It's very rigorously academic" (October 2020, interview). Although Schwartz spoke about using political cartoons as a part of a "gallery walk" to help her learners identify social bias in political cartoons and newspaper articles, the learner objectives disclosed are to help learners understand Palestinian suffering through their worldview, and not to develop a relationship with Palestinian culture (October 2020, interview). On this sort of sentimalization of Palestinians, Carly Pildis writes that it is critical for people to understand that "the Palestinians are not helpless people who need to be rescued."[84] It's worth noting that

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[83] Ibid., 111-112.

[84] Carly Pildis, "How to Talk About Israel and Palestine Don't try to save the people on either side of the conflict. Just listen to them," *Tablet*, July 10, 2019, Accessed December 20, 2020, https://www.tabletmag.com/sections/israel-middle-east/articles/how-to-talk-about-israel-and-palestine.

although Lekht spoke about *Club Z*'s approach to speaking about Palestinians as aggressors, their approach arguably also sentimentalizes Israelis within their worldview especially in that she did not discuss a meaningful "***mifgash***" component to the program that helped learners to "normalize" Israelis beyond being victims within the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Section H: Final Reflections on the Power of the Relationship

Psychologist Thomas Pettigrew produced a study in the early 2000s which Tori DeAngelis describes as a "meta-analysis of 500 studies" where he learned that "all that's needed for greater understanding between groups is contact, period, in all but the most hostile and threatening conditions." Although Pettigrew argued that "your stereotypes about the other group don't necessarily change" when you form a relationship with them, ultimately "you grow to like them anyway." Pettigrew's research can be summed up in the title of DeAngelis' article: "All you need is contact."[85] Ultimately, meeting other human beings -- whether through poetry or visual arts; or through interpersonal meetings or a panel discussion -- helps people to more thoughtfully understand other cultures.

While it's clear when sharing culture, that many of the educators I interviewed might prefer for their learners to interact with real human beings, several of them spoke about the value of using artistic expression to facilitate that same human connection. Toran writes that

> "today's Israel is a vibrant kaleidoscope of weights, sounds, tastes, ideas, people, and cultures. Often when teaching Israel, we focus on facts and events, ignoring the dynamic and intense life that is lived. By engaging with the world of arts and culture,

[85] T DeAngelsis, "All you need is contact," *American Psychological Association*, November 2001, Vol 32, No. 10, Accessed December 20, 2020, https://www.apa.org/monitor/nov01/contact.

> however, we are presented with an ideal vehicle for exploring a vibrant vision of Israel."[86]

Kessler would add that artistic expression teaches complexity, uncertainty, and ambiguity.[87] To her words I would add that in general, storytelling and relationship building within a learning community itself helps learners to understand complexity.

[86] Vavi Toran, "Israeli Arts and Culture: The Ability to Engage," *Aleph Bet of Israel* Education, 2nd Ed. (Chicago, iCenter for Israel Education, 2015), 67.
[87] Rachael Kessler, *The Soul of Education* (Alexandria, Association and Curriculum Development 2000), 96.

Chapter 3: Learning Complexity is Valuable

"This is the Jewish State.

Whether we live in Brooklyn or whether we live in Haifa,

it's our country to engage with.

That's what it says in the Declaration of Independence.

Teaching diverse perspectives on Israel is the right thing to [do]. "

– Avi Posen

"Failure to present this complexity will cause many teens turn their backs on Israel and also often on Jewish life as a whole if they believe that they are being sold 'the party line' or 'lies,'" read the analysis of the 2016 ***Jewish Education Project*** survey on American Jewish teenagers, pressing "educators and other leaders [to] address the full complexities of Israel, including the Arab-Israeli conflicts and other tension points in Israeli society."[88] With that comment in mind, it's worth noting that every single educator I interviewed also felt that teaching complexity was a valuable activity for their teenage learners. For instance, Posen proudly stated that "this is the Jewish State. Whether we live in Brooklyn or whether we live

[88] "Generation Now: Understanding and Engaging Jewish Teens Today," *Jewish Education Project,"* April 2016, 24.

in Haifa, it's our country to engage with. That's what it says in the Declaration of Independence," arguing that teaching "diverse perspectives on Israel is the right thing to [do], because [we have many different perspectives in Israel]. Half of world Jewry lives in Israel and no one agrees on anything here," so Jews living outside of Israel should equally reflect this diversity of opinion (October 2020, interview). The majority of the educators spoke about the value of supporting learners in better understanding complex narratives. Linzer argued that it is valuable for one to learn other perspectives to help them understand how someone else might feel about particularly complex issues (October 2020, interview). On teaching complexity to young learners, Young pointedly argued that one should never underestimate a teenager's ability to learn this material because they "can handle nuance a lot better than we think they can" (October 2020, interview). This chapter will reflect on the common and unique themes discovered while conducting my interviews in regard to teaching complexity, as well as reflect on much of the language that the educators used when speaking about diverse narratives.

Section A: Preventing Adverse Emotional Reactions to Challenging Topics

"Imagine my surprise when I learned about an entire war and period of Israeli military history that seemed to be missing from the curriculum of every Jewish program I have ever attended," writes an anonymous author about their experience in NFTY and the Reform Movement, continuing "during this time the IDF participated in the massacre of Palestinians in refugee camps ... how convenient that this Occupation, this stain on Israel's

'moral' army, is left out of every lesson on Israel and its history."[89] A letter written as a part of *IfNotNow*'s "You Never Told Me" campaign, the writer eloquently describes the shock many young Jews experience when they first learn narratives about Israel that both run counter to their values and counter to the narratives they learned as a child growing up in Jewish institutions. The author continues, "I felt lied to."[90] Historically, Jewish Educators have taught one particular narrative about Israel, akin to Sinclair's reference to David and Goliath,[91] that is often criticized for lacking complexity, or in the language of the above campaign, for "lying" to learners. Sousan Abadian and Tamar Miller argue that "it is difficult to challenge narratives that we have come to consider truth because our ancestors handed them down to us," [92] to which I imagine has become much of the challenge that many educators face when confronted with the dilemma that young people wish to learn complexity vis-a-vis Israel. Historian James W. Loewen who wrote the book "Lies my Teacher Told Me," writes that "because history is more personal [and] more about 'us,' there is an additional reason not to present it honestly." He goes on to argue that "some people feel that we should sanitize history to protect students from unpleasantries."[93] And I would add that this is even more true in light of Abadian and Miller's comment regarding being unable to understand arguments beyond what is comfortable and what has been taught. On that note, "when two beliefs come into conflict in our minds," writes Psychology professor at

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[89] "It will be on us: NFTY, URJ," *You Never Told Me* via *IfNotNow, Accessed January 2, 2020.* https://younevertoldme.org/stories/i-felt-lied-to.
[90] Ibid.
[91] Alex Sinclair, *Loving the Real Israel: An Educational agenda for liberal Zionism* (Teaneck, Ben Yehuda Press, 2013), 8.
[92] Sousan Abadian and Tamar Miller, "Taming the Beast: Trauma in Jewish Religious and Political Life" *Journal of Jewish Communal Service*, Vol 83. No 2/3, Winter/Spring 2008, 237.
[93] James W. Loewen, *Lies my Teacher Told Me: Everything Your American History Textbook Got Wrong*. (New York, The New Press, 1995), 294.

Harvard University Mahzarin Banaji, "our brains are not good at just holding the conflict."[94] Reflecting on how complicated parts of the story of the State of Israel have been historically taught in in mainstream American Jewish settings, Posen argues that when "you learn everything in a super binary way, and then suddenly later on in life you're presented with another perspective that you never heard, it could really mess you up!" Continuing, this "happens to a lot of kids every single year going onto college campuses" (October 2020, interview). Loewen argues, "when we fail to present students with the truth… we end up presenting a lie instead-- at least a lie of serious omission."[95]

Reflecting on this sense of shock that many young Jews experience when encountering different and/or contradictory narratives, several educators I spoke to found it of value to introduce multiple perspectives while teaching about Israel. Most educators I spoke to would agree with Posen and *Unpacked for Israel's* "*Cognitive Goal*" arguing that it is a priority for learners to be "constructing their own views and deconstructing the way they may have previously heard the stories."[96] Similarly, Sagarin mentioned that in her practice, she tries not to "cover this all up," and brings complex narratives about what she understands to be flawed aspects of Israeli society "forward." Exemplifying some of the complexity she spoke about in her work, Sagarin continued,

> ...not everything is 'camels and falafel,' there is poverty and… [due to the pandemic], there's been a rise in domestic abuse. [In Israel there are certain] cultural manifestations of Israeli men who have been raised in a very machismo; male

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[94] Samantha Schmidt, "Americans' views flipped on gay rights. How did minds change so quickly?," *The Washington Post,* June 7, 2019, Accessed November 21, 2020, https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/social-issues/americans-views-flipped-on-gay-rights-how-did-minds-change-so-quickly/2019/06/07/ae256016-8720-11e9-98c1-e945ae5db8fb_story.html.

[95] James W. Loewen, *Lies my Teacher Told Me: Everything Your American History Textbook Got Wrong*. (New York, The New Press, 1995), 294.

[96] "Curricular Outline: Toward a Mature Engagement with Israel," *Unpacked for Educators,* Accessed Dec 15, 2020, https://unpacked.education/curricular-outline/ascending-level-of-sophistication/

> dominated misogynistic culture [which often looks taboo to American Jewish eyes. (October 2020, interview).

On not hiding information from her learners, Young described how at her synagogue, they have Israeli maps that include the green line in their classrooms

> so then one day when you say, okay, the West Bank and Gaza is disputed territory, and that's really made up of Palestinians, they're not like, wait, what other people live in Israel? And … that's not necessarily Israel. I think you've set the groundwork for those kids. And particularly teenagers can handle nuance a lot better than we think they can. (October 2020, interview).

These are just some of the ways that Jewish Educators today are working to combat this sense that many American Jews feel like they were "lied to" about Israel at camp, in Religious School, and in youth group programs.

Although several educators argued that teaching complex narratives to young children can help to best prepare their learners for life, Drobenare mentioned that at camp they prefer to teach what she might refer to as the more unfavorable parts of the story of Israel only to their older children. She mentioned that for younger campers, this is "emotional, you know?" Referencing the Jewish People as a family, she added that it is of value to facilitate a love of a young child's Jewish family before you "get into those ugly conversations." (October 2020, interview). This belief that one must cultivate a love of Israel before introducing complexity appeared to be a common belief among many educators. Young challenged this notion, arguing "that it is flawed thinking to say that you have to love Israel first and then you can learn its flaws" (October 2020, interview). Chazan believes that young American Jews in elementary school should begin to learn that there have always been "diverse narratives vis-a-vis Israel. Christian, Muslim, and Jewish perspectives [as an example]." He mentioned that "[we all know that] these kids are smart. And I think we can't neglect [that in them]," continuing, "and I think the Palestinian narratives [are important] as

much as we can to teach it" (September 2020, interview). That said, Drobenare would most likely agree with Chazan, Young, Sagarin, and Posen in that teaching diverse narratives on the story of the State of Israel is important primarily because it will help learners to have a better understanding of the complexities that exist within the story of the State of Israel.

Section B: Frames that the Educators Found Useful when Teaching Complexity

For many Jews, it's more than just feeling "lied to" about Israel. Sinclair argues that many people feel "off balance" when learning a new narrative about Israel that challenges "previously held comfortable and one-dimensional assumptions about Israel, Israelis, Israeli politics, Arabs, and religious life in Israel." Continuing, he writes that many people feel frustrated and frightened at the instability when they encounter a narrative that is different from what they have always known to be true, writing that new narratives can easily throw off their "equilibrium." Many educators that I spoke to, spoke passionately about language used to prevent this sense of shock, in order to prevent learners from feeling immense "dissonance and anger," according to Sinclair, that the Israel that they once "related to and conceptualized… is no longer adequate."[97]

For the educators who teach Israel outside of the realm of advocacy, the idea of teaching a "mature love" of Israel, albeit not necessarily using this particular jargon, was an attractive commonality in teaching teenagers as to prevent the dissonance described above. When reflecting on the complexities, both Chazan and Linzer admitted that teaching this "mature love" to even young children is important. Reflecting on her training in Gringras'

[97] Alex Sinclair, *Loving the Real Israel: An Educational agenda for liberal Zionism* (Teaneck, Ben Yehuda Press, 2013), 85.

Four Hatikvah Questions with *Makom*, Linzer mentioned that "we found that the four [Hatikvah] frames were a really accessible way for even our young kids to think about Israel and a way for me to approach complexity within Israeli society" (October 2020, interview). Posen mentioned that overall, when teaching Israel through the frame of a "mature love," this complicated view of Israel is one that "students appreciate [and typically encourages them to be] more engaged when they're learning challenging, controversial topics in every situation…" Continuing, in his experience he found that

> when you present [Israel] in a way that they know that they're learning from multiple perspectives, they actually feel better about it. They feel like you're not showing them one side [so] that they [know] that you're not hiding anything (October 2020, interview).

On a similar note, in a recent article from Molly Tolsky representing *Alma*, "a website for Jewish millennial women from 70 Faces Media," she mentioned that their Israel posts hold "no agenda." Similar to Posen's philosophy, Tolsky adds that "even though we are a Jewish website, the mission [vis-a-vis Israel] was not to make millennials feel closer to or more supportive of Israel. The only thing we want them to feel is more informed," noting that "if an organization has a clear pro- or anti-Israel agenda, people are less likely to take the information they're putting out as unbiased and propaganda free."[98]

Sagarin mentioned that Israel's complexities require us as liberal Jews to engage in, "hugging and wrestling," borrowing the term from Gringras, defining it as "learning to appreciate that Israel has so much to offer that is quite positive while also engaging with some of the struggles of Israel" (October 2020, interview). In a blog post from 2004, Gringras argues for a shift from doing less "hugging" to one with more "wrestling." He

[98] Molly Tolsky, "How to Actually Talk to Young Jews About Israel," *eJewishPhilanthropy.* June 13, 2019, Accessed December 20, 2020, https://ejewishphilanthropy.com/how-to-actually-talk-to-young-jews-about-israel.

evokes the moment in Genesis 32 when Jacob wrestles with a man and is then renamed Israel in order to argue that "wrestling with Israel requires an effort, a fight, a struggle. But it also demands an intimacy and a commitment."[99] Reflecting on the idea of facilitating a compassionate relationship fueled on critique, Young noted that she wants her learners to come away, saying "the politics are really difficult, and this is a real country with interesting stuff going on" (October 2020, interview). That said, Gringras spoke about how "Israel is dynamic, complex and sometimes disturbing" (October 2020, interview). On a similar note, Sagarin adds that "Israel is not perfect like every [other] country in the world" (October 2020, interview), and Pitkowsky adds that an ongoing relationship with Israel can include "sometimes critiquing Israel" (September 2020, interview). Posen adds an *Essential Question*, that I believe would resonate with most of the educators, asking "[does our relationship with Israel] need to be this flawless, perfect thing?" (October 2020, interview).

Ultimately, the educators did not shy away from speaking about the importance of encouraging their learners to ask thoughtful questions, and the value of teaching this complex understanding of loving Israel. A particularly common strategy that several educators mentioned was referring to Israelis and the State of Israel in familial terms to express the point that challenging conversations about Israel can be similar to challenging conversations with one's own family. The value in framing Israel as our family that we "love unconditionally," in the words of Posen seems to be an effective tool for most of them, albeit even if our family members still, as Posen mentioned, "make a fool of themselves" (October 2020, interview). Young, reflecting on the notion of the Jewish connection with Israelis,

[99] Robbie Gringras, "Hugging and Wrestling: Alternative paradigms for the Diaspora-Israel relationship," *Makom Israel,* November 15, 2011, Accessed January 2, 2020, https://makomisrael.org/hugging-and-wrestling-2.

mentioned “we are forever connected to them in some way.” Using the same metaphor, Drobenare spoke about the value of not excommunicating one’s family because of a disagreement (October 2020, interview), Young supporting this notion arguing that it might be a helpful frame for a learner to, for example, ask one’s “Uncle Yisrael… to act differently next time” (October 2020, interview). Kornfeld spoke about disagreement with one’s “family” from the perspective of her individual learners within their overall learning community, arguing that “if you have a relationship with a person and you respect them and love them as a human being, as your friend, as a fellow participant in a program as a fellow human, issues can be discussed, character should never be attacked” (October 2020, interview). To this, Posen adds that

> you think about a relationship with a parent, for example. We love them unconditionally, hopefully, but there are times where maybe they piss us off. Or they do something that we don't agree with. But that doesn't take from the fact that there is a deep connection and relationship and that [ultimately], we still love them. (October 2020, interview).

Similarly, Drobenare introduced the *Essential Question* of “how can I ‘agree to disagree,’ but still love this place?” (October 2020, interview). This interplay between love and critique spoke in familial terms underscored the idea that American Jews writ-large hold a deep relationship, albeit often with ambivalence, with Israelis, with the State of Israel, and with the Land of Israel.

Multiple educators believed that when thinking about facilitating a “mature love” for Israel in their learners, there is value comparing the current climate of mistrust of politicians and disillusionment among many in the United States, to attitudes towards the government of Israel. For example, Sagarin described her modeling this comparison with learners, arguing that

> the last four years in American politics has helped me a lot because it's an easy confluence to be able to say, you know, we may not love the man sitting in the White House, but we love our country. [Similarly], we may not love the Prime Minister of Israel or agree with him or think he's doing a good job, but that shouldn't take away from our general support of Israel." (October 2020, interview).

American artist Alex Graudins described this phenomenon well, in an article titled "You can be a Patriot Without Loving America," arguing that "believing in the ideals the nation was founded on doesn't mean you have to be proud of who we are or who we've been."[100] Similarly, several of the educators either inferred or directly said something along the lines of "you can be Jewish and critique Israel" or "you can be a Zionist and be outwardly disappointed in the actions of Netanyahu and the Likud party." On the same note, Posen adds that although many people regularly protest the President of the United States, referring to protests against the Trump administrations often abhorrent policies, arguing that regularly protesting these policies "doesn't mean they hate America" (October 2020, interview). That said, Drobenare reflected on the value of differing opinions coming together to "agree to disagree," adding that if one "could sit down at the table and have an open conversation about American politics in 2020, then you can sit down and have open conversation about Israeli politics in 2020," adding that ultimately, it is okay to "agree to disagree" because "everything these days is complicated, right?" (October 2020, interview).

On a slightly different note, Pitkowsky spoke about the value in connecting the United States to Israel using the interests that motivate teenagers today. Similar to Sagarin, she argued that there is much value in comparing the myriad of similar social issues that plague the United States and the State of Israel that are universal issues faced by many

[100] Alex Graudins, "You Can Be a Patriot Without Loving America," *The Nib*, August 22, 2018, Accessed July 14, 2019, https://thenib.com/american-patriotism-vs-nationalism.

sovereign nations on earth. She reflected on how making these comparisons with a learning community of teenagers can be an effective activity, especially of a generation so interested in social justice (September 2020, interview).

Section C: What is the Ultimate Goal of Teaching Complexity?

Beyond the language used to frame and support learners in better understanding some of the complexities for themselves, several educators spoke of the value of using the complexities to drive their learners to become more active in the Jewish Community, some going as far to encourage learners to possibly make ***aliyah***. For example, Kornfeld mentioned "and if you really, really want to have an opinion about what, how Israel runs itself, move there and vote. That's a very great way to be able to influence Israeli policy" (October 2020, interview), a sentiment expressed by Linzer as well. That said, I believe all of these educators would probably agree with the spirit of Posen and his team's learner objective in their curriculum, arguing that learners will "want to 'do more' with their knowledge and understanding.... [such as] reading more Israeli newspapers or articles, taking part in Hillel or Chabad when on college campus, or reading more about Israeli history."[101]

Unlike the philosophies of the above educators, Schwartz and Lekht, as leaders in educational advocacy work, both reflected on different implicit goals when teaching about the complexities within the story of the State of Israel. For Lekht, she spoke about how she and her team both teach an "academic" history-based component that tells complicated

[101] "Curricular Outline: Toward a Mature Engagement with Israel," *Unpacked for* Educators, Accessed November 1, 2020, https://unpacked.education/curricular-outline/ascending-level-of-sophistication.

historical narratives within the worldview of *Club Z.* She explains, “Yes, we are a Zionist organization. Yes, we'll give multiple perspectives and narratives, but we have a desired outcome for our teens. I mean, we're not hiding it” (October 2020, interview). These classes are paired with activities designed to support learners in dispelling what *Club Z*-identifies as anti-Israel talking points, essentially designed to teach learners “how to apply that education ... to do something.” Lekht described the purpose of her advocacy-based education as everything from “talking to your roommate” to “tabling advocacy” to “writing a powerful op-ed,” or “talking one-on-one to a friend” (October 2020, interview).

Similarly, Schwartz spoke passionately about how she and her fellow “trainers” with *IfNowNow Chicago* hoped to “create change” vis-a-vis the Occupation of the Palestinians and a whole host of other issues with their teens. Although Schwartz did not identify any particular advocacy-based goals like the ones articulated by Lekht, she did mention that she and her colleagues sought to “explain [how they] view social change and how [they understand] power,” continuing, “and I think, you know, rather than it coming from the Israeli right perspective or a Palestinian person, it's more of like, this is actually how we view how change happens in the world” (October 2020, interview). When speaking about power, I immediately understood much of her language to be similar to language I identify with community organizing. That said, when I asked if this is how she saw their work with the teenagers and her work writ large with *IfNotNow*, she denied that they are engaging in community organizing work at all. Schwartz mentioned that by teaching their historical worldview and understanding of power to their teen cohort, she inferred that they would encourage the teens to become a part of their adult network and thus get involved with *IfNotNow Chicago’*s overall advocacy work (October 2020, interview). For both of the

advocacy-based educators, their overall goal mentioned was to help teens understand their organization's worldview and to encourage them to get involved in advocacy work performed by their respective organization, or in the words of Lekht, "our goal is to create a network of proud, articulate, knowledgeable Jews slash Zionists who stand up to" anti-Israel sentiment (October 2020, interview).

Both Sykes and Chazan spoke about the value of teaching complex narratives to help learners to further develop empathy and listening skills. In a similar vein**,** Solomon spoke about the importance of the development of better listening and communication skills through her work with *Encounter* for the purpose of leadership development. Although Solomon is the only Israel Educator interviewed who does not work with teenagers, I believe that her wisdom on why to cultivate the skills described by Chazan and Sykes is useful in thinking about teaching complexity writ large. For Solomon and her team, she explained that

> "we want to develop more robust, courageous leadership on this issue … we don't [really] talk about this at all, but a lot of our work is about bringing [Jewish Professionals] from different perspectives together to work together on this issue, because if we want a more robust, courageous, informed leadership on it, then we actually have to be with people that we don't necessarily agree with." (November 2020, interview).

An intrinsic value of Encounter programming is both in helping Jewish Professionals to develop particular leadership skills on complex Israel issues, and also encouraging them to work with individuals with whom they might disagree on the issues back home. Solomon's comments on listening skills and leadership coupled with those of Chazan and Sykes, are heightened when thinking about our 21st century reality where it is so much more difficult to listen to others due to the political and social challenges of our collective historical moment.

Most of the educators interviewed, would argue that teaching complexity is valuable because it helps their learners to understand the perspectives of their peers and of others with

differing views. Specifically, Linzer and Young both reflected on the emotional process a learner undergoes when connecting with the story of a person with whom they might not agree, underscoring their roles in helping teenagers to understand why others feel the way that they do about particularly challenging issues. It is clear that the cognitive and the emotional are interlinked processes in the brain, both important to understanding others, and in forging connections and relationships with others. In the next chapter, I will uncover how some of the educators described their teaching of particular social and emotional skills while teaching complexity.

Chapter 4: Complexity Facilitates SEL Skills

"I think it's particularly important these days
[to be exposed to complexity]
not just because of what's going on all around us,
but also, because it's so easy
to be exposed only
to the loudest voices you know."
– Dr. Jeffrey Kress

According to Elias and Tobias, "nearly everything we do throughout our lives depends on our emotional intelligence, from maintaining healthy relationships to achieving our goals." John Mayer and Peter Salovey defined emotional intelligence in 1997 as "the ability to perceive emotions ... so as to assist thought … and to reflectively regulate emotions so as to promote emotional and intellectual growth."[102] Several educators I interviewed identified the strengthening of emotional intelligence skills as one major value in their teenager's exploration of the complex story of the State of Israel. For instance, Posen recalled from his days in the classroom that "you're always going to have kids who strongly

[102] John Mayer and Peter Salovey, "What Is Emotional Intelligence?" in Pater Solovey & David J. Stuylter (eds.), Emotional Development and Emotional Intelligence (New York: Basic Books, 1997), 3-31.

agree with somebody or strongly disagree with something else. And that's good" (October 2020, interview). Kress spoke about the value of learners interacting with opinions that they disagree with, saying, "I'm not saying that we should embrace offensive opinions, but I think that the question is how to not be completely thrown off your game by another opinion… if [these challenging opinions are out there], then it's good to [learn] about them" (November 2020, interview). Identifying the schools of *Hillel and Shammai* as exemplars in emotional regulation and asking good questions, Kornfeld spoke about the value of training learners to speak in "respectful and truthful [ways] … open to the idea of hearing from others without necessarily trying to change [their minds]" and identified that engaging in complex conversations about Israel help to strengthen learner's Emotional Intelligence (October 2020, interview).

Similarly, Drobenare reflected on real life situations, like "when you sit around the Thanksgiving table with your family and you disagree about politics," adding, "you don't excommunicate [your] family, right? You hash it out, you agree to disagree." In the realm of supporting teenagers in real life situations like those described by Drobenare, Lekht identified the value of helping her learners at the moment of their lives when "they're figuring out who they are, not just as Jews and Zionists, but as people" (October 2020, interview). This comment is valuable because it illuminates the particular developmental moment teenagers find themselves in. Speaking to the value of using Israel to teach particular life skills, Gringras mentioned that the "best thing that there is [here] is to push home this idea that life is not easy. Life is always going to be complicated" (October 2020, interview). Solomon reflected on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict specifically, mentioning that "this whole story fundamentally is about who we are as human beings" (November 2020,

interview). On this subject, Chazan went as far to say that he does not believe that "the subject of Israel Education is Israel, but rather about the learner themselves" (September 2020, interview). When thinking about Israel Education from the perspective of teaching complex narratives, these educators seem to be in agreement that they have the potential to teach powerful interpersonal life skills, especially in this fraught moment in history, Kress mentioning that learning complexity is "particularly important these days, not just because of what's going on all around us, but also because it's so easy to be exposed only to the loudest voices you know" (November 2020, interview). Several of the educators spoke not only about the value of teaching complexity and nuance but spoke about how they in particular teach what many often find as challenging topics through teaching particular social-emotional skills.

According to Kress and Elias, it is more challenging to learn when one lacks "self-control and social awareness" because people are "unlikely to engage in productive problem solving." And with that, I can imagine why so many people neglect to understand this and other complicated topics as fully as they many educators think they should. That is why it is no surprise when Elias and Tobias articulate that "teaching emotional intelligence is not optional or supplemental, but rather is an integral facet of education."[103] The two speak to the importance of facilitating these skills in teenagers, noting the "adolescent [brain's]... advanced development in emotions without corresponding developmental advances in self-control," identifying how adolescents often struggle to "evaluate risk or consider consequences" because, although they are "just as capable of understanding things as adults

[103] Maurice J. Elias and Steven E. Tobias, *Boost Emotional Intelligence in Students: 30 Flexible Research-Based Activities to Build EQ Skills (Grades 5-9)*, (Minneapolis, Free Spirit, 2018), 3.

are," they write that "their capability for thoughtful decision-making can be overshadowed or overridden by their intense response to social relationships and feelings."[104] This chapter will specifically speak to both why learning emotional intelligence skills can be helpful for teenagers and the three major skills that the educators collectively spoke about in their interviews.

Section A: Emotional Regulation

While they may not have used the specific jargon, several of the educators spoke about particular SEL-based skills that they strived to support their learners in practicing. Overwhelmingly, educators concerned with their learner's emotional health spoke about emotional regulation as a valuable skill for their teenagers to practice when speaking about challenging topics. Elias and Tobias refer to emotional "self-control" as "the ability to recognize an impulse and control the urge to act on it without thinking carefully."[105] This topic was one that educators such as Linzer, Lekht, and Kornfeld were excited to talk about when I introduced questions about their learner's emotional health when discussing challenging topics. In general, a common comment made by the educators' writ-large was that many of their learners have incredibly strong feelings that they "know little about." To this comment, Linzer added that "I find that we do have kids, [who are] really surprised by how strongly they feel about certain things."

[104] Ibid., 5.
[105] Ibid., 70.

For instance, Lekht spoke about her own struggles with emotional regulation, mentioning that when having conversations with people who she disagrees with, "my heart rate goes up, when I speak to someone who's against Israel or against the Jewish people. I'm a very emotional person and it's very hard for me personally." For Lekht, the solution to this emotional irregularity is to dismiss her learner's feelings as a "problem" that should be "humanized," mentioning to them how she "needs to learn how to be less emotional [because] my blood pressure literally starts to rise, and I feel my heart [race]" (October 2020, interview). SEL practitioners would generally argue that Lekht's negative frame regarding emotions should be tweaked, because as Aryeh Ben David writes "our intellectual, emotional, and active sides are all essential."[106] Lekht mentioned that she models self-talk for her learners about how she tries to help herself in those situations, saying "'this is not the end of the world. You're going to be okay,'" continuing, "and I actually give them examples of times that I," in her words, "'effed up'" (October 2020, interview). Several of the educators who spoke about emotional regulation, spoke about the value of using complexity in the story of the State of Israel specifically with their teenage learners. Reflecting on emotionally challenging conversations, Kornfeld mentioned that "the arguments should … [help learners] get to the root of the issue and not to dagger the other person in the heart," underscoring the often-volatile emotions that teens have, reflecting on the importance of being able to "do that in a respectful way while keeping in mind the facts and figures in history and context," holding together the "intellectual" and the "emotional"[107] (October 2020, interview). Overwhelmingly, the educators even beyond just Lekht, Linzer, and

[106] Aryeh Ben David, *Becoming a Soulful Educator* (Woodstock, Jewish Lights Publishing, 2016), 67.
[107] Ibid.

Kornfeld, spoke about the necessity of supporting teenagers in developing these skills, reflecting on how Israel's complexity can be a valuable topic of conversation to help support the development of these skills.

Section B: Listening Skills

Several of the educators touched on teaching complexity to teach stronger listening skills. Chazan, Sykes, and Solomon were all particularly passionate detail about this subject. All three educators emphasized the importance of encouraging learners to ask thoughtful questions, to listen deeply, and to having compassionate dialogue. Chazan noted that for him, Israel Education is "about a dialectic relationship with others" that is "Socratic" in nature (September 2020, interview). Sykes added that their goal at *URJ Heller High* "is to give [learners] as much information as possible and to help [them] reinforce the importance of listening skills: of empathetic listening and active listening" (September 2020, interview). Elias and Tobias speak about listening skills in terms of facilitating the development of how one understands the "social cues" of others and the strengthening of "active listening" skills. They argue that accurately reading social cues, which they offer are "signs and signals people send out, sometimes nonverbally, that help shape social interactions" help us to actively listen better, which they define as "a way of repeating back to people what we are understanding from their words and actions to make sure our interpretations are correct."[108]

[108] Maurice J. Elias and Steven E. Tobias, *Boost Emotional Intelligence in Students: 30 Flexible Research-Based Activities to Build EQ Skills (Grades 5-9)*, (Minneapolis, Free Spirit, 2018), 100.

Chazan spoke about the necessity to create situations where learners are encouraged to dialogue with their learning community. In thinking about the development of Israel Educators, Chazan argues that it is important for teacher training programs to instill "the device of questions and answers" when "conducting a dialogue," so that educators can use these Socratic skills out in the field (interview, September 2020). "Once you have learned how to ask... relevant and appropriate and substantial questions" one has "learned how to learn," argues Neil Postman and Charles Weingartner.[109] Noddings argues that genuine "dialogue is open-ended" when "neither party knows at the outset what the outcome or decision will be. Dialogue is a common search for understanding, empathy, or appreciation." She warns that "as parents and teachers, we cannot enter into dialogue with children when we know that our decision is already made.[110]

On the importance of dialoguing, Sinclair argues that he thinks that "American Jewish engagement with Israel should be a series of *conversations* about the *complexities* of Israeli society" where learners are "*empowered* to dialogue and disagree with Israelis."[111] But that said, Sykes argued that "simple discourse is a lost art in our society" (September 2020, interview). Solomon spoke about creating compassionate discourse among learners as one of the core learner objectives that they wish to develop in *Encounter* programs. When listening to Palestinian speakers, she urges her learners to ask clarifying questions to better understand the speaker's story or perspective on an issue. Although it might be tempting for many of her learners to ask particular questions designed to disprove a speaker's point, she

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[109] Neil Postman and Charles Weingartner, *Teaching as a Subversive Activity* (New York: Delacorte, 1969), 23.
[110] Nel Noddings, *The Challenge to Care in Schools: An alternative Approach to Education,* 2nd Ed, (New York, Teachers College Press, 2005), 23.
[111] Alex Sinclair, *Loving the Real Israel: An Educational agenda for liberal Zionism* (Teaneck, Ben Yehuda Press, 2013), 66.

discourages the practice because these types of questions go against the learning community's goal of actively listening to Palestinians (November 2020, interview).

Sykes similarly reflected on the importance of using active listening skills to ask thoughtful questions, reflecting on the evolution of a program at *URJ Heller High* involving a *Haredi* couple who live in a settlement in the West Bank who came to speak to his students, with the intention of learning about their lives as observant settler life. In the first iteration of the program, students became fixated on the homophobic teachings of the Haredi community and asked the kinds of questions that Solomon discourages in her programming (September 2020, interview). Unlike Solomon and her team who intentionally create learning situations that encourage the development of active listening skills, this first program described by Sykes' failed in that regard. In the evolved version of the program, Sykes mentioned that he has his learners pre-submit questions to the couple so that he and his team can screen them beforehand. Beyond Sykes, Chazan, and Solomon, several other educators spoke about the power of small group reflection and listening deeply to different narrators, and how doing so helps learners develop a deep connection to others.

Section C: Developing Empathy

Empathy, according to Elias and Tobias, is "the ability to understand and share other people's feelings."[112] Sykes, Chazan, and Solomon identified helping their learners develop empathy for others as one goal of active listening. For instance, in speaking about striving to

[112] Maurice J. Elias and Steven E. Tobias, *Boost Emotional Intelligence in Students: 30 Flexible Research-Based Activities to Build EQ Skills (Grades 5-9)*, (Minneapolis, Free Spirit, 2018), 113.

model seeing herself in another person's story, Solomon mentioned that "I think [developing empathy] is an important tool because we can't empathize with the person's experience [otherwise]" (November 2020, interview). Young similarly spoke about a tangential instance of teaching about the Orthodox perspective to a "young man who was 'feministing' all over the place," arguing that he didn't like how they "do this to women, or that to women." Young spoke to the value of modeling, "listen man, I'm a big feminist too. And God I love hearing you talk like this, but let's consider from the perspective of an Orthodox person" mentioning to the student that although his beliefs were against her own values too, that it was important to understand why they believe the way they do, even if it goes against our values (October 2020, interview). Noddings warns that we as human beings "tend to associate all that is good and right with *our* side, and all that is evil and wrong with the other side," insinuating the importance of yearning to understand another person's perspective and feelings first as a human being.[113] By and large, the educators taught empathy through modeling. Elias and Tobias speak about empathy as both a "natural human reaction [that is] a skill [that] takes practice and intention," although some people naturally have developed the skill more than others.[114] Several of the educators interviewed spoke about empathy as a core value and skill in Jewish Education because, Anna Fuchs argues as quoted by Jonathan Woocher, "the goal of Jewish education is the same as it has always been! The job of Jewish education is to help people be more human, more humane."[115]

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[113] Nel Noddings, *The Challenge to Care in Schools: An alternative Approach to Education,* 2nd Ed, (New York, Teachers College Press, 2005), 116.
[114] Maurice J. Elias and Steven E. Tobias, *Boost Emotional Intelligence in Students: 30 Flexible Research-Based Activities to Build EQ Skills (Grades 5-9)*, (Minneapolis, Free Spirit, 2018), 113.
[115] Jonathan Woocher, "Forward," *Growing Jewish Minds, Growing Jewish Souls: Promoting Spiritual, Social, and Emotional Growth in Jewish Education*, in Jeffrey S. Kress (ed.) (New York, URJ Press, 2013), vi.

That all said, the skills of developing empathy, critical thinking, and emotional regulation are important social and emotional skills when learning about Israel. In chapter 6, I will unpack them further using the language and suggestions of SEL educators. But first, nearly every non-advocacy-based educator identified the setting of classroom norms and values to be of high value when learning challenging information. Understandably, it is of value to scholars in SEL as well. Before learning social and emotional skills, a learner first must feel safe and able to grow in community, which I will unpack further in the next chapter.

Chapter 5: Value in Setting Classroom Norms

"You can't [experiment with new ideas] unless
you feel like you have the space
to process and to reflect
and go through your own experience of
transforming the way that you see
everything going on around you"
– Leah Solomon

Take yourself back to a time when you were a teenager and experienced a deep emotional outburst. Maybe you recall your heart and thoughts racing or even your brow overwhelmed with sweat? If you were approached by a parent or teacher, how did they react? Many adults choose to use these situations with young people to help work on their social-emotional skills, asking them to take a few deep breaths or having them count backwards from ten. Although this might be an effective way to support someone in regulating their emotions in the moment, Kress and Elias argue that as human beings, "we do not learn best when we are highly stressed," although many teachers and adults will "tend to

pick just these times to teach about social and emotional skills."[116] Intense emotions disrupt our ability to learn. They write that when one is in a state where they lack "self-control and social awareness," that they are "unlikely to engage in productive problem solving."[117] This is to say, SEL educators argue that there is much value in preparing learners to have challenging conversations that might involve intense emotional reactions. Similarly, the educators with whom I interviewed agreed with this sentiment for the most part, as Pitkowsky argued that "before getting into any [difficult] topic", that there is a value in setting "norms and expectations within the learning group" (September 2020, interview). The educators who found value in articulating norms as a part of a larger learning experience referenced their value in setting clear boundaries for learners, supporting them in regulating emotional irregularities while speaking about difficult topics.

Section A: Articulated Norms and Values Built into an Israel Education Program

Every educator had their own approaches to setting and creating particular boundaries within their learning spaces, designed to best support their learners in practicing particularly challenging social-emotional skills among their peers. This section will discuss several articulated norms and expressed values built into the fabric of particular programs that teach complex narratives about the State of Israel. To many of the educators, the most critical norm built into their educational environments is that of transparency, like for Drobenare who in preparing for camp each year, expressed that she "likes being clear" with campers and

[116] Jeffrey S Kress and Maurice J Elias, "Social and Emotional Learning in the Jewish Classroom: Tools for a Strong Jewish Identity" *Journal of Jewish Communal Service* Spring/Summer 2001, Vol 77, 8-9.
[117] Ibid., 10.

their parents about their Israel programming (October 2020, interview). On transparency, Sagarin noted that there is a value in creating spaces where learners are well aware that their teachers are not trying to indoctrinate them, arguing that "I think that it's really important to check in and form a 'safe space' where there are no wrong answers, where people are free to speak about things [on their mind]" (October 2020, interview). Similarly, Linzer adds that with her learners it's about "being honest," and saying to them, "'I'm not trying to just paint Israel as one thing or the other thing.'" These thoughts on transparency echoed much of how the other non-advocacy-based educators spoke about the topic, arguing for educational environments where learners will be able to navigate these complex challenges that face Israel through a teacher's guidance.

That said, although both Schwartz and Lekht discussed the importance of transparency, they did so for a slightly different goal, Lekht mentioning that "I believe in transparency. [While] we are an advocacy organization, we tell people [that] and if they're not comfortable with it, then they're not comfortable with it" (October 2020, interview). Schwartz similarly spoke about the transparency involved in teaching advocacy in *IfNotNow Chicago's* teen program, describing their goal as creating new networks of advocates to make change in the world (October 2020, interview). That said, transparency was the only established norm mentioned in my interviews with them. Unlike the other educators, they did not speak about establishing norms and/or brainstorming shared values with their learning communities. This chapter will primarily focus on how the non-advocacy-based programs and educators establish "safe spaces" in their learning communities.

Section B: Establishing a "Safe Space" in the Learning Community

Sagarin spoke about the importance of forming a "'safe space,' where there are no wrong answers, [and] where people are free to speak about things" on their mind, without feeling like they are being "indoctrinated" (October 2020, interview). Part of the success in "safe spaces" are, as Posen put it, making "the red lines in your classroom clear," so that learners are able to experiment and make mistakes that they can learn and grow from (October 2020, interview). Understanding boundaries in educational and social situations help people feel safe and able to have particular conversations. No educator articulated this "safe space" much like Solomon did, describing it as "Lab Space," described on the *Encounter* website as "the practice of experimentation and messiness: a willingness to try on new ideas and to allow others to do the same without fear of attack or judgment."[118] Solomon mentioned that

> Lab Space [gives] people explicit permission to say, 'I am not going to come in knowing everything...' because so often, especially Jewish leadership, [people] expect [each other] to come into [experiences like Encounter already] being able to say what they think about everything. Or [alternatively,] they feel like they need to come in and have a developed opinion about everything and be able to take a stand and be able to argue and debate. (November 2020, interview).

Julia Rohrer thinks "it's a cultural issue that people are not willing to admit mistakes," reflecting on the value of transforming cultures to normalize to admit past mistakes, and grow from them.[119] Being able to experiment with ideas in intentionally developed spaces such that Solomon described, allows people to learn that they might be wrong, described by Mark Leary in an article by Brian Resnick as "intellectual humility," which, Resnick

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[118] "About Us," *Encounter,* Accessed January 2, 2020, http://www.encounterprograms.org/about-us-2.

[119] Brian Resnick, " Intellectual humility: the importance of knowing you might be wrong," *Vox, January 4, 2019, Accessed January 1, 2021.* https://www.vox.com/science-and-health/2019/1/4/17989224/intellectual-humility-explained-psychology-replication?fbclid=IwAR1yv-duyLOx6XmT1ynQOEZvezWqUn2yyQVo0K1Hx2ZFinE2oItX5Iy-oO8.

continues, is when one is "actively curious about [their] blind spots," similar to how a "scientist actively works against [their] own hypothesis." Resnick writes that because scientists attempt "to rule out any other alternative explanations for a phenomenon before settling on a conclusion," that ultimately "it's about asking: what am I missing here?"[120] Listening to complex narratives within a safe environment, or Solomon's "Lab Space," allows learners to, in the words of Sagarin, be "open to hearing and learning different things" (October 2020, interview).

Section C: There is a Value to Creating Reflection Time

Another established norm that many educators spoke highly about was creating intentionally designed moments for reflection throughout an educational experience. Reflection requires vulnerability, which often comes at a struggle for many people. Brené Brown argues that "the perception that vulnerability is weakness is the most widely accepted myth about vulnerability and the most dangerous."[121] Reflection in educational settings works to challenge this notion. Speaking about the power of creating opportunities to reflect within an environment that encourages "Lab Space," Solomon argues that "you can't [experiment with new ideas] unless you feel like you have the space to process and to reflect and go through your own experience of transforming the way that you see everything going on around you" (November 2020, interview). Ultimately this requires participants to also practice being vulnerable. Brown suggests reframing this fear of being "less capable" and

[120] Ibid.
[121] Brené Brown, *Daring Greatly: How the Courage to be Vulnerable Transforms the Way We Live, Love, Parent, and Lead* (New York: Avery, 2015).

our desire to "mask feelings, suck it up, and soldier on," but rather come to respect and appreciate "the courage and daring behind vulnerability" in others and in ourselves.[122]

Creating a culture where vulnerability is equated to courage takes intention, as Young described transforming the culture at *Woodlands Community Temple* into one where risks in conversations lead to validation, appreciating her learners as they process particularly challenging information, saying to them phrases such as "'gosh, I love that! You're asking the question.' That's what our kids get a lot of, we're like, good for you asking that question. And we aren't afraid to go there'" (October 2020, interview). Sagarin critiqued programs that frown on establishing regular time for reflection (October 2020, interview), and Linzer mentioned that in her religious school, reflection is a part of the educational culture beyond just Israel Education. Linzer spoke about her program's school-wide exit "ticket to dinner," mentioning that this is each learner's chance to share a reflection with their class right before dinnertime, which "could be something they're thinking about something that's struggling with or something they're interested in." She mentioned that this reflection is so powerful and important that even as they transitioned to virtual learning, all learners turn their video cameras on for this final part of class so that they could be together as a classroom community before singing off (October 2020, interview). Both Linzer and Sagarin in particular spoke about the value of having these "social-emotional check ins," in the words of Linzer, whereas a full learning community, the teens and their teacher can share with the group a reflection from their past week. In my own religious school classroom, as an example, I always ask my learners for their "*tov*" or "*lo tov,*" which I generally translate as their "good thing and not so good thing" from the past week. Similarly, other educators may

[122] Ibid.

ask their learners for their "rose and thorn" or their "glow and grow." Ultimately, these sorts of activities help learners to see that their teachers care about them. Reflecting on the power of these activities, Yeager argues that "when students feel that people genuinely listen to them as they share their lives, they begin to sense their own significance as human beings."[123] Similarly Noddings argues "no matter how hard teachers try to care, if the caring is not received by students, the claim 'they don't care' has some validity," arguing that it is critical for learners to see how much their teachers care.[124] Ultimately, these check-ins both help facilitate community and help learners to care about each other and recognize that their peers and teacher care about them, ultimately making more challenging conversations easier to have in the future.

"It is sad but unfortunately true that learning," writes Ben David, "without processing, never happened."[125] And said processing with the utmost growth cannot happen unless a learner is in an environment where they feel that their teacher and peers care about their humanity. Solomon spoke about the power of including small group reflection time to aid her learners in processing complex cognitive and emotional information during *Encounter* programming. Intentionally building programming around forming several small group processing sessions among peers, these sessions are "integral" to supporting learners process the information that they learned in hearing from different Palestinian speakers (November 2020, interview). Similarly, the *iCenter for Israel Education's* iFellow's program, most *Clinical Pastoral Education* (CPE) programs, and several rabbinical and

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[123] Rachael Kessler, *The Soul of Education* (Alexandria, Association and Curriculum Development 2000), 68.
[124] Nel Noddings, *The Challenge to Care in Schools: An alternative Approach to Education,* 2nd Ed, (New York, Teachers College Press, 2005), 15.
[125] Aryeh Ben David, *Becoming a Soulful Educator: How to Bring Jewish Learning from Our Minds, to Our Hearts, to Our Souls – and into Our Lives* (Woodstock, Jewish Lights Publishing, 2016), 68.

cantorial school programs are designed with small group time built into the educational programming in order to provide their learners with time to reflect on the experiential aspects of their learning. Emotional reflection has its Jewish roots in the *Mussar* Movement when Salanater encouraged small group reflection among his students learning ethics.[126]

Speaking to the value of small groups, Solomon argues that it is "super important" to give "people space to process, to think through, and to reflect," arguing that if their goal is to "develop more robust, courageous leadership" that they will not meet their goals if their learners are unable to "confront [them]self" and ask themselves "'what does this stuff mean for me? How does this impact me as a person? How does it impact me as a leader in the areas that I care about?'" (November 2020, interview). Michael Shire argues that "reflection is a crucial phase," an activity that "is as important for the individual as it is for the educational group" because the "sharing of reflections" ultimately "allows articulation of spiritual awareness."[127] This is all the more true for teenagers, the Jewish Education Project's 2016 study identifying that their peer group being the most critical of their relationships.[128] Yeager spoke about the power of small group reflection with teenagers in his descriptions of the Chicago-based social-emotional development program *Becoming a Man* (BAM), in how they use "open-ended, student-led discussions with mentors from the neighborhood along

[126] Arielle Levites and Ira F Stone, "Carrying the Burden of the Other: Musar and Adult Development," *Growing Jewish Minds, Growing Jewish Souls: Promoting Spiritual, Social, and Emotional Growth in Jewish Education*, in Jeffrey S. Kress (ed.) (New York, URJ Press, 2013), 225.
[127] Michael Shire, "Nurturing the Spiritual in Jewish Education," *Growing Jewish Minds, Growing Jewish Souls: Promoting Spiritual, Social, and Emotional Growth in Jewish Education*, ed. Jeffrey S. Kress (New York, URJ Press, 2013), 10.
[128] "Generation Now: Understanding and Engaging Jewish Teens Today," *Jewish Education Project,"* April 2016, 24.

with a series of activities that build relationships and a sense of community with others in a small group.[129]

Section D: Identifying Particular Norms & Values as a Community

Beyond articulating values of transparency, developing "safe space" or "Lab Space" in a community, and teaching the value of self-reflection, several of the educators spoke passionately about how they choose to frame their learning experiences through *rules* or *articulated values and norms.* While some educators chose to present their learners with an ethics statement, some vouched for the co-creation of a document. Three educators spoke about using these statements to frame their subsequent educational experiences. Lekht for example pointed me to *Club Z*'s "Principals," which are seven statements that keep their learner's all on the same page regarding some basic tenets when discussing the State of Israel.[130] Similarly, Kornfeld spoke about how she and her staff at *StandWithUs* use an ethics statement with their High School program. Paraphrasing the document, Kornfeld mentioned that it "states that we are here to respect each other, [that] we are here to have positive and productive discussions, and that we will always assume positive intentions and positive intent." That said, Kornfeld mentioned that their ethics statement has not been overly effective as of the past year. Underscoring the main goal of this statement, Kornfeld modelled the language she might use with a learner, saying,

> when you hear something that you might disagree with or something that you might find to be egregious, your first assumption should be either that the person doesn't

[129] David S. Yeager "Social and Emotional Learning Programs for Adolescents" *The Future of Children*, Volume 27, Number 1, Spring 2017, 78.
[130] "Our Mission," *ClubZ,* Accessed December 20, 2020, https://clubz.org/our-mission.

> know, or that the person has a different opinion… [The intention is that learners should] never attack.

Reminiscing about how well it worked in previous years, Kornfeld argued that she thinks that the emotional regulation needed to make mature choices when discussing complex geopolitical issues has "definitely dropped" in the wake of living during a global pandemic and during such a contentious political reality (October 2020, interview). Solomon and the team from *Encounter* also have made the pedagogical choice to use an ethics statement with their learners. She noted that speaking to that many of the *Encounter* "Values" and "Principles of Practice" are universal in nature, commenting that when values include "*Ahavat Yisrael*," "Love of the Jewish People," and "*Kavod HaAdam*" "Human Dignity," she imagines that it is rather difficult to disagree. At the beginning of *Encounter* trips, she and her team use them to help facilitate an opening conversation to frame the trip where participants are allowed to offer their own interpretations and disagreements about the document created by *Encounter* if they see the need (November 2020, interview).

Alternatively, some educators spoke about the value of a co-created document, often called a "*Brit Kehilla*," a communal covenant, to be developed at the start of a learning experience. Kress mentioned that he thinks that

> co-creating these rules is a really great thing to do [while] setting a higher goal for why you're doing that. So, for example, [paraphrasing how he might speak to a group of teens before "you know, we're all here to learn and to share ideas. What are some agreements that we could make that would allow us to achieve that?" (November 2020, interview).

Social-Emotional Learning expert Erin Jones argues that co-creating learning expectations is important because it "allows [the teacher] to learn about cultural norms" within the learning community while giving learners the chance to "feel like they have some ownership." And with that, I would add motivation. Continuing, Jones argues that it helps to have discussions

amongst the learning community about "what we [actually] mean by respect, what we actually mean when we say, 'being a good student,'" etc.[131] Applying Jones' wisdom even further to the complexity within the story of the State of Israel, Pitkowsky suggests asking learners, "how will we phrase our opinions?" and "how do we withhold judgment?" She mentioned how there is a value "for teachers to set that playing field [and ask their learners] what are the norms and guidelines when we're going to enter into a conversation in general" (September 2020, interview). Kress mentioned that the co-creation of learning norms is an incredibly important moment in the life of a learning community, arguing that for a room of adolescents, this is a moment for them to have the agency to really create a "living document" that will serve their needs as they traverse some really complicated topics (November 2020, interview). Elias and Tobias argue that "adolescents accept rules better when they have had a voice in creating them," reflecting on the value in helping them to both "feel heard" as well as giving them a "sense of autonomy."[132] In creating a "*Brit Kehilla*," Kress warns educators that he thinks

> that the biggest problem with the *Britot* [is] that we make is that we [don't really use them]. You know, we're very big on talking about Judaism as an evolving covenant the people have… [But yet, when] we talk about a *Brit* in the bunk [or in another learning experience], it becomes something that you do for the first fifteen minutes and it gets pinned up [to the bunk] or in the classroom on the wall. And [ultimately] when someone does something that violates it, [the teacher] could say, 'ah, look, you violated it!' And they get in trouble. Which is really not a *Brit*. It's false to call it a *Brit*. It's [really] a set of rules, which is not what a covenant is. (November 2020, interview).

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[131] Erin Jones (CharacterStrong), "Social Emotional Learning Through the Lens of Social Justice," Youtube video, June 13, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YWm7-MN7zsk&feature=emb_logo&fbclid=IwAR0LtyUUIJ_3_HY10gIMTu2AlZC2LwKO06XMk2hkL3tELWpCCwMfzWIYfDE.

[132] Maurice J. Elias and Steven E. Tobias, *Boost Emotional Intelligence in Students: 30 Flexible Research-Based Activities to Build EQ Skills (Grades 5-9)*, (Minneapolis, Free Spirit, 20189.

Reflecting on an ideal communal learning agreement modeled after the Covenant between God and the Jewish People, Kress argued that these covenantal documents should be a "mutual agreement" (November 2020, interview). Both Kress and Pitkowsky claimed that the best way to use this co-created document is to consistently revisit it and give learners the opportunity and ultimately agency to help it evolve to best meet their needs. Kress underscored the importance of making sure that the "*Brit* remains an alive document" especially when having challenging conversations, arguing that it's possibly "even more important than the initial creation" to consistently check back in frequently (November 2020, interview).

Section E: The Educator as a Member and Model in the Learning Community

Schwab argues that the place of the teacher, who he refers to as "the scholarly member" of a learning community, "as only one among many," continuing that they are "not the place of 'first among peers,'" in other words, they should model being an active learner among their students and peers.[133] Several of the educators spoke about their role as integral members of the classroom community, less as traditional teachers, but more as coaches or counselors to help support learners through complex topics. Bringing relatable and helpful aspects of their own personal lives to their learners helps to make them more personable. Ben David described the power of a teacher forming a thoughtful relationship with a learner, citing a student who mentioned to him that

> "'when the teacher shares something from her personal life with us, I feel she is treating us as equals, that she is bringing us into her inner circle. She becomes much

[133] Joseph J. Schwab, "Translating Scholarship into Curriculum," in "The Practical 3: Translation into Curriculum in School Review," August 1973, 15-16.

more real and accessible. Now I would even consider approaching her outside of class with an issue."'[134]

Teachers play powerful roles in their learner's lives, especially in the lives of teenagers, even more so when they bring their own appropriate and helpful life experiences into the learning community. Human development expert Chip Wood writes that every adult encounter "offers the adolescent apprenticeship in adulthood through respectful interaction with caring adults."[135] When a teacher socializes with their learners, they humanize themselves. This humanization helps teachers to be better models for their learners.

On the value of modeling within the caring educational framework, Noddings argues that there is value in a teacher establishing themselves as a model in caring about the learning community and the content, writing "so we do not tell our students to care; we show them how to care by creating caring relations with them."[136] Several of the educators spoke about the importance of modeling care, Solomon for instance spoke about the importance of modeling *Encounter's* particular values throughout the educational experience: from conversations at meal times and social programming to educational programming. *Encounter* educators model "living" their values in thoughtful ways, from discussing them with participants over meals during weekend retreats to explicitly mentioning the values as educational frames while facilitating a conversation with a Palestinian guest (November 2020, interview).

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[134] Aryeh Ben David, *Becoming a Soulful Educator: How to Bring Jewish Learning from Our Minds, to Our Hearts, to Our Souls – and into Our Lives* (Woodstock, Jewish Lights Publishing, 2016), 27.
[135] Chip Wood, *Yardsticks: Children in the Classroom Ages 4-14.* 3rd Ed. (Turner Falls, Center for Responsive Schools, Inc., 2015), 170.
[136] Nel Noddings, *The Challenge to Care in Schools: An alternative Approach to Education,* 2nd Ed, (New York, Teachers College Press, 2005), 22.

Sagarin, Young, and Lekht all spoke about the importance of sharing their own struggles and journeys with their learners, each mentioning in different ways how this can be a motivating factor to help their learners speak up about challenging topics. Ben David noted that "it is actually the sharing of our flaws that endears us to our students."[137] Similarly, Solomon spoke about the importance of modeling one's own discomfort and liminality, as well as raising up the importance of holding multiple truths when teaching complexity (November 2020, interview). Although, as Kessler wrote, "many teachers are troubled by such unfathomable dilemmas for which they have no answers,"[138] she described one teacher who "encourages teachers to express their own uncertainty or sense of mystery without feeling that not knowing in any way undermines their authority."[139] Frankly, I think that it is impossible for one's teacher to have all of the answers, especially in regard to challenging topics. And with that, this is all the truer when speaking about an enduring Occupation; issues of rampant antisemitism, islamophobia, and racism; a multiplicity of voices both on the ground and in the Jewish and Palestinian Diasporas; challenges associated with minority identities; issues of borders and wars, terror and security among other challenges. Solomon and several other educators that I spoke to would argue that because the teachers themselves are on their own personal journey with the material, they should embrace it in their teaching.

Returning to the crux of how most of the educators understood their role in teaching teenagers about Israel: it's all about the relationship. Helping to facilitate relationships between a model teacher, or "coach," among the entire learning community, and between

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[137] Aryeh Ben David, *Becoming a Soulful Educator: How to Bring Jewish Learning from Our Minds, to Our Hearts, to Our Souls – and into Our Lives* (Woodstock, Jewish Lights Publishing, 2016), 17.
[138] Rachael Kessler, *The Soul of Education* (Alexandria, Association and Curriculum Development 2000), 62.
[139] Ibid., 65.

learners and stories, narratives, and other human beings vis-à-vis the complexities within the story of the State of Israel is the long-term goal for the majority of the educators that I interviewed. For many of the educators, the work begins by articulating particular values and/or co-creating a community set of expectations within an environment that teaches particular skills when navigating challenging content. That said, none of the educators that I spoke to beyond Kress were versed in the language of CASEL's five competences or how to more effectively teach many of the social and emotional skills that they yearned to teach. While it is true that some skills were taught, I think that an intentional SEL framework would teach the skills more effectively that not only can help better inform our teenagers and future leaders regarding challenging topics regarding Israel but help to better the hearts and minds of our teenagers as they traverse through what is quite possibly the most challenging moment of their lives.

Chapter 6: A New Paradigm for Teaching Complexity: a "*Mussar* Mindset"

"American Jewish teenagers today would welcome
a program that taught a 'Mussar Mindset'
built on learning SEL skills,
crafted to teach them complexity about Israel
designed with self-betterment in mind.
– Joshua A Gischner

"Neuroscience is adding concrete evidence to what educators have long understood about the inextricable link between educating the 'heart' and the 'head,' writes Rotstein,[140] and thus, I believe that we can improve our efforts to teach complexity about Israel to teenagers if we do so through an SEL framework. That said, SEL is most effective within a strong learning community built on the development and nurturing of relationships as identified in chapter 2. Nearly all of the educators interviewed found value in introducing learners to particular stories, and in teaching differing narrative perspectives within the story of the State of Israel so that their learners can experience a fuller picture, as reflected in

[140] Evie Rotstein, "Part-Time Jewish Education Harnessing the Power of Social-Emotional Spiritual Learning," *eJewishPhilanthropy*, May 30, 2017, Accessed November 1, 2020, https://ejewishphilanthropy.com/part-time-jewish-education-harnessing-the-power-of-social-emotional-spiritual-learning/.

chapter 3. Chapter 4 took this a step further, including reflections from the educators as to how teaching complexity can be useful to teenagers, identifying three particular common SEL-skills spoken about by them: practicing emotional regulation, improving listening skills, and developing empathy. This is all to say: while some educators spoke of teaching particular social-emotional skills when teaching complexity, none of the Israel Educators identified this as a learner objective. Similarly, none of the educators who spoke about the three particular skills spoke about particular activities designed to help support their learners in developing these skills, beyond raising up the importance of modeling these behaviors and the importance of articulating clear norms and values, a commonality that was nearly unanimously discussed in the interviews discussed in chapter 5. Although creating safe boundaries in a learning space is a crucial step for the SEL Educator, it is simply not enough. While some argue that SEL skills can simply be "learned by osmosis" or believe that they are a "matter of inborn character," Kress and Elias argue that this is not the case.[141] Therefore, a new paradigm in Israel Education using SEL to teach particularly helpful social and emotional skills would be helpful.

Our teenagers think so too. For instance, the Jewish Education Project's 2016 study argued that "many teens today are interested in practices such as meditation and character self-development," urging teen educators to "move beyond traditional Jewish practices… to engage teens, and to provide them with meaningful tools that they can apply to their own spiritual and life journeys."[142] Similarly in the 2018 study from CASEL, researchers identified that most "young people like the idea of attending a school that would help them

[141] Jeffrey S Kress and Maurice J Elias, "Social and Emotional Learning in the Jewish Classroom: Tools for a Strong Jewish Identity" *Journal of Jewish Communal Service* Spring/Summer 2001, Vol 77, abstract.
[142] "Generation Now: Understanding and Engaging Jewish Teens Today," *Jewish Education Project,"* April 2016, 24.

develop social and emotional skills, and they believe [that] attending a strong SEL school would personally benefit them and create a more positive social and learning environment. However, many young people do not feel that their high school excels in developing students' social and emotional competencies." In my research for instance, I've learned that many SEL-based programs for teenagers are often boring. Yet, there is great untapped potential in this methodology. In the 2018 study from CASEL, titled "*Respected: Perspectives of Youth on High School & Social and Emotional Learning*," researchers Jennifer L DePaoli, Matthew N. Atwell, John M. Bridgeland, and Timothy P. Shriver discovered that of the students and former students that they surveyed, 67% of current High School students and 71% of recent graduates believe that if their High School included an SEL-based curriculum, that it would have improved their relationships with friends and other students. 76% of current students felt that it would better help them prepare for college and for graduates in college, 70% of college students felt that an SEL-based program in High School would have improved their preparations for college. And 74% of current students and 70% of graduates believed that an SEL-based curriculum would better prepare their "real world" skills post-High School.[143]

This yearning for curricula that would help to better facilitate social-emotional growth makes sense from a developmental perspective. According to Yeager, adolescents begin "a second window of opportunity" for social-emotional development,[144] and therefore educators who work with teenagers can seize this window of opportunity to, in the words of

[143] Jennifer L DePaoli, Matthew N, Atwell, John M. Bridgeland, and Timothy P. Shriver, "Respected: Perspectives of Youth on High School & Social and Emotional Learning," *The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL),* November 2018, 27-30.
[144] David S. Yeager "Social and Emotional Learning Programs for Adolescents" *The Future of Children*, Volume 27, Number 1, Spring 2017, 81.

Kress and Elias, facilitate learner's growth in particular SEL skills in order to "enable them to put these skills to use in real-life situations."[145] In other words, imagine an intentionally designed SEL-based educational program for teens about Israel; facilitated by a cantor, rabbi, or educator trained in pastoral care; designed to help teenagers explore the migrant crisis in Tel Aviv, the Boycott-Divestment-Sanctions (BDS) movement, and/or police brutality aimed at Ethiopian Jewry, among many others. The only agenda would be helping them to explore the complexity and to thoughtfully practice particular social and emotional skills that will deeply improve their lives.

Due to the fact that "adolescents are filled with stressful [hormonal and social] changes… that evoke strong emotional reactions," writes Elias and Tobias, "this is the perfect time to teach kids emotional awareness and self-regulation." They argue because the "brain is most malleable while it is growing and developing," that during this period in a child's life "we have not only an opportunity but an obligation to promote self-understanding, self-control, and good choices."[146] In a chapter titled "Seizing the Moment," Steinberg refers to this malleability of the brain as "plasticity," he argues that because "adolescence is the *last* period of especially heightened malleability" as trusted adults in the lives of teenagers, we should "take advantage of it" and provide "the sorts of experiences to young people that will facilitate positive development and [ultimately by] protecting them from experiences that will hurt them."[147] SEL-based programs really work, Joseph A. Durlak noting a "meta study" which found that "students who took part in social and emotional

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[145] Jeffrey S Kress and Maurice J Elias, "Social and Emotional Learning in the Jewish Classroom: Tools for a Strong Jewish Identity" *Journal of Jewish Communal Service* Spring/Summer 2001, Vol 77, 4-5.
[146] Maurice J. Elias and Steven E. Tobias, *Boost Emotional Intelligence in Students: 30 Flexible Research-Based Activities to Build EQ Skills (Grades 5-9)*, (Minneapolis, Free Spirit, 2018). 6-7.
[147] Lawrence Steinberg, *Age of Opportunity: Lessons from the New Science of Adolescence* (New York, First Mariner Books, 2015), 10-11.

learning, or SEL, programs improved in grades and standardized-test scores by 11 percentile points compared with nonparticipating students."[148]

Although none of the educators who I interviewed used language similar to that expressed above, many of them often inferred or outright said how Israel Education can support children as they traverse the challenging developmental moments experienced throughout teenagerhood. Many spoke passionately about Israel Education as a means of teaching life skills. This chapter will further unpack this claim, contextualize it with language from CASEL and the *Mussar* Movement, and identify how Israel Educators can more effectively circularize the teaching of helpful social-emotional skills to teenagers via complexity.

An important note to make prior to unpacking CASEL's framework, is that Elias and Tobias point out an important accessibility note, noting that autistic people and those with similar neurological makeups sometimes find it more difficult to read "facial expressions and interpret social cues,"[149] and other neurotypical SEL skills. The *Autistic Self Advocacy Network* mentioned that "we process our senses differently;" "we communicate differently;" and "we socialize differently," pointing out that "eye contact might make us uncomfortable."[150] This all underscores the importance of understanding SEL skills from a place of nuance and understanding when facilitating class lessons. Every human being exists differently. I can share from my experience teaching children and adults who learn and

[148] Joseph A. Durlak et al., "The Impact of Enhancing Students' Social and Emotional Learning: A Meta-Analysis of School-Based Universal Interventions," *Child Development,* 82, no. 1, January/February 2011, 432.
[149] Maurice J. Elias and Steven E. Tobias, *Boost Emotional Intelligence in Students: 30 Flexible Research-Based Activities to Build EQ Skills (Grades 5-9)*, (Minneapolis, Free Spirit, 2018), 100.
[150] "About Autism," *Autistic Self Advocacy Network,* Accessed January 2, 2021, https://autisticadvocacy.org/about-asan/about-autism.

socialize differently than neurotypical people do, there are many different ways to actively listen—even some ways that do not involve eye contact.

Figure 1

Section A: Introduction to CASEL's Framework

CASEL's SEL framework includes five "broad, interrelated areas of competence." These include *Self-Awareness*, *Self-Management*, *Social-Awareness*, *Relationship-Skills*, and *Responsible Decision-Making*.[151] For a chart produced by CASEL that outlines the five competences, see figure 1.[152] Elias and Tobias argue that these five competencies are

> "grounded in… an internal dimension encompassing a student's capacity to recognize, monitor, manage, and express [their] feelings in healthy ways, and an external dimension concerned with the student's capacity to interact with peers and adults, including being aware of other's feelings and needs and responding appropriately."[153]

This section will discuss each of the competencies reflecting on their developmental usefulness for adolescents as well as how aspects of each competence might be effective in teaching complexity. Additionally, I will include examples of what Kress and Elias describe

[151] "CASEL's SEL Framework: What Are the Core Competence Areas and Where are they Promoted?," *The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning,* Accessed January 2, 2021, www.casel.org/what-is-SEL.
[152] Image found: https://casel.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/CASEL_Wheel_2020.png
[153] Maurice J. Elias and Steven E. Tobias, *Boost Emotional Intelligence in Students: 30 Flexible Research-Based Activities to Build EQ Skills (Grades 5-9)*, (Minneapolis, Free Spirit, 2018), x.

as “application activities,” learning activities that provide opportunities to practice new skills in academic and social situations.”[154] Tara Flippo argues that

> learning occurs when carefully chosen activities are supported by reflection, critical analysis, and synthesis,” adding that “the educators' primary roles include structuring an intentionally sequenced flow of activities, setting boundaries, supporting learners, ensuring physical and emotional safety, and facilitating the reflection process.[155]

Kress and Elias argue that many teachers “equate ‘telling students about”’ SEL with ‘teaching’ SEL skills.” They argue that it is important that we model and reflect on, for instance when teaching respect, what it means to have a “respectful tone of voice or body posture” and provide learners with ample time to practice and then “demonstrate their ability to perform these skills before we can assume that the skills are attained,” continuing that “if they cannot demonstrate these skills, we must keep working on a few distinct skills until their use becomes routine.”[156] You will find that the application activities and philosophies about the competencies are sourced from both Jewish and secular educators, who will further illuminate how teaching complexity through SEL can be effective for teenager’s emotional health when discussing complexity.

Section B: Self-Awareness

CASEL defines *Self-Awareness* as “the abilities to understand one’s own emotions, thoughts, and values and how they influence behavior across contexts.” This includes

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[154] Jeffrey S Kress and Maurice J Elias, “Social and Emotional Learning in the Jewish Classroom: Tools for a Strong Jewish Identity” *Journal of Jewish Communal Service* Spring/Summer 2001, Vol 77, 13.
[155] Tara Flippo, *Social and Emotional Learning in Action: Experiential Activities to Positively Impact School Climate* (London, Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, Inc., 2016), xx.
[156] Jeffrey S Kress and Maurice J Elias, “Social and Emotional Learning in the Jewish Classroom: Tools for a Strong Jewish Identity” *Journal of Jewish Communal Service* Spring/Summer 2001, Vol 77, 8.

developing a "growth mindset," or in more familiar Jewish language, encouraging learners to embrace the value of *Cheshbon HaNefesh, Accounting of the Soul*; examining one's "prejudices and biases," "demonstrating honesty and integrity," and encouraging learners to name their emotions, among others.[157] Kessler argues that a "deep connection to the self," when one is able to express their true self and "feel connected to the essence of who [they] are [ultimately] "nourish the human spirit."[158] Elias and Tobias reflect on *Self-Awareness* in regard to the importance of "encouraging students to think for themselves" by facilitating their critical thinking skills, cautioning educators to think about how "feelings and social pressures can often interfere with us being the way we really want to be because we may think others want us to act differently," reflecting on how it is often "easier for adolescents to know what others want them to do [rather] than to know what their own values and desires are."[159] That said, developing application activities that encourage learners to name their emotions and to think critically about how they understand the world, all within a growth mindset framework, can be incredibly helpful developmentally as well as when they traverse complicated topics. Chris Gambill and Molly Lineberger argues that "when we name emotions and know their causes and consequences, we can read a situation more accurately and know how to respond appropriately."[160] Gap Aguilar and Clarissa Bridges encourage teachers to use a "feelings wheel" to help students acknowledge their emotions, which are

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[157] "CASEL's SEL Framework: What Are the Core Competence Areas and Where are they Promoted?," *The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning,* Accessed January 2, 2021, www.casel.org/what-is-SEL.
[158] Rachael Kessler, *The Soul of Education* (Alexandria, Association and Curriculum Development 2000), 20.
[159] Maurice J. Elias and Steven E. Tobias, *Boost Emotional Intelligence in Students: 30 Flexible Research-Based Activities to Build EQ Skills (Grades 5-9)*, (Minneapolis, Free Spirit, 2018), 45.
[160] Chris Gambill with Molly Lineberger, "Emotional Intelligence and Effective Conflict Management: This Pair Can Make our Break Your Leadership," *JohnMark,* March 16, 2014, Accessed July 19, 2019, http://johnmark.net.au/ps/?p=224.

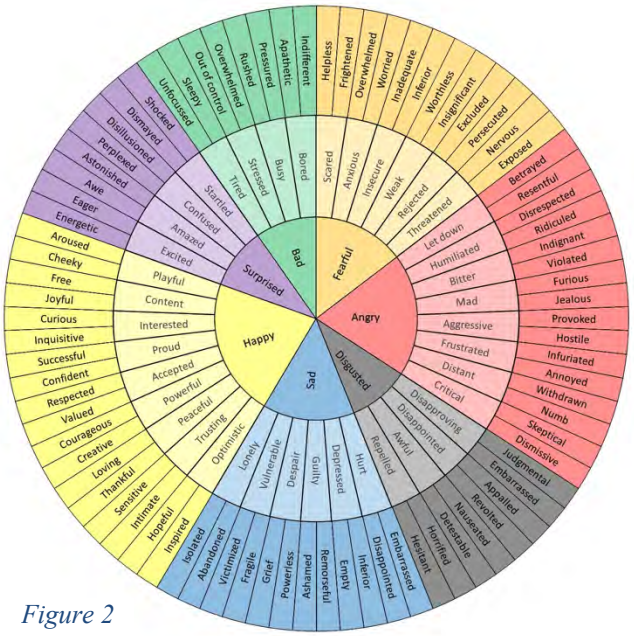

Figure 2

often difficult to accurately define in the moment even for many adults.[161] Please see figure 2[162] for an example of a "feelings wheel" one could use with learners. On the wheel, one might notice that there are six main emotions in the center of the wheel, "happy," "sad," "disgusted," "angry," fearful," "bad," and "surprised," each leading to more specific versions of each of the feelings beyond the spokes.

Although Elias and Tobias argue that many educators often wish to "impose" their own "values" on their learners, they write that it "rarely works in the long run," and that it is beneficial to help them make their own decisions.[163] It is no secret that emotions are intertwined with our ability to learn particular facts and figures, as Sinclair writes, "Israel Education is not just about knowledge."[164] Due to the fact that social pressures are rife in the American Jewish Community around Israel, it would be beneficial to help learners think for themselves.

Facilitating the development of ***Self-Awareness*** skills helps teenage learners to be more open and honest about their thoughts and feelings and empowers them to express their ideas. As their clergy and educators coach them on the path to adulthood, creating communal

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[161] Gap Aguilar and Clarissa Bridges, "A Guide to the Core SEL Competencies [Activities and Strategies Included]," *Panorama,* Accessed January 2, 2021, https://www.panoramaed.com/blog/guide-to-core-sel-competencies.

[162] Image found: https://thechalkboardmag.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/feelings-wheel-explained.jpg

[163] Maurice J. Elias and Steven E. Tobias, *Boost Emotional Intelligence in Students: 30 Flexible Research-Based Activities to Build EQ Skills (Grades 5-9)*, (Minneapolis: Free Spirit, 2018), 45.

[164] Alex Sinclair, *Loving the Real Israel: An Educational agenda for liberal Zionism* (Teaneck, Ben Yehuda Press, 2013), 97.

space where their thoughtful and compassionate opinions are valid and equal can be validating. I believe that this is especially important today as our teenage learners traverse an incredibly complicated political and social landscape both as Americans and as American Jews. Having more *Self-Awareness* about one's emotions -- as well as how one's emotions impact their decision making about complex issues is only beneficial, especially when thinking about bias. Human beings hold bias, and, as Solomon argues, it is important to encourage learners to examine their emotional biases. They often get in the way of really learning. She argued "I like the idea of being in this liminal space where you're on the cusp of something ...that you don't know" (November 2020, interview). Similarly, Gringras spoke about the importance of preparing lessons with one's learner in mind, thinking about the pair of "spectacles" that they use to examine Israel, arguing that even the educator should examine their biases about their own learners (October 2020, interview). Reflecting on the process of supporting our learners to become more self-aware of their thoughts and feelings so that they can manage themselves more effectively, Kessler argued that "the capacity to be in relationship to one's inner life is critical for the development of autonomy -- building a healthy identity that is central to adolescent development."[165]

Section C: Self-Management

Self-Management is defined by CASEL as "the abilities to manage one's emotions, thoughts, and behaviors effectively in different situations and to achieve goals and aspirations." Some examples that they identify of this competence include "identifying and

[165] Rachael Kessler, *The Soul of Education* (Alexandria, Association and Curriculum Development 2000), 19.

using stress-management strategies," "showing the courage to take initiative," "managing one's emotions," among many others. Where the former competence encourages learners to develop particular internal skills vis-a-vis their emotional reactions, *Self-Management* is more of an external competence, including particular skills like "demonstrating personal and collective agency," "showing the courage to take initiative," "exhibiting self-discipline and self-motivation," and "managing one's emotions." [166] Aguilar and Bridges add "impulse control" as another important aspect of this competence.[167] For some of the educators that I spoke to, this competence was seemingly one of the most important life skills to teach to young people today. At the heart of what drives many of the Israel Educators that I spoke to was supporting their learners in the development and strengthening of particular emotional regulation skills due to the fact that oftentimes, conversations about Israel can become emotional. In particular, Lekht, Linzer, Solomon, and Kornfeld spoke in detail about why instructing these skills are valuable in helping learners to talk about complex issues. It's worth noting that one application activity described by Solomon, Linzer, and some others that I interviewed that would facilitate these and other competences is group and individual reflection.

Gambill and Lineberger write that "thought influences emotion just as emotion influences thought," and I would add, both influence our behaviors. They continue, "the more we know about emotions, the less likely we are to be hijacked by them or to become

[166] "CASEL's SEL Framework: What Are the Core Competence Areas and Where are they Promoted?," *The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning,* Accessed January 2, 2021, www.casel.org/what-is-SEL

[167] Gap Aguilar and Clarissa Bridges, "A Guide to the Core SEL Competencies [Activities and Strategies Included]," *Panorama,* Accessed January 2, 2021, https://www.panoramaed.com/blog/guide-to-core-sel-competencies.

victims of our own emotional state.[168] Or in other words, when one practices the competence of *Self-Awareness,* it enhances our practice of and abilities within the competence of *Self-Management.* That said, in their book of educational activities designed to boost the Emotional Intelligence of adolescents, Elias and Tobias tied the two competences together within a series of short lessons, suggesting activities that support learners in practicing deep breathing exercises and in using positive self-talk, as well as activities designed to help learners practice naming their emotions.[169]

The founder and director of the *Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence* Marc Brackett writes on naming his own emotions during a particularly bad bout of acid reflux, that "naming my actual feeling was liberating. Why? Because it clarified the situation and gave me a path forward," noting that the acid reflux could be a symptom of feeling stressed, reflecting that in the moment he discovered that "the only way I'd feel less stress was to take things off my plate."[170] Thoughtful reflection with a chance to name one's emotions, offers learners a chance to better understand how their emotions may cause their bodies to physically feel and ultimately helps them to recognize how particular patterns of emotions might drive them to make certain decisions. In the case of having challenging discussions about the State of Israel, American Jewish teens can reflect on physical signs of emotions -- like a higher-than-average heart rate, unusual sweating, etc. -- as well as reflect on their particular emotional states while having challenging discussions, as a means to help them

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[168] Chris Gambill with Molly Lineberger, "Emotional Intelligence and Effective Conflict Management: This Pair Can Make our Break Your Leadership," *JohnMark,* March 16, 2014, Accessed July 19, 2019, http://johnmark.net.au/ps/?p=224.
[169] Maurice J. Elias and Steven E. Tobias, *Boost Emotional Intelligence in Students: 30 Flexible Research-Based Activities to Build EQ Skills (Grades 5-9)*, (Minneapolis, Free Spirit, 2018), 31-79.
[170] Marc Brackett, "Name That Feeling Reading your emotions takes practice," *Character Lab,* March 22, 2020, Accessed January 2, 2021, https://characterlab.org/tips-of-the-week/name-that-feeling.

regulate these feelings in the future. Beyond noticing one's emotional outputs, the realm of *Self-Management* also encourages learners to set realistic life goals with which their teacher and peers can help co-create plans to achieve said goals.

In regard to a particular goal-setting program, Aguilar and Bridges encourage educators to help their learners to create specific goals, encouraging the use of the educational activity "WOOP" from the *Character Lab*, designed to help their learners to realistically dream and plan for their personal goals.[171] The authors of the WOOP lesson plan write that,

> "WOOP is a practical, accessible, evidence-based activity that helps students find and fulfill their wishes. In character development terms, WOOP builds self-control. WOOP is named for each step in the process: identifying your Wish, imagining the Outcome, anticipating the Obstacle, and developing a specific Plan."[172]

Encouraging teenagers to be self-reflective about how they can achieve particular goals gives them more agency and autonomy. This is effective because in doing so in the classroom, this further reminds learners that their teacher, and by extension their peers, cares about them and their personal growth. Supporting learners in taking initiative in their own lives through goal setting can potentially help facilitate the growth of their leadership. Gambill and Lineberger argue that good leaders have high levels of Emotional Intelligence and "emotional intelligence can be improved with training."[173] Intentionally cultivating leadership based on facilitating social and emotional skills within the realm of the American Jewish relationship

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[171] Gap Aguilar and Clarissa Bridges, "A Guide to the Core SEL Competencies [Activities and Strategies Included]," *Panorama,* Accessed January 2, 2021, https://www.panoramaed.com/blog/guide-to-core-sel-competencies.

[172]Gabriele Oettingen, "WOOP for Classrooms," *Character Lab,* Accessed January 2, 2021, https://characterlab.org/activities/woop-for-classrooms/

[173] Chris Gambill with Molly Lineberger, "Emotional Intelligence and Effective Conflict Management: This Pair Can Make our Break Your Leadership," *JohnMark,* March 16, 2014, Accessed July 19, 2019, http://johnmark.net.au/ps/?p=224.

with Israel would be helpful moving forward. As our teenagers' transition to college and into the adult world in general, we hope they will develop into our leaders of tomorrow in many of the divisive conversations described throughout this thesis. And within this conversation of preparing young people to have these challenging conversations about Israel, the SEL educator might rely heavily on the importance of supporting learners in the competencies of *Social-Awareness* and *Relationship-Skills*.

Section D: Social-Awareness

The competence of *Social-Awareness,* according to CASEL includes "the abilities to understand the perspectives of and empathize with others, including those from diverse backgrounds, & contexts," adding that this competence "includes the capacities to feel compassion for others, understand broader historical and social norms for behavior in different settings, and recognize family, school, and community resources and supports." Additionally, *Social-Awareness* also includes the identification of various social norms, including norms that are unjust, better understanding how organizations and systems influence human behavior, and being able to understand the perspectives of others.[174] In other words, I would suggest that an ultimate goal regarding this topic should be encouraging your learners to be in a place where they can say something along the lines of, "although I disagree, I understand ***why*** you believe this way and ***why*** you feel so strongly about it."

[174] "CASEL's SEL Framework: What Are the Core Competence Areas and Where are they Promoted?," *The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning,* Accessed January 2, 2021, www.casel.org/what-is-SEL

Elias and Tobias argue that it is important that learners understand that as human beings, we are

> "by nature, social animals." They continue, "We react to others, and we need to be with others. And to interact with others well, we need to be able to manage our strong feelings, communicate effectively, read others' cues accurately, and empathize with others-- in good times and in not-so-good times."[175]

This competency helps learners think about the emotions that other people -- whether they are their peers, teacher, or otherwise -- are feeling.

Aguilar and Bridges reflect on the importance of framing this competency through "an equity lens," arguing that "social awareness can help adults and students navigate norms in diverse social settings," regarding that the equity lens can help learners "recognize issues of race and class in different settings, understand power dynamics, and come up with ways to create a positive school climate that honors diversity." I can imagine frames that many anti-bias and equity trainings provide students can be helpful when discussing the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict; issues of antisemitism, Islamophobia, and racism; as well as various social inequalities within the State of Israel.[176]

Facing History and Ourselves teaches learners Social-Awareness especially well, instructing them about how particular social structures affect human behavior negatively resulting atrocities such as the enslavement of Black Americans and the Holocaust. They help learners to unpack aggressions behavior systemically, aiding the study of history through nuance. Noddings discusses an example of nuance in conversation about the

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[175] Maurice J. Elias and Steven E. Tobias, *Boost Emotional Intelligence in Students: 30 Flexible Research-Based Activities to Build EQ Skills (Grades 5-9)*, (Minneapolis, Free Spirit, 2018), 81.
[176] Gap Aguilar and Clarissa Bridges, "A Guide to the Core SEL Competencies [Activities and Strategies Included]," *Panorama,* Accessed January 2, 2021, https://www.panoramaed.com/blog/guide-to-core-sel-competencies.

Holocaust that might help learners to contextualize human behavior beyond the juxtaposition she opposed above:

> "At one level it is true that we each bear some responsibility for the events of our time, but at another level it is totally ridiculous. A child-- even had there been a small son of Adolf Hitler -- could not be found guilty of Nazi crimes and therefore deserving of horrible retribution."[177]

A direct comparison to this could be, to have learners explore the question of: is an Israeli child living on a settlement in the West Bank complicit in the Occupation and partially responsible for Palestinian suffering? Similarly, would a Palestinian child who is grows more and more helpless as they grow up living under brutal Occupation who yearns to stab an Israeli soldier—the symbol of the Occupation—wrong for thinking so? Or one that might hit even closer to home, is an American white child raised in a racist home, taught from a young age to praise Nazis and antisemites, at fault for bullying children different from him on the playground? Ultimately, a learner objective within this competence of *Social-Awareness* can be working to have one's learners discover complexity in the human condition and becoming curious about the systems that created said perspectives.

In my interview with Kress, he mentioned that one activity to help learners better understand perspective is through text study because Jewish texts can help learners explore particular values the see held by the characters depicted in the texts. (November 2020, interview). In a journal entry, Kress and Elias cite Elias and Tobias who describe the "*Parshat HaShavuah Problem Solving Diary*," which they describe as a way to learn "problem solving skills" while studying different figures in each week's Torah Portion. They argue that this activity "provides the groundwork for the transfer and generalization of [SEL]

[177] Nel Noddings; *The Challenge to Care in Schools: An alternative Approach to Education,* 2nd Ed. (New York, Teachers College Press, 2005), 111-112.

skills into real life situations.[178] This comment reminded me of a class that I took with the *Pardes Institute of Jewish Studies* in May of 2020 with Daniel Roth entitled *"Mahloket Matters: How to Disagree Constructively - the Beit Midrash Way online series for rabbis and educators."* Roth's central thesis of the class was the notion that one can better understand the human condition and complex topics with many emotionally charged perspectives, like the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict, through studying ambiguous Jewish texts. In the class, we approached biblical verses that are often confusing, bewildering, and challenging by applying the wisdom of commentators to our study. Roth believes that understanding how each of the commentators read the ambiguous texts from varying perspectives, helps to strengthen the particular kind of critical thinking needed to parse through politicized articles in the United States, Israel, and around the world. Roth also suggested that similar to how one applies the wisdom of Jewish commentators to their study first by understanding their perspective and worldview, it is important to encourage others to read the news using websites such as AllSides.com which delineate news stories by their political leanings.

Similar to Roth, Kress argued that before having particularly challenging conversations, it is worthwhile practicing these skills in a controlled environment like the class that Roth developed. Unlike Kress and Roth's argument here, both Gringras and Lekht spoke of the value of intentionally putting their learners in emotionally taxing situations. Lekht went as far to mention that *Club Z* makes it a requirement for their learners to go to "Anti-Israel rallies and hearings," praising this as a helpful practice (October 2020, interview).

[178] Jeffrey S Kress and Maurice J Elias, "Social and Emotional Learning in the Jewish Classroom: Tools for a Strong Jewish Identity" *Journal of Jewish Communal Service* Spring/Summer 2001, Vol 77, 14.

Based on research from experts in the field of emotional intelligence development, this notion is not helpful and can be emotionally scarring for learners. In my interview with Kress, he argued that if a learner is "working from is a sense of anxiety and existential sort of questioning of one's own safety," reflecting on Gringras and Lekht's philosophy when I mentioned it to him, the learner is "not going to be able to process" much that is helpful to their social-emotional development (November 2020, interview). Elias and Tobias equate this to encouraging someone to play a competitive sport without first training, writing that "we would not expect to teach people how to play basketball by putting them into the midst of a high-stakes competitive game," because they would not yet be at the "point of readiness" to be able to play.[179] That said, Gambill and Lineberger argue that it is important to "start working on emotional intelligence and conflict management when times are good." And similarly, from the perspective of teaching complexity, it's important to see ourselves as "coaches" who nurture and train our learners in forming critical thinking and emotional regulation skills that are needed in having challenging conversations first by using less emotionally taxing topics. Gambill and Lineberger argue that once people have raised their "functioning emotional intelligence," that they "can [ultimately] monitor [the] handling of conflict" better.[180] I would add that this "training" in low-stakes conversations can and should continue alongside more difficult topics help learners continue to practice their skills.

At the heart of strengthening, one's Emotional Intelligence is often a practice of understanding the human story and working to better understand how one functions daily.

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[179] Jeffrey S Kress and Maurice J Elias, "Social and Emotional Learning in the Jewish Classroom: Tools for a Strong Jewish Identity" *Journal of Jewish Communal Service* Spring/Summer 2001, Vol 77, 8-9.
[180] Chris Gambill with Molly Lineberger, "Emotional Intelligence and Effective Conflict Management: This Pair Can Make our Break Your Leadership," *JohnMark,* March 16, 2014, Accessed July 19, 2019, http://johnmark.net.au/ps/?p=224.

While the competence of *Social-Awareness* supports learners in understanding systems and the human beings in those systems, the competence of ***Relationship-Skills*** directly aids learners in forming meaningful social relationships with their learning community and beyond.

Section E: Relational Skills

Clearly, this competence might just be the favorite collectively of the educators that I interviewed. CASEL defines "Relational Skills" as the "ability to establish and maintain healthy and supportive relationships and to effectively navigate settings with diverse individuals and groups." CASEL adds that "this includes the capacities to communicate clearly, listen actively, … work collaboratively to problem solve and negotiate conflict constructively,… seek or offer help when needed," [and to] show "leadership in groups," among others.[181] The adolescent brain is particularly good at forming "new social relationships," Yeager writes, which an "effective SEL program can" take advantage of in order to help young people facilitate deeper more meaningful relationships.[182] On the importance of relationships to adolescents, Steinberg mentions that "the adolescent brain undergoes particular "extensive maturation" in a part of the brain that he refers to as the "relationship system," which is incredibly "responsive to stimulation" and is also one of few

[181] "CASEL's SEL Framework: What Are the Core Competence Areas and Where are they Promoted?," *The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning,* Accessed January 2, 2021, www.casel.org/what-is-SEL

[182] David S. Yeager "Social and Emotional Learning Programs for Adolescents" *The Future of Children*, Volume 27, Number 1, Spring 2017, 81.

systems that can be "most easily harmed" at this stage of brain development.[183] This is why oftentimes adults view particular problems that teenagers may face, like a breakup after only a few months of dating, through a less emotionally intense lens than them.

That all said, it is no surprise that relationships sat at the heart of the philosophy of most of the Israel Educators I interviewed. Relationship development in Israel Education is clearly important to Chazan as a pedagogical philosophy, given his recent article "*A Philosophy of Israel Education: A Relational Approach*" (October 2019). Chazan also teaches this philosophy in his consulting work for the *iCenter for Israel Education*, whose Vision and Mission statement ends with their yearning for their "learners [to] develop meaningful relationships with Israel and understand Israel as core to their Jewish identities."[184] Beyond Israel Education, relationships often sit at the center of Jewish Education, to which Parkes and Kress argue that "there seems to be a consensus" among educators that they hope that their "students' learning leads to the living of a meaningful life with deep connections to others."[185]

The Jewish Education Project's 2016 Study *Generation Now* reports that the "2013 report *Effective Strategies for Educating and Engaging Jewish Teens* explained that 'relationships are central to participants positive educational experiences, be it with peers, alumni, staff members or volunteers.'" Adding that in their study, they found that "the role of the peer group is far more critical than any of the other relationships," reflecting that writ-large, "the peer group is one of the most influential factors in the lives of adolescents today --

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[183] Lawrence Steinberg, *Age of Opportunity: Lessons from the New Science of Adolescence* (New York, First Mariner Books, 2015), 37.
[184] "Vision and Mission," *The iCenter for Israel* Education, https://theicenter.org/about.
[185] Nancy Parkes and Jeffrey Kress, "Values + Social and Emotional Learning = Powerful Jewish Learning," *eJewishPhilanthropy*, November 20, 2018, Accessed December 21, 2020, https://ejewishphilanthropy.com/values-social-and-emotional-learning-powerful-jewish-learning.

and even more critical as teenagers reach their latter teen years."[186] The study also reflected that "the vast majority of teenagers in this study spoke about the positive influence of their families in enabling them to make life choices, including choices related to being Jewish."[187] The researchers suggested that when a teen program is successful, the child's families are often the "strongest allies, advocates, and supporters."[188]

Facilitating the growth of positive relationships amidst a learning community of teenagers can help to create a meaningful "safe space," or Solomon's "Lab Space," where they can have challenging conversations among peers. Flippo argues that "relationships are both developed and nurtured: learner to self, learner to others, and learner to the world at large."[189] And therefore, educators have the power to nurture them in the learning space. Kessler suggests beginning to facilitate these relationships early on with group bonding activities, writing that

> playful games in the early weeks foster affection, cooperation, and connection in the group. They help students learn as much as possible about others without feeling exposed or invaded. Carefully selected activities invite students slowly, cautiously, playfully to get to know each other.[190]

In my experiences as a learner, teacher, and Unit Head at camp, I found group bonding activities and games to be extremely helpful in developing environments where people can begin feeling vulnerable among their peers to have challenging conversations. Beyond group bonding activities and thoughtfully designed games in the early stages of a learning community, Elias and Tobias identify several activities in their book designed to support

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[186] "Generation Now: Understanding and Engaging Jewish Teens Today," *Jewish Education Project,"* April 2016, 12.
[187] Ibid.
[188] Ibid., 23.
[189] Tara Flippo, *Social and Emotional Learning in Action: Experiential Activities to Positively Impact School Climate* (London, Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, Inc., 2016), xx.
[190] Rachael Kessler, *The Soul of Education* (Alexandria, Association and Curriculum Development 2000), 8.

learners in developing relational skills including reading the social and emotional cues of others and developing empathy for others.[191] When facilitating the creation and deepening of relationships within a learning community, CEO and founder of *Character Lab* Angela Duckworth argues that there are three major ways to "forge true connections." She argues that

> "the first is ***understanding***—seeing the other person for who they are, including their desires, fears, strengths, and weaknesses. The second is ***validation***—valuing the other person's perspective, even if it differs from your own. And the third is ***caring***—expressing authentic affection, warmth, and concern."[192]

Beyond training learners in following steps as outlined by Duckworth here, in regard to training to have increasingly more emotionally taxing conversations, Elias and Tobias include activities in their book that are intentionally designed to help learners both anticipate and defuse situations that might be "triggering" to them, as well as activities one could use with teens designed to help them learn how to have more assertive communication skills.[193]

Kessler argues that the "learning process itself relies on the student's ability to make meaningful connections, to discover and create patterns of meaning."[194] When an educator creates spaces with which learners are encouraged to validate each other willingly and ones in which the learners are encouraged to think critically in order to understand each other's perspectives so that everyone feels heard, learners can really thrive. In my interviews, this is what I so clearly heard from Young and Solomon in describing their programs. As an

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[191] Maurice J. Elias and Steven E. Tobias, *Boost Emotional Intelligence in Students: 30 Flexible Research-Based Activities to Build EQ Skills (Grades 5-9)*, (Minneapolis, Free Spirit, 2018), 100-117.
[192] Angela Duckworth, "The Holy Trinity of Healthy Relationships How to forge true connections," *Character Lab,* October 11, 2020, Accessed January 2, 2021, https://characterlab.org/tips-of-the-week/trinity-of-healthy-relationships.
[193] Maurice J. Elias and Steven E. Tobias, *Boost Emotional Intelligence in Students: 30 Flexible Research-Based Activities to Build EQ Skills (Grades 5-9)*, (Minneapolis, Free Spirit, 2018), 82-98.
[194] Rachael Kessler, *The Soul of Education* (Alexandria, Association and Curriculum Development 2000), 60.

example, on understanding perspective Young modelled how she might discuss a perspective on challenging issues within Israeli society that she disagrees with, saying

> I'll say listen to the people making decisions right now in Israel, lived through the nineties and all of the bus bombings and the checkpoints got rid of the bus bombings. So, like, can you really blame people for being pro-checkpoint, even though I'm very anti-checkpoint, you have to be able to see the perspective of somebody who is okay with the institution of the checkpoints. (October 2020, interview).

It was clear in Young's tone that she deeply cared about this issue, but also deeply cared about understanding and expressing the opinion that others might have about what is an incredibly challenging issue within the context of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict. On the topic of understanding perspectives, in our interview Kress adds "I'm not saying that we should embrace offensive opinions, but I think that the question is how to not be completely thrown off your game by another opinion… if [differing opinions are out there], then it's good to read about them," noting that it can't be our goal to "keep our heads in the sand" ignoring different or outright offensive opinions that might cause us great pain (November 2020, interview).

Duckworth's assertion about care resonates powerfully with Noddings who writes, "caring is the very bedrock of all successful education."[195] Cultivating learning communities that deeply care for one another can help lead to a culture of validation and understanding. Noddings encourages caring educators to be models, showing learners "how to care in our own relation" to those who we care for.[196] I would argue that modeling validation and engaged listening during group reflection can be one of the most important ways that an

[195] Nel Noddings; *The Challenge to Care in Schools: An alternative Approach to Education,* 2nd Ed. (New York, Teachers College Press, 2005), 27.
[196] Ibid., 22.

educator can support their learners in developing and strengthening their relationships, especially when having challenging conversations. Noddings continues,

> so, we do not tell our students to care; we show them how to care by creating caring relations with them... [Another] reason why modeling is so vital [is that] the capacity to care may be depending on adequate experience in being cared for.[197]

CASEL too argues that the most effective SEL instruction is that which is happening in "nurturing, safe environments characterized by positive, caring relationships among students and teachers."[198] And it is within those relationships that learners can be taught strategies on how to make thoughtful decisions.

Section F: Responsible Decision-Making

CASEL defines *Responsible Decision-Making* as "the abilities to make caring and constructive choices about personal behavior and social interactions across diverse situations," including "the capacities to consider ethical standards and safety concerns, and to evaluate the benefits and consequences of various actions for personal, social, and collective well-being."[199] Elias and Tobias argue that there is no more important competence "than being able to cope effectively with both the positive and negative aspects of life and consistently [making] good decisions about how to respond to challenges." They add that "doing so brings together a wide range of [emotional intelligence] skills," many of which discussed above, including

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[197] Ibid., 22.
[198] "CASEL's SEL Framework: What Are the Core Competence Areas and Where are they Promoted?," *The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning,* Accessed January 2, 2021, www.casel.org/what-is-SEL.
[199] Ibid.

> identifying and handling difficult feelings, interacting appropriately with others, feeling and expressing empathy, understanding and analyzing situations, and taking thoughtful, rational action in keeping with individual values.[200]

Within this competence, CASEL emphasizes skills of both "demonstrating curiosity and open-mindedness" as well as "recognizing how critical thinking skills are useful both inside & outside of school."[201] Recognizing one's feelings and using critical thinking skills are incredibly helpful skills when engaging with complex topics.

Elias and Tobias structure the learning of this competence around an acronym ESP, which stands for "Evaluate, Select, Proceed," a goal setting system designed to help learners "better understand their own thoughts and feelings as well as those of others, and respond accordingly."[202] This is one example of how SEL educators can train their learners in making healthy decisions. Although the ESP system can and should certainly be used as a goal setting system within the context of teaching teenagers, I think that it can be especially valuable in teaching challenging topics within the story of the State of Israel. Using the system, SEL educators can support their learners "with [finding] deeper understandings of problem situations so they can make good decisions and deal with these challenges deliberately and positively."[203] As an example, I'm imagining a scenario where a student who identifies as a Zionist gets into a massive argument with their friend who identifies as an Anti-Zionist over a particular Israeli policy. The ESP system may be able to support the student in being able to have a healing and thoughtful conversation with their friend after

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[200] Maurice J. Elias and Steven E. Tobias, *Boost Emotional Intelligence in Students: 30 Flexible Research-Based Activities to Build EQ Skills (Grades 5-9)*, (Minneapolis, Free Spirit, 2018), 121.
[201] "CASEL's SEL Framework: What Are the Core Competence Areas and Where are they Promoted?," *The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning,* Accessed January 2, 2021, www.casel.org/what-is-SEL.

[203] Ibid., 121-122.

getting hot headed over the particular disagreement in Israeli policy. The ESP system trains a student to first *evaluate* (E) "a problem or challenge and what feelings and thoughts are associated with it."[204] Next, they encourage learners to *select* (S) their "goal and how to achieve it" in the moment, describing this mid-step as the "bridge between problem and action," urging the learner to "reflect specifically on what [they] want to happen and what [they] can do to achieve that outcome."[205] In the case of this argument between a student and their Anti-Zionist friend, some achievable goals in this realm may be offering to take their friend out to Starbucks for coffee to improve their relationship beyond this conversation, another might be offering to have a facilitated mediation with a teacher regarding their argument, or a helpful goal might be as simple as pulling their peer aside and informing them why they care about them. After deciding on possible helpful and achievable goals, Elias and Tobias instruct learners to shift to the final step: *proceeding* (P) "with a plan" that is "deliberate" and thoughtful, adding that "careful planning is what turns good ideas into successful ways to reach [one's] goals."[206]

Reflecting on the notion of emotional regulation and its intersection with making thoughtful decisions, Kress mentioned that reflection time can "help us understand our own stance. Using our emotions [can act] as a guide to help us clarify what [might be] bugging us" (November 2020, interview). Elias and Tobias use the ESP system to outline particular skills to help facilitate an adolescents growth within the realm of *Responsible Decision-Making,* including supporting learners in developing realistic goals, brainstorming among peers, anticipating particular outcomes of how they and others might react in certain

[204] Ibid., 121-122.
[205] Ibid., 121-122.
[206] Ibid., 121-122.

situations, as well as planning ahead and overcoming obstacles that might stand between them and success.[207] Although this system is only one instance of a framework that supports learners in developing this competence, it is a helpful example of how an educator might support their learners in having complex, emotionally taxing conversations.

When it comes to Israel, Pitkowsky cited the *Jewish Education Project's* 2016 study mentioning that,

> what came to the top is that teens said [that they] want to be able to ask questions. [That they] don't want to be fed a script. [We know that] their "radar" goes up when they feel like they're just like being given something scripted. They want their questions answered. They wanted trusted adults to be able to ask these questions. (September 2020, interview).

Similarly on the value of questioning, Loewen writes that to succeed, "schools must help us learn how to ask questions about our society and its history and how to figure out answers for ourselves."[208] Kress and Elias reflect on the power of "facilitative questioning," defined as the process of "using questions to guide students" in critical thinking skills, arguing that it is "a first step toward building decision making skills."[209] According to Pitkowsky, Schwartz, Kornfeld and other educators of teenagers, they want forums to be able to ask thoughtful questions about Israel, but sometimes struggle with not knowing how to ask their questions. With that, Kessler warns that "many students [writ-large] have lost even the capacity to ask" questions.[210] This is problematic because, as Hayim Halevy Donin argues that "Jewish Education at its best teaches the child to think, to question, to inquire, and to analyze."[211] To

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[207] Ibid., 123-166.

[208] James W. Loewen, *Lies my Teacher Told Me: Everything Your American History Textbook Got Wrong*. (New York, The New Press, 1995), 313.

[209] Jeffrey S Kress and Maurice J Elias, "Social and Emotional Learning in the Jewish Classroom: Tools for a Strong Jewish Identity" *Journal of Jewish Communal Service* Spring/Summer 2001, Vol 77, 12.

[210] Rachael Kessler, *The Soul of Education* (Alexandria, Association and Curriculum Development 2000), 61.

[211] Hayim Halevy Donin, *To Raise a Jewish Child: A Guide for Parents* (New York, Basic Books Inc., 1977), 41.

add to Kessler's concern and Donin's argument, I believe that questioning is the very bedrock of education.

Loewen's useful resource "Lies My Teacher Told Me" series is designed to help facilitate critical thinking skills about historical narratives in the United States that are often mythologized and falsified to fit particular political narratives. Loewen suggested that when looking at primary and secondary sources that students ask

> 1) why was it created? "Locate the audience in social structure" and consider what the [author or speaker] was trying to accomplish." 2) Ask, "whose viewpoint is presented?" As well as ask, where, when, and within what social structure did the person live when they created the source? 3) Ask yourself, is this "account believable? Does each acting group behave reasonably -- as we might, given the same situation and socialization?" Loewen warns that this step also requires examining oneself for internal biases and contradictions. 4) Ask, "is this the account backed up by other sources?" By chance, do other authors [or speakers] contradict it?" 5) How do you think this source makes the reader feel about the country or system that the author or speaker is presenting?"[212]

In a world where our teens in their secular schools are not often provided with the greatest opportunities for learning history through a critical lens,[213] asking the sorts of questions exemplified by Loewen is critical to truly understanding the history of the State of Israel. Especially after most of the educators I interviewed claim that their learners are often both passionate and ignorant about many issues associated with Israel, providing frameworks of questioning to encourage the development of critical thinking skills is one of the most important aspects of teaching SEL to teens. In other words, I believe that teaching teenagers how to use frameworks such as Loewen's five questions is more important than striving to teach a wide breadth of the history itself.

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[212] James W. Loewen, *Lies my Teacher Told Me: Everything Your American History Textbook Got Wrong*. (New York, The New Press, 1995), 316-317.
[213] Ibid., 14.

On the emotional toll of questioning familiar nationalistic narratives and mythologies that many find comforting, Abadian and Miller argue that this is "risky because it evokes all sorts of feelings, principally feelings of deep disloyalty."[214] Arguably, that is why it is so critical to have these conversations in the safety of a learning community fueled on trust, and built with systems like Duckworth's *care*, *validation*, and *understanding* model. Having challenging conversations with such support can help coach learners in order to, in the words of Kress and Elias, "ask questions which provide not the solution to the problem, but the framework for making the decision."[215] Coaching one's students to ask the right questions in a safe environment facilitates the growth of their decision making skills, aiding them in strengthening the skill of regulating impulsiveness in their relationships, life decisions, and when talking about challenging topics.

Beyond using questioning as the mode described above, it's important to note that in general, adolescence is typically a time when kids contemplate big existential life. Supporting teenagers through dialoging to help them voice and begin to explore many of them is a helpful approach that clergy and educators can take to promote their social and emotional health. Noddings argues that one issue with schools is that they spend more time "on the quadratic formula than on any of these existential questions," citing questions such as "Who am I? What kind of person will I be? Who will love me? How do others see me?"[216] Giving learners the chance to ask these questions helps them feel seen**,** further develops their

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[214] Sousan Abadian and Tamar Miller, "Taming the Beast: Trauma in Jewish Religious and Political Life" *Journal of Jewish Communal Service*, Vol 83. No 2/3, Winter/Spring 2008, 237.
[215] Jeffrey S Kress and Maurice J Elias, "Social and Emotional Learning in the Jewish Classroom: Tools for a Strong Jewish Identity" *Journal of Jewish Communal Service* Spring/Summer 2001, Vol 77, 12.
[216] Nel Noddings; ***The Challenge to Care in Schools: An alternative Approach to Education,*** 2nd Ed. (New York, Teachers College Press, 2005), 20.

relationships with peers and the adults in their lives, and ultimately encourages better *Responsible Decision-Making.*

An example of applying Nodding's wisdom to a Jewish Education can be seen with the questions posed @RogueShul on Twitter at the start of the Covid-19 Pandemic: "The question isn't "How can they learn the *V'ahavta* virtually in third grade?" It's "How can religious school be a source of constant love for third graders when the world is upside down?'"[217] Adding to this, we should ask how can teaching the *V'ahavta* encourage learners find love in their lives and promote a sense of radical love. Since several of the educators I interviewed argued that teaching Israel is akin to teaching life, there is much value to exploring these extensional questions that teenagers ask while exploring the complex story of the State of Israel. Many of these were identified by the educators in describing their ideal *Essential Questions* and *Enduring Understandings*, relating them to concepts of home, connection, and life. Kessler identifies some examples of existential questions that I think can apply directly to a teenager's relationship with the complexity of the State of Israel:

> How do people who love you hurt you? I sometimes go against one or two of my values just to be accepted, and I don't know why I do that. [218] Why do I feel like the burden of the world is on my shoulders? What is the thread of humanity that connects all of us? Why are there so many cruel people? How can I let people know what I feel, when I don't trust hardly anyone? Why is it that people rarely look past the outer shell (mental and physical) of a person? [219] Why am I so alone? Does my heritage anything in who I am? [220]

Kress and Elias encourage facilitated questioning and dialoguing as a practice because over time it "becomes internalized and expressed through students' ability to walk themselves

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[217] Twitter @RogueShul Aug 2, 2020 https://twitter.com/rogueshul/status/1290036711058051072?lang=en.
[218] Rachael Kessler, *The Soul of Education* (Alexandria, Association and Curriculum Development 2000), 20.
[219] Ibid., 22.
[220] Ibid., 25

through decisions."[221] Turning back to the target activity of using Jewish texts to help learners understand how different characters and figures feel and why they might have made decisions, Kress and Elias encourage questions such as: "How did they feel? What was the problem? What else could they have done in the situation?"[222] These questions can be helpful jumping off points to the questions described by Kessler and Noddings above that are often extensional in an adolescent's mind. "Questions create the context for students to move through the problem-solving process," according to Kress and Elias,[223] and ultimately, according to Noddings, providing ample opportunity for learners to ask "why."[224]

As Jews, questioning is the central tenet of *maklochet* and Talmudic discourse in that there is a special emphasis placed on understanding even the minority opinion through deep questioning. Getting curious and asking questions about topics in educational settings helps learners in general to make better decisions outside of the learning environment. Flippo encourages her learners to not only "be actively engaged in posing questions," but also to experiment in creatively solving problems, practicing assuming responsibility for ideas, and constructing meaning through the relational process.[225] To do all of that, and create a culture where no question is wrong or "too silly," where learners are encouraged to actively listen and reflect on their own spiritual and emotional growth while having difficult conversations

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[221] Jeffrey S Kress and Maurice J Elias, "Social and Emotional Learning in the Jewish Classroom: Tools for a Strong Jewish Identity," *Journal of Jewish Communal Service,* Spring/Summer 2001, Vol 77, 12.
[222] Ibid., 14.
[223] Jeffrey S Kress and Maurice J Elias, "Social and Emotional Learning in the Jewish Classroom: Tools for a Strong Jewish Identity" *Journal of Jewish Communal Service* Spring/Summer 2001, Vol 77, 12.
[224] Nel Noddings, *The Challenge to Care in Schools: An alternative Approach to Education,* 2nd Ed. (New York, Teachers College Press, 2005), 23.
[225] Tara Flippo, *Social and Emotional Learning in Action: Experiential Activities to Positively Impact School Climate* (London, Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, Inc., 2016), xx.

all while working with adults who actively model particularly helpful social-emotional behaviors would greatly benefit teenagers today.

Section G: Motivating Teenagers to Learn

"Perhaps the most challenging finding from our research," writes the researchers from the 2016 study from the Jewish Education Project, "was the frequency at which teenagers referred to the complete irrelevance of much of their Jewish learning. When probed further," the researchers write, "teens explained what they learned in Jewish frameworks often had no connection to their current stage of life." The teens who were surveyed said that they preferred educational programs that provide them with material that "can be used in the present" or "envision using it in the future," writes the researchers, most likely finding "Jewish knowledge meaningful when they could see connections and relevance to the rest of their lives."[226] In other words, they do not find value in *Torah Lishmah,* learning for the sake of learning.

American Jewish teens today both "relate to Israel," in the language of the 2016 study, and for some more "highly-connected" teens, they "displayed moral ambivalence and uncertainty about many actions taken by Israel."[227] I believe that we must lean into this dissonance when educating teenagers today. As Grant argues "we [should] accept the fact that being ambivalent about Israel is a productive educational goal" because dissonance is "a rather formative tension" between what many might understand as "black-and-white

[226] "Generation Now: Understanding and Engaging Jewish Teens Today," *Jewish Education Project,"* April 2016, 14.
[227] Ibid., 16.

[choices]," but what ultimately "allows for productive negotiation and growth.[228] "Lower-connected" American Jewish teenagers surveyed in the 2016 study too feel a connection to Israel as well as ambivalence, but many in this group also feel ambivalence towards

> Jewish organizations that in their eyes, only portray a singular, pro-Israel viewpoint. For them, any organization that failed to give a comprehensive, multi-narrative portal of Israel (in-line with their universal view of the world) was perceived as being dogmatic and inauthentic. [229]

In my experience, several Jewish young people I know who one might consider to be in the "higher-connected" group; including many of my peers studying in Jewish Studies program and some training to be cantors, Jewish Educators, and rabbis; feel similarly to the teens surveyed in this above quotation. In short: we could do better.

Our teenagers want us to teach complexity. They want us to teach more of the story of the State of Israel. In general, they are asking big questions about life. This future leadership of the American Jewish Community deserves to have a space where they can discuss this ambivalence using Jewish language and wisdom. Learning about the complicated story of the State of Israel in many ways is a social-emotional task, so using the framework created by CASEL to aid in the teaching of challenging topics is certainly valuable. And ultimately, I believe that we need to be strategic in regard to how we use and frame the competences.

When thinking about how to best use SEL with teenagers, it's important to specify how educators can best reach their learners in a way that avoids infantilizing and truly motivates them. Yeager suggests that programs should "respect the kind of person an

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[228] Lisa D. Grant, "Educating for Ambiguity," in *The Fragile Dialogue: New Voices of Libral Zionism*, Stanley M. Davids and Lawrence A. Englander (eds.) (New York, CCAR Press, 2018), 81.
[229] "Generation Now: Understanding and Engaging Jewish Teens Today," *Jewish Education Project,"* April 2016, 17.

adolescent needs and wants to be," and help them to become the best version of themselves. Ultimately, he calls for SEL educators to create programs that meet the four psychosocial tasks that developmental psychologist Bradford Brown discusses:

1. To stand out: to develop an identity and pursue autonomy;
2. To fit in: to find comfortable affiliations and gain acceptance from peers;
3. To measure up: the develop competence and find ways to achieve, and
4. To take hold: to make commitments to particular goals, activities and beliefs.

Yeager argues that when a program meets Brown's four psychosocial tasks, "they can capture adolescents' motivation to change."[230] Ultimately, he suggests motivating young people through "[harnessing] their developmental motivations," while not "[suppressing] their desire to feel autonomous or to garner the respect of their peers," through the "values that matter most to them. Yeager argues against "explaining to adolescents the... consequences of their choices,"[231] such that an emotional outburst against their grandfather about Israel may not be the best idea. They know that emotional regulation and other SEL skills are helpful. Yeager encourages SEL educators to teach what he refers to as a "mindset model" to teenagers, which he describes as the co-creation of a particular "emotional climate that also teaches young people mindsets they can apply when they eventually leave that climate." He says that this produces the most powerful "internalized, lasting change" in the mind of young people.[232] Using more Jewish language, Yeager is talking about ***Cheshbon HaNefesh***, which as previously mentioned, sat at the center of Salanter's ***Mussar*** curriculum.

I would like to propose that educators and clergy teach complicated aspects of the story of the State of Israel through the creation of a "***Mussar*** Mindset" designed around

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[230] David S. Yeager "Social and Emotional Learning Programs for Adolescents" *The Future of Children*, Volume 27, Number 1, Spring 2017, 76.
[231] Ibid., 79.
[232] Ibid., 76-77.

CASEL's five competences. Many American Jewish teenagers today would welcome a program that taught a "*Mussar* Mindset" built on learning SEL skills, crafted to teach them complexity about Israel designed with self-betterment in mind. The 2016 Jewish Education Project Study reports that many Jewish teenagers today feel like they "need certain 'tools' to express their Jewishness," and to better understand their world. The *Middot*, or inner traits, of *Mussar* may just be that tool. According to Alan Morinis, "it is a *Mussar* axiom to say that every human being is endowed with every single one of the traits – there is no one who is entirely without anger, or generosity, or kindness, or worry, or any other inner attribute," arguing what makes human beings unique, "is the fact that those traits reside within each of us in different measures" that we can choose to harness them in order to enhance our lives. [233]

Many congregational schools and Jewish camps already employ some *Mussar* language and SEL development, which would be helpful in introducing the type of program that I am describing. For example, Linzer reflected on how each month her religious school is themed to a different *Middah* (October 2020, interview). Similarly, *Union Temple of Brooklyn* where I currently serve as student rabbi-educator, has a school-wide *Middot* that we use holistically in our teaching, all learning similar skills as a collective school. Rotstein reflects on how some supplementary Jewish Educational programs "are experimenting with… the infusion of *Mussar*-based activities into the curriculum," many going as far as "providing *Mussar*-based professional development for their faculty."[234] Kress and Elias argue that "comprehensive programming involves infusion of SEL skills into all aspects of

[233] Alan Morinis, "Forward," in *The Mussar Torah Commentary: A Spiritual Path to Living a Meaningful Life* ed. Barry H. Block (New York, CCAR Press, 2020), xv.
[234] Evie Rotstein, "Part-Time Jewish Education Harnessing the Power of Social-Emotional Spiritual Learning," *eJewishPhilanthropy*, May 30, 2017, Accessed November 1, 2020, https://ejewishphilanthropy.com/part-time-jewish-education-harnessing-the-power-of-social-emotional-spiritual-learning/.

the educational experience,"[235] and therefore, I would suggest that this sort of program would best take place within an educational system already working on particular SEL skills and *Middot*.

Our teens yearn for educational programs that they can apply to their lives, according to the 2016 Jewish Education Project study, which argued that this is a part of a larger "paradigm shift in Jewish learning… a movement away from Jewish activities designed to make participants 'more Jewish' and instead focus on how Judaism can be utilized as a resource to help develop stronger and healthier human beings."[236] Many of them feel connected to Israel, but yet feel ambivalent about it and don't necessarily have the language or knowledge to begin to deal with many of those feelings. As the future leaders of the American Jewish Community, we as clergy and educators can use the wisdom of SEL practitioners and Mussar masters to shape curricula that give our teens a chance to begin to think about and prepare them for many challenging conversations that they might have as they lead on issues related to the State of Israel.

Section H: How to use *Mussar* to Enhance this work

Ben David argues that "soulful educators," his language to describe educators who care about bringing SEL into their learning spaces, model honesty, openness, sincerity, and vulnerability to their students. I believe that this is all the truer in regard to complex, emotionally divisive topics. Continuing, he argues that soulful educators "exude personal

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[235] Jeffrey S Kress and Maurice J Elias, "Social and Emotional Learning in the Jewish Classroom: Tools for a Strong Jewish Identity" *Journal of Jewish Communal Service* Spring/Summer 2001, Vol 77, 13.
[236] "Generation Now: Understanding and Engaging Jewish Teens Today," *Jewish Education Project,"* April 2016, 23.

openness and a desire to grow personally."[237] This comment reminds me of those expressed by my *Mussar* professor Jan Katzew, reminded us nearly every class that like us, he too is a "rabbi in-formation," bettering himself each and every day to become the best version of himself. Katzew models for his students how to live the value of *Cheshbon HaNefesh,* throughout the course. Arielle Levites and Ira F Stone argue that *Cheshbon HaNefesh* "has been understood as the key ingredient of Salanter's *Mussar* program."[238] Although many might assume that the practice is only important during the High Holiday season, Maimonides, as an example of one scholar, fiercely disagreed, arguing "that a person needs to reflect upon themself all year long…" working to internalize one's own faults and strengths.[239]

Rotstein reflects that the "blueprints for moral and ethical behavior are embedded within Jewish values and *mitzvot*, particular … interpersonal *mitzvot*." [240] Barry H. Block describes the process that a "faithful practitioner" of *Mussar* might choose to focus on one *Middah* for a week or two at a time in order to, in the words of Eliyahu Lopian, make "the heart feel what the mind [already] knows." [241] For instance, one week I can imagine a learning community studying about Israel to practice the *Middah* of *Emet,* truth, to which Lisa Goldstein offers that "it is not our fault that we cannot recognize the whole truth.

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[237] Aryeh Ben David, *Becoming a Soulful Educator: How to Bring Jewish Learning from Our Minds, to Our Hearts, to Our Souls – and into Our Lives* (Woodstock, Jewish Lights Publishing, 2016), 16.
[238] Arielle Levites and Ira F Stone, "Carrying the Burden of the Other: Musar and Adult Development," *Growing Jewish Minds, Growing Jewish Souls: Promoting Spiritual, Social, and Emotional Growth in Jewish Education*, ed. Jeffrey S. Kress (New York, URJ Press, 2013), 230.
[239] Moses Ben Maimon, Mishneh Torah, Repentance 3:4
[240] Evie Rotstein, "Part-Time Jewish Education Harnessing the Power of Social-Emotional Spiritual Learning," *eJewishPhilanthropy*, May 30, 2017, Accessed November 1, 2020, https://ejewishphilanthropy.com/part-time-jewish-education-harnessing-the-power-of-social-emotional-spiritual-learning/.
[241] Alan Morinis, "Forward," in *The Mussar Torah Commentary: A Spiritual Path to Living a Meaningful Life* ed. Barry H. Block (New York, CCAR Press, 2020), xxi.

According to the midrash, our inability to recognize the full truth is essential to the way we were created."[242] Another week, I can envision working on the *Middah* of *Ometz Lev,* courage; or another week on *Kavod*, respect. I also can envision learners identifying which *Middot* they would like to work on each week. Ultimately, the process of creating a "*Mussar* Mindset" is how we can bring Yeager's suggestion of teaching SEL to teens within the realm of his "mindset model,"[243] through what may already be the useful and for many, familiar frames of *Middot* and *Chesbon HaNefesh.*

"Nechama [Leibowitz] liked to say that our students will forget everything we teach them but will remember our stories," writes Ben David. He continued, saying, "sharing my personal story-- the fact that I want to continue growing, to become a more beneficial force in this world, and to use Jewish wisdom as the vehicle for healing this world -- may be the most significant lesson I can offer my students."[244] I imagine a successful SEL program designed to teach learners about the complexities of Israel begins with hiring a reflective teacher who actively models a growth mindset. In the ideal program, I imagine learners co-creating particular classroom norms in a "*Brit Kehilla"* that is truly a living document, revisited often throughout the life of a program. I envision a program that is transparent with both learners and their parents about how SEL and this particular "*Mussar* Mindset" can and will transform their lives, and transparent about the importance of learning about the complexities of Israel. I also imagine a program built on the notion that facilitating relationships, not only between the learner and their learning community, but also with the

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[242] Lisa Goldstein, "Tol'dot: Emet," in *The Mussar Torah Commentary: A Spiritual Path to Living a Meaningful Life* ed. Barry H. Block (New York, CCAR Press, 2020), 38-39.
[243] David S. Yeager "Social and Emotional Learning Programs for Adolescents" *The Future of Children*, Volume 27, Number 1, Spring 2017, 76-77.
[244] Aryeh Ben David, *Becoming a Soulful Educator: How to Bring Jewish Learning from Our Minds, to Our Hearts, to Our Souls – and into Our Lives* (Woodstock, Jewish Lights Publishing, 2016), 16.

stories of individuals living halfway around the world in Israel and the West Bank through artistic expression, interviews, panels, and other means of deep emotional connection.

CHAPTER 7: A Curricular Application

"This demands the creation of a safe space for open, honest conversations
that expose our vulnerabilities.
It means sharing fears, anger, and pain with others
who may have totally different perspectives
or no perspective at all.
It requires strong and active facilitators
who can create and preserve this safe space,
to ask each other questions that are grounded in genuine curiosity
rather than a desire to prove the other wrong."

-- Rabbi Dr. Lisa Grant[245]

Section A: Capstone Introduction

Currently, we are living during one of the most divisive moments in American history. In addition to the fraught political reality that we face, fueled by an historic distrust in our governmental systems, each other, and the perpetuation of "fake news;" we are in the midst of a Global Pandemic which has accelerated much of this division. At this moment in history, false information isn't just being propagandized by news outlets and politicians in xenophobic forms-- like "birther arguments" aimed at the former President and incoming

[245] Lisa D. Grant, "Educating for Ambiguity," in *The Fragile Dialogue: New Voices of Liberal Zionism*, Stanley M. Davids and Lawrence A. Englander (eds.) (New York, CCAR Press, 2018), 83.

Vice President -- but now this propaganda has extended to false arguments downplaying or outright demonizing or infantilizing the importance of mask wearing, social distancing, and other reasonable actions to lessen the death toll from the Pandemic.

What's more, there is a growing divine within the American Jewish Community over our opinions about the State of Israel. For many educators and clergy, Israel is the "third rail" often left out of sermons and educational programming out of fear that particular individuals might create a disturbance. Oftentimes, opposing arguments that lack nuance compete in a chaotic cacophony of emotionally charged arguments. Especially with how the Pandemic has been fueling great emotional distress across the United States, I can imagine why Jewish Professionals might choose to not prioritize Israel education in their communities. Frankly, many Americans are simply emotionally exhausted.

Within this divisive milieu, it is no surprise that when institutions shifted online in March 2020 due to the dangers of the Pandemic, that Jewish Educators and clergy chose to transition their curricula to fit the moment. For most educators, that meant adapting a Social-Emotional Learning-based educational model to best support their learners and teachers. When interviewing veteran educator Lori Sagarin, the Director of Congregational Learning at Temple Beth Israel in Skokie, IL, she referred to Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) as the "buzzword of the day… and all the more so in the midst of a pandemic" (October 2020, interview). I agree that there is something particular about this moment in history where more and more people need permission to "feel their feelings" as well as practice and support in emotional regulation. It's worth noting that historically, according to Rotstein, that phrases such as "character education," "spiritual education," "whole person learning," and even "*Mussar*" are interchangeable with Social-Emotional Learning.

Teenagers who are involved in synagogues, camps, and other Jewish institutions are growing up within this divisive milieu. This capstone seeks to support them both in our contemporary moment and in the future as one could imagine that this divisiveness will not disappear overnight. It is framed around teaching complex narratives about the State of Israel. Increasingly current teenagers as well as the alumni of Jewish camps and religious schools sharply criticize how educators and clergy have historically taught about Israel. Many claim they have only been taught a single narrative depicting a "Disneyland" version of Israel doing no wrong. Many educators refer to this as teaching "Israel Education as camels and falafel." Many of these alumni speak angrily about not learning the "full story" about the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict, with no opportunity to explore different perspectives.

This capstone seeks to go beyond this notion and teach complex narratives on Israel in ways that support learners emotionally and spiritually as they process what can be enormously challenging information. Especially as potential future leaders of the American Jewish Community, this capstone will act as a prerequisite for their life, helping them to practice particular skills when speaking about often divisive topics about Israel. Unlike programs designed to teach a particular narrative, this capstone is designed to help learners in processing many challenging issues and provide them some tools to begin making decisions about how they understand them and tools to help them discover what they believe.

This curriculum relies heavily on using artistic expression -- such as poetry, music, theatre, and visual arts -- as well as video interviews to help facilitate emotional connections between learners and Israelis and Palestinians. It calls for an educator who is skilled in pastoral care, willing to be vulnerable with their students, modelling *Chesbon HaNefesh* and

thus their relationship with each of the competences, the *Middot*, as well as their "hugging and wrestling," or relationship and struggle with the State of Israel.

Section B: Intended Audience and Setting

The intended audience for this curriculum is a *Hebrew High* or *Confirmation Class* for teenagers generally between the ages of 15-18 [grades 8-12]. The ideal setting is in the synagogue youth lounge or in someone's home over dinner and/or with snacks. An ethic of care will be used to plan for weekly meetings with learners to make them as comfortable as possible when discussing these potentially uncomfortable conversations. That said, for many communities this program would work best online, so I will provide ample suggestions on how to transition the activities and discussions to an online format.

Section C: Curricular Rational

Living with the threat of gun violence in their schools, the onslaught of "fake news," the contemporary rise of white nationalism and bigotry, and the digital catalysts for these and other issues, the next generation of young Americans is maturing into an adult world distraught by immense conflict, violence, and distrust of others. And adding to that, they are currently maturing during the Covid-19 Pandemic which intensifies all of our emotions and makes all of these issues even more challenging. Beyond the Pandemic, this sea of young people includes the future of the American Jewish community who are living during what is arguably one of the most challenging times in recent history to be a Jew in the United

States. Between the rise in deadly antisemitic violence and rhetoric from across the political spectrum in conjunction with a State of Israel that is increasingly counter to the Jewish values and sensibilities often taught in mainstream Progressive Jewish communities, it is hard to be an American Jew today. The information overload of the internet and the multitude of news media, opinion websites, and social media outlets that span opinion and discussion can make learning all the more challenging, especially regarding issues that are emotionally charged and fueled by spiritual distress.

This capstone will address this need for young American Jews living in this era of conflict and distrust. Specifically, Jewish teenagers today would benefit in training in CASEL's five competences. According to Steinberg, "self-regulation" is "the central task of adolescence, and the goal that we should be pursuing as parents, educators, and health care professionals."[246] He argues that the brain of the adolescent is at the final period of an "especially heightened malleability," and thus an integral moment to introduce an educational experience grounded in the support of their emotional growth.[247] Teens would benefit from spaces thoughtfully designed to support them in processing their emotions and developing their critical thinking skills by learning about multiple perspectives on issues in spaces that they consider safe, to train them to have more thoughtful, and challenging conversations in the future.[248]

Knowing that our teens are our future leaders, providing them tools and practice to have challenging conversations around Israel will benefit them in the here and now, and also

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246 Lawrence Steinberg, *Age of Opportunity: Lessons from the New Science of Adolescence* (New York, First Mariner Books, 2015), 16.
247 Ibid., 10.
248 Jeffrey S Kress and Maurice J Elias, "Social and Emotional Learning in the Jewish Classroom: Tools for a Strong Jewish Identity" *Journal of Jewish Communal Service* Spring/Summer 2001, Vol 77, 8.

enhance the potential for a better future for the American Jewish Community. This experiential model is provides ample support for learners to process what they learned academically, emotionally, and spiritually and apply what they have learned to their lives.

Section D: Desired Results

Priority Goals for Learners

- Learners and their teacher will cultivate a community around their shared *Middot*, continuously using their *Brit Kehilla* as a true "living document" to help guide their conversations.
- Learners will practice SEL competencies, such as emotional regulation, listening skills, being able to name their emotions, etc.
- Learners will practice and become increasingly more comfortable with understanding complex narratives about State of Israel-- including narratives from Palestinians living under Occupation, Israeli Settlers who live in the West Bank, Palestinian Christians, LGBTQ+ Israelis, etc.

Enduring Understandings

- There is value to creating community around shared values and shared identity.
- Having a growth mindset model (*Chesbon HaNefesh*) through *Mussar* and SEL can be beneficial to me and my peers.
- Deeply listening for the humanity in others –in my learning community, in my life, and those with different worldviews than me— is an important value.

Essential Questions

- Why is listening to the stories of Israelis and Palestinians important for me as an American Jew?
- What is my role in the conversation in engaging in complex stories about Israel?
- How do my emotions influence how I react to other people and topics in my life?
- How do I understand these narratives for myself?

Learner Outcomes

- Knowing Outcomes
  - Learners will be able to discuss which shared *Middot* are meaningful to them and how particular can *Middot* help them when having challenging conversations.
  - Learners will learn the value of using SEL competencies to have serious and difficult conversations.
  - Learners will explore different narratives within the story of the State of Israel and develop critical thinking skills and will be work towards understanding why others might believe the way that they do.
- Doing Outcomes
  - Learners and their teacher will cultivate a community around their shared *Middot*, continuously using their *Brit Kehilla* as a true "living document" to help guide their conversations
  - Learners will practice CASEL's five competencies using *Mussar* language in order to explore Jewish Tradition and some of the narratives about Israel.
  - Learners will thoughtfully engage with various perspectives about Israelis and Palestinians through narrative, texts, and artistic expression.
  - Learners will increasingly begin naming their emotions.
  - Learners will process their thoughts and feelings in small-group meetings, in *chevruta*, and with artistic means.
- Believing/Valuing Outcomes
  - Learners will find *Middot* that are personally meaningful and helpful to them.
  - Learners will care about and feel a responsibility to the State of Israel.
  - Learners will also believe that they have a responsibility to listen for the humanity in the narratives of those who live in the Land of Israel.
  - Learners will respect and value human dignity-- of everyone in their learning community, and of every human story that they listen to.
  - Learners will seriously consider how antisemitism, racism, Islamophobia, and the intersectional evils are a threat to human dignity and human safety.
  - Learners will find their place-- or begin to find their place -- within this complicated story.
- Belonging Outcomes
  - The *Middot* that the learning community creates together will create a special bond among the learners and their teacher.
  - Learners will feel like they are a part of a safe, learning community.
  - Learners will identify themselves and their peers as a part of a supportive and inclusive learning community and as valued members of the Jewish People.

Section E: Evidence for Learning

Evidence for learning will be primary found in observation of learner behavior in completing tasks throughout various learning experience. Although there are several SEL evaluations that CASEL and other organizations encourage educators to adapt for their purposes, I have found that the concept of evaluating learners based on one single set of ideal SEL skills to be problematic. Beyond the fact that every learner learns differently, they all exist differently in the social and emotional realm. While one might express concern that certain individuals who have neurotypical differences and/or who have particular disabilities cannot be evaluated fairly with particular markers addressed in a "one size fits all" evaluation, I believe that the best way to evaluate learners is through thoughtful reflection. I suggest that the educator uses their own journal to reflect on the progress that they observe in their learners. In addition to all of the above, this curriculum is self-reflective in nature and will encourage learners to develop self-evaluation skills.

Section F: A Letter to the Educator

To my dear colleagues facilitating this journey,

I am so excited for you and your teens. Being a teenager is so difficult, especially as we traverse these unprecedented times. As our young people prepare themselves to go out in the "real world," they will face often uncomfortable situations that many are ill prepared for- especially regarding Israel. Unfortunately, our schools do not teach social and emotional skills needed to traverse adulthood, and you my dear colleague hold the keys to the Jewish People's most intentional social and emotional program: *Mussar*.

As a model for expressing your own emotions, as a model in appropriately discussing your own journey with particularly challenging and rewarding *Middot*, I implore you to support your learning community as a full member, a model, and a "coach" rather than teacher, coaching your learners throughout this process. By modeling compassion for others – even for those who we might sharply disagree – you can nurture courage and integrity in your learners. In a world where the complications surrounding Israel often act as a wedge between American Jews, you can act as the glue facilitating growth in active listening skills, managing difficult emotions, and in giving learners the space and skills to begin to emotionally and intellectually process challenging narratives within the story of our beloved State of Israel.

In preparation for teaching, please do some of the reflective activities on your own. Create your own *Mussar* practice and keep up to date on Israeli news if you don't do so already. Find thought partners and mentors who can support you in your efforts in teaching this content. Please plan on using this experience as an opportunity for your own spiritual and emotional growth, as well as a growth in your being able to educate on challenging issues. Ideally, you will grow and change alongside them.

This will not be easy. But it will surely be rewarding. Helping the future leaders of *B'nai Yisrael* to understand challenging issues that deeply affect the land, state, and people of Israel is incredibly holy work.

b'yirat kavod, with enduring awe and respect,

Josh Gischner

Section G: Learning Activities

This curriculum includes two units, the first titled "Cultivating a '*Mussar*' SEL Climate" and the second titled "Using our '*Mussar* Mindset to Learn Diverse Narratives of the State of Israel." Unit 1 effectively is designed to nurture a "*Mussar* Mindset," which is my own Jewish-adaptation of what Yeager refers to as a "mindset model," which he identifies as a co-created "emotional climate" that helps learners to experience the mindset of *Mussar* both in the learning community and later as a lifelong learner.[249] I have opted to begin Unit 1 with having the learners explore their deeply held values, in the language of the *Middot* because, as Yeager argued, an educator can nurture an SEL climate among teenagers through the values that matter most to them.[250] In my interview with Kress, he identified that SEL practitioners, himself included, would hold that creating climates around shared values is a mandatory task in order to have complex conversations (November 2020, interview). Generally speaking, most SEL educators would argue that it is irresponsible to place learners in emotionally taxing situations without best preparing them and their communities to manage such emotions. While Solomon might refer to the creation of the climate used in *Encounter* as "Lab Space," or Sagarin the environment used at Temple Beth Israel of Skokie as a "safe space," I intentionally chose to frame it as a "*Mussar* Mindset" due to my research from two particular studies.

In CASEL's 2018 study, "*Respected: Perspectives of Youth on High School & Social and Emotional Learning,*" researchers identified that American teenagers are generally hoping to develop and sharpen their SEL skillsets, and are often disappointed that their High

[249] David S. Yeager "Social and Emotional Learning Programs for Adolescents" *The Future of Children*, Volume 27, Number 1, Spring 2017, 76-77.
[250] Ibid., 79.

Schools did not prepare them with the social and emotional skills often needed to succeed.[251] Secondly, the framing also was inspired by the 2016 Jewish Education Project study, *Generation Now,* which argued that many American Jewish teenagers are excited to learn Jewish content if it were applicable in their daily lives.[252] Therefore, in this capstone I propose a marriage between the wisdom of *Mussar* that American Jewish teenagers can use to enhance their lives with the secular wisdom that SEL can bring to enhance their learning. It's also worth noting that the *Middot* of *Mussar* are a helpful frame for creating this climate because many learners are already familiar with them from religious school and camp, as discussed by Sagarin, Linzer, Young, and from my own experience as a religious school teacher and camp professional. Being that developing a "mindset model," according to Yeager, can develop "lasting change" in the lives of a learner,[253] similar to the experience of studying *Mussar,* Unit 1 will intentionally develop what I hope will be a life-transforming, group bonding experience that will create the kind of "*Mussar* Mindset" that will help teenagers have emotionally taxing conversations about complexity within the story of the State of Israel later in Unit 2.

Although Unit 1 can be presented over the course of several weeks as a fall semester class for teenagers, I suggest that educators should use the programming within a retreat setting at a URJ camp or as a part of a "shul in" experience in synagogue in order to create the strongest community. Rachel B. Cowan argues that intentionally designed retreats have

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[251] Jennifer L DePaoli, Matthew N, Atwell, John M. Bridgeland, and Timothy P. Shriver, "Respected: Perspectives of Youth on High School & Social and Emotional Learning," *The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL),* November 2018, 27-30.
[252] "Generation Now: Understanding and Engaging Jewish Teens Today: Understanding and Engaging Jewish Teens Today," *Jewish Education Project,"* April 2016, 14.
[253] David S. Yeager, "Social and Emotional Learning Programs for Adolescents" *The Future of Children*, Volume 27, Number 1, Spring 2017, 76-77.

the power to nurture Jewish community in providing individuals with "new ideas and practices with a more open mind and heart."[254] Additionally, a weekend retreat setting will allow for fewer absences as the learning community co-creates it's "*Mussar* Mindset."

In this ideal situation where unit 1 is taught as a part of an annual retreat, I suggest that group bonding exercises and mixers are intentionally framed and designed with the overall curricular goals and CASEL's five competencies in mind. As an example, designing a ropes course activity to practice different communication skills, and crafting Shabbat services and text studies around themes of *Cheshbon HaNefesh*. Regardless of where Unit 1 is taught to the learners, I suggest that the educator relies on several mixers and group bonding exercises, designed to create and strengthen community throughout the experience. One might frame mixers as a tool to facilitate and nurture sacred community. Additionally, mixers and group bonding activities can be used to help learners practice the five competencies and their *Middot* as well as in using emotional language.

An important feature of Unit 1 is the creation of a "*Brit HaNefesh*," a Covenant of the Self, as well as a ***"Brit Kehilla,"*** a Communal Covenant. Both intentionally designed by the learner and the learning community, they will be encouraged to use pencils and to update each throughout this course. As Kress identified about communal learning contracts in his interview, it is critical that both documents are framed as "living documents" that they can go back to as often as needed (November 2020, interview). While the "*Brit Kehilla*" might be familiar to most readers, the "*Brit HaNefesh*" will be a special journal given to learners where they will have the opportunity to reflect on their universal values, the particular

[254] Rachel B Cowan, "Retreats & Jewish Spiritual Growth," *The Journal of Jewish Life Networks / Steinhardt Foundation,* Autumn 2006/Kislev 5767, Volume 9, Number 1, 9.

Middot which they wish to continue mastering, and to reflect on the development of their social and emotional skills. Although no writing structure will be mandatory, learners will have the option to be guided by their teachers in creating the journal. Learners will be encouraged to be creative and to be thoughtful. Although learners can choose to share parts from their "*Brit HaNefesh*" with their learning community, they do not need to share- even with their teacher. Although Unit 1 will help learners to develop both documents, they will be expected to continue using each of these "living documents" throughout Unit 2. If Unit 1 is taught over a weekend retreat, the 10 lessons in Unit 2 could easily be taught over the course of weekly evening meetings during the semester. Alternatively, both units can be taught over the course of an entire year.

Unit 1: Cultivating a *Mussar* SEL Mindset

	Lesson Theme	Core Concept	Suggested Activities	CASEL Competence(s)
1	Introduction: Your Values	Being mindful of our personal values can help us in exploring challenging topics.	"*Middot* Shopping" - Learners will have structured time to "shop" for *Middot* at the "*Middot* Store." Each *Middah* will be written in Hebrew and English on a small card. They will be instructed to thoughtfully take any *Middot* that resonates with them and place them into their own personal envelopes. Although learners will have structured time for this activity now, the "store" will be open throughout the weekend for them to collect and dispose of *Middot*.	Self-Awareness, Responsible Decision-Making
3	Introduction: Our Community's Values	Being mindful of our communal values can help us in exploring challenging topics and in also in supporting one another.	Learners and their teachers will create a *Brit Kehilla*. Learners will be encouraged to use the language of the *Middot* on this document.	Social Awareness, Relationship Skills
4	Introduction to *Mussar* ** If retreat, Shabbat Torah Study	You can access *Mussar* and it can help you become more grounded, emotionally aware, and connected to one another.	Learners will be introduced to *Mussar* through the *Mussar Torah Commentary* (2020) through this week's Torah portion.	Self-Awareness, Relationship Skills
5	*Mussar* Application: Developing a Growth Mindset through *Cheshbon HaNefesh*	Exploring a growth mindset through understanding the science of adolescent brain development and	"Crumpled Reminder," reflective Text Study on *Cheshbon HaNefesh*	Self-Awareness, Self-Management

		the wisdom of *Mussar* can help us in exploring challenging topics.		
6	Talking about & Recognizing our Feelings	It is helpful to explore a growth mindset through emotional language.	Learners will define and begin to discuss how different emotions are interconnected, how some are challenging, and how they feel inside their bodies. Learners will be encouraged to write the emotions or their thoughts about the emotions on the backs of their middot cards. Learners will also be encouraged to update their Brit *Kehilla* using emotional language.	Relational Skills, Self-Awareness, Social Awareness, Self-Management, Responsible Decision-Making
7	Beginning my *Brit HaNefesh* Journal ** If retreat, Havdalah Program	Self-Reflection about which Middot we want to work on and about our emotional health can help us	Learner's *Brit HaNefesh* journal's will be presented to them in a special ceremony. Each learner will have thoughtful time to begin planning their *Brit HaNefesh* journal, encouraged to use the Middot cards and emotional language they've collected throughout the retreat to reflect on their journeys.	
8	Nurturing our Community as we transition to Unit 2.	Being mindful of our communal needs and values can help us in exploring challenging topics.	Learners will have a chance to reflect on what they individually and communally need as they transition back home.	Self-Awareness, Social Awareness, Relational Skills

Where Unit 1 is designed to create the "*Mussar* Mindset," Unit 2 nurtures said climate through an exploration of various complex issues within the story of the State of Israel. Based on the wisdom of Linzer and her leadership at Temple Beth El of Northern Westchester, Unit 2 is structured so that learners can miss lessons if they need. In conversation, Linzer mentioned that although absences are not necessarily encouraged, that it can be helpful that the topics do not necessarily build on one another because our students, especially teenagers today, often live complicated lives. Being that they need some "buy in" and motivation to attend lessons, presenting the material as a series that is non-consecutive gives them the power to make that decision to come to class (October 2020, interview). Similarly, I hope to create a similar environment for the students. Assuming the educator chooses to use the material from Unit 1 as a retreat, their teenage learners will also most likely be motivated to attend class due to the strengthening of their relationships. Another piece to motivate learners to attend this class is the communal structure, pizza dinner, and framing of having "adult" conversations as a learning community. Similar to Unit 1, I suggest including various mixers throughout Unit 2.

Below in the Unit 2 guide, you will find two suggested activities each week, each taking approximately thirty minutes each to complete. The first activity will be designed to help facilitate the development of an SEL skill. The second activity will similarly apply the skill to a complex topic within the story of the State of Israel. Both of these skill-based activities will occur within a larger structured set of activities designed to nurture community and reflection using both the "*Brit Kehilla*" and the "*Brit HaNefesh.*" I suggest beginning each evening with an emotional check in, such as asking learners for their "*tov*" or "*lo tov*," "good thing" or "not so good thing," from the past week. This can help both teachers and the

entire learning community determine how everyone is feeling before discussing challenging topics. I suggest that teachers also share their own emotional check in with the community. See below for a sample evening schedule as a part of a 2-hour confirmation or Hebrew High program:

6:00-6:20 Pizza Dinner + Emotional Check-in
6:20-6:50 Activity 1
6:50-6:55 Break
6:55-7:25 Activity 2
7:25-7:30 Break
7:30-7:45 Self Reflection Time using "*Brit HaNefesh"*
7:45-8:00 Group Reflection Time

Unit 2: Using a *Mussar* Mindset to Learn Diverse Narratives of the State of Israel.

	Lesson Theme	**Core Concept**	**Suggested Activities**	**CASEL Competence(s); *Middot***
1	Hearing a Multiplicity of Voices, I	Hearing multiple voices helps to understand the full picture.	A1 Text Study: what did the Biblical Author mean when they wrote "מצחק" in Genesis 21:9b? Looking at this ambiguous word through the lens of the medieval rabbis. A2: Modern-Day Text Study: Using recent news about Israel from AllSides.com, have learners unpack a current event from the perspective of the "left," the "middle," and the "right" to learn more about the topic.	Social-Awareness, Relationship-Skills, *Shelmut* (Wholeness), *Bina* (Understanding), *Sakraut* (Curiosity)
2	Hearing a Multiplicity of Voices II	Valuing multiple perspectives allows us to get a better understanding of particular issues.	A1: Communal creation of a page of Talmud, discussion on Jewish argument. A2: Gallery activity: learners will reflect in pairs and all together on the value of hearing several different Israeli, Arab, Palestinian, and differing Jewish voices.	Self-Awareness, Social-Awareness, Kavod (Respect), *Shelmut* (Wholeness), *Bina* (Understanding)
3	How are *they* feeling?	Reading secondary sources while imagining how people feel is important to understanding complexity.	A1: Text Study: how do characters feel in ambiguous texts from the Tanakh? Examples can include: the fall of Adam and Eve (Genesis 3), the Akedah (Genesis 22), Joseph's dealings with his brothers (Genesis 42-43), etc. A2: Learners will be instructed to each take one of two voices (from previous weeks) and instructed to similarly identify how they might have felt when voicing their concerns.	Self-Awareness, Social-Awareness, Kavod (Respect), *Shelmut* (Wholeness), *Bina* (Understanding), *Anava* (humility)

4	Checking our Biases	Checking our biases is important when learning about other cultures.	A1: Learners will reflect on a short movie clip on interpersonal bias from Disney's Zootopia, to reflect on their biases as American Jews. A2: Gallery activity with new voices: learners will reflect on how their biases might affect how they view several different Israeli, Arab, Palestinian, and differing Jewish voices. Learners will also begin to uncover how holding these biases make them feel in small groups.	Self-Awareness, Social-Awareness, Relationship-Skills, *Kavod* (Respect), *Shelmut* (Wholeness), *Bina* (Understanding), *Anava* (humility)
5	There is a Value to Practicing Active Listening I	Bettering our listening skills helps us to better understand the people.	A1: Active Listening Skills Workshop I A2: Practicing Active Listening Skills using video interviews from different Israeli voices.	Self-Awareness, Social Awareness, Relationship-Skills, *Kavod* (Respect), *Shelmut* (Wholeness), *Bina* (Understanding), *Achariut* (Social Responsibility)
6	There is a Value to Practicing Active Listening II	Bettering our listening skills helps us to better understand the people.	A1: Active Listening Skills Workshop II A2: Practicing Active Listening Skills using video interviews from different Palestinian voices.	Self-Awareness, Social Awareness, Relationship-Skills, *Kavod* (Respect), *Shelmut* (Wholeness), *Bina* (Understanding), *Achariut* (Social Responsibility)
7	Managing our Emotions	There is a value to managing our negative emotional reactions when encountering challenging information.	A1: Learners will be asked to reflect on how some of the voices that they have heard throughout the class have made them feel emotionally and physically, for instance: sweat on their brow, heartbeat quickening, feeling small, feeling disgusted, hot-headed, etc. A2: Learners will write a poem, draw a picture, write a song, or create another artistic expression to further unpack their feelings from the previous activity. Learners should be encouraged to create multiple art pieces.	Self-Awareness, Self-Management, Responsible-Decision Making, *Bina* (Understanding), *Anava* (humility), *Sakraut* (Curiosity)

8	Understanding Others and Ourselves in the Process	There is value to practicing learning how to say, *"I think I understand your perspective and how you feel about it, even though I may not agree myself."*	A1: Learners will reflect on how the myriad of voices that they've heard have made them feel. Learners will brainstorm strategies on how they can better manage their emotions in these situations in conversation facilitated by educators. A2: Learners will be introduced to "In Jerusalem" by Mahmoud Darwish and "Jerusalem" by Yehuda Amichai without the poet's names or nationalities listed. Learners will study the two poems, determine how they think the authors might be feeling and why, and only at the end will their names and nationalities be determined. [This is to eliminate bias and introduce the two national poets thoughtfully] Learners will pay extra special attention to their emotional reactions to the texts.	Self-Awareness, Self-Management, Social-Awareness, Responsible Decision-Making, *Sakranut* (Curiosity), *Malchut* (Wonder), Bina (Understanding), *Anava* (Humility)
9	Where is home?	Home is super emotional. Many of the challenges within the story of the State of Israel revolve around home.	A1: Learners will discuss home and the ambiguity around where home might be for them and their peers. (Thinking ahead to college, parent separation, etc.) A2: Learners will compare Israeli Uzi Hitman's song "Here" with Palestinian hip hop group DAM's adaptation of the song through the lens of the history of Lod/Lydda using Loewen's Five Questions to use when studying historical documents. [Located on page 122.][255] Learners should be encouraged to reflect on how they feel throughout the experience and how they are managing those feelings.	Self-Awareness, Self-Management, Social Awareness, Responsible Decision-Making, *Kavod* (Respect), *Shlemut* (Wholeness), *Bina* (Understanding)

[255] James W. Loewen, *Lies my Teacher Told Me: Everything Your American History Textbook Got Wrong*. (New York, The New Press, 1995), 316-317.

10	*Siyyum*: Where do we go from here?	How has this process been meaningful and helpful for you?	A1: Learners will brainstorm how using the *Middot*, their *Brit HaNefesh*, and *Brit Kehilla* supported their learning and building of community. Learners should reflect on how this process aided or neglected to aid in their making of responsible decisions about how they react. A2: Learners will thoughtfully reflect on what topics that they might like to learn next.	Self-Awareness, Social Awareness, Self-Management, Social Awareness, Relationship Skills, Responsible Decision-Making, *Kavod* (Respect), *Bina* (Understanding), *Sakraut* (Curiosity)

Unit 1, Lesson 1: "Introduction: Your Values"

Core Concept:
Being mindful of our personal values can help us in exploring challenging topics.

CASEL Competencies:
Self-Awareness, Responsible Decision-Making

Essential Questions:
- What *Middot* and values guide my life?
- How can I better myself?

Enduring Understandings
- The *Middot* guide us in, what *Mussar* Master Rabbi Elya Lopian (1876-1970) says "teaching the heart what the mind already understands."
- The *Middot* live inside of us.

Materials
- "*Middot* Cards" -- individual cards that display each *Middah* in Hebrew, English transliteration, and that include the English translation(s). (See Appendix B for sample) Plan on printing at least one per learner and teacher.
    - Note: it is important that the *Middot* each have space on the back for learners to write on the back.
- Pencils
- Envelopes
- Markers, crayons, etc.
- A table(s)
- "*Brit Kehilla*" - should be posted in the learning space, allowing learners to both see it and give them the opportunity to amend it if necessary.

Set Up
- Place piles of individual "*Middot* Cards" on the table so that learners can all "shop" for the *Middot* that they'd like to add to their envelopes.

Learning Activity: (60 minutes)

00:00-00:10: Set Induction
- The learning community should stand in a circle in the room-- including the teachers who will be full participants in this activity. The facilitator will ask a series of questions designed to help the learning community begin to think about their universal values. The questions are also designed to help them think about how their values might not totally meet their actions.

- Instructions:
    - If a learner or teacher agrees with the statement, they are asked to step into the circle. If they really agree, they should take two steps in. If they disagree, they should take one step out. If they feel ambivalent, they should stay in their place.
    - Facilitator and other teachers should stop activity throughout and encourage learners to speak about their choices. Similarly, they should model their own choices.
- Examples of Questions:
    - I care about how we treat the environment.
    - When I think about the future, I think about how my future job will align with my personal values.
    - Volunteering my time is important to me.
    - I care about people who are different from me and my family.
    - It is important for me to associate with friends who care about the same social issues that I care about.
    - Although the world looks dark, I believe in hope.
    - Although the world looks dark, I have trouble holding onto hope.
    - I think that justice and accountability are two of the most important values.
    - Sometimes when I want to help people, but I don't have the ability to do so in the ways that I might want.
    - Respecting the opinions and thoughts of my friends and family is important to me.

00:10-00:40: "*Middot* Shopping"

- Each member of the learning community will each be given an envelope and instructed to write their name on the envelope and decorate it with symbols and words that represent them and their lives. Examples include their favorite sports teams, pets, favorite foods, their families, etc.
- Learners will be briefly introduced (or reintroduced) to the concept of *Middot* and how they can act as reminders to help us make our lives more whole. The teacher who discusses the *Middot* should bring a meaningful, personal example from their life to describe how using the *Middot* has made them more whole themselves.
- Everyone will be encouraged to "shop" for *Middot* that:
    - That already drive their lives.
    - That they appreciate, but need to work on.
    - That they'd like to add to their lives.

- Please note, learners and teachers should be encouraged to take as many *Middot* that they think that they can work on over the next few months, noting that this table will be here throughout the weekend in case they need to return a *Middah*, exchange a *Middah*, or take on another *Middah*.

00:40-01:00: Debrief

- In small groups, pairs will discuss why they chose to decorate their envelopes in the ways that they did (10 minutes) and later discuss why they chose two of the *Middot* that they chose to put in their envelope. (10 minutes)

Digital Adaptations (for Zoom)

- For the Set Induction, the facilitator should encourage learners to use emojis, hand gestures, or words in the chat to express themselves.
- For the "*Middot* Shopping" activity, the activity should only last between ten and fifteen minutes and should not include creating an envelope. The facilitator should email all students a word document that includes all of the *Middot*. Rather than physically taking *Middot* from a table, learners will be instructed to copy and paste *Middot* into a box in their word document.
- The "Debrief" activity should only last between ten and fifteen minutes. The facilitator should put learners into breakout rooms to discuss their two *Middot*.

Unit 2, Lesson 8: "Understanding Others & Ourselves in the Process"

Core Concept:
There is value to practicing learning how to say, *"I think I understand your perspective and how you feel about it, even though I may not agree myself."*

CASEL Competencies:
Self-Awareness, Self-Management, Social-Awareness, Responsible Decision-Making.

Sample *Middot*:
Sakranut (Curiosity), *Malchut* (Wonder), *Bina* (Understanding), *Anava* (Humility)

Essential Questions:
- Why would one listen to opinions that they don't agree with?
- What do I feel when I hear someone say something that I find abhorrent or sad or difficult?
- How can I (better) manage my emotions when I hear something that I find abhorrent or sad or difficult?

Enduring Understandings
- Actively listening to others helps us to better understand a full picture of a situation.
- Listening to our body's cues can help us to determine our emotions.
- Human beings are a lot more similar than they are different.

Materials
- Large post-it notes that have the following phrases written on the top:
  - "When studying hard topics, I feel…"
  - "When studying hard topics, I need..."
  - "When studying hard topics, I yearn for..."
  - "When studying hard topics, I want…"
  - "When studying hard topics, I usually…"
  - "When studying hard topics, I hate how I…"
  - "When studying hard topics, I struggle with how…"
  - "When studying hard topics, I get confused with..."
- Markers
- Several copies of two poems printed on either side of a piece of paper with included questions to debrief. The two poems include: (Appendix C)
  - Poem A: Mahmoud Darwish's poem "In Jerusalem" without attribution.
  - Poem B: Yehuda Amichai's "Jerusalem" without attribution.
- Small green and red stickers.

Set Up

- Post the large post-it notes around the room.

Learning Activity 1: (30 minutes)

00:00-00:15: "Getting Out" our Feelings

- The learning community is encouraged to walk around the room and comment on the post-it notes.
- Teacher(s) should circulate around the room, participate, and actively engage with learners as they add their comments.
- When learners seem to be finished, they should be encouraged to add red stickers to the comments that they disagree with and green stickers to the comments that they agree with. Learners should be encouraged to add additional kind thoughts to comments made by their peers.

00:15-00:30: Unpacking Our Feelings and the Feelings of Others

- Learners and their teachers should all stand next to a prompt that resonated with them. In the small group now formed, the participants should discuss why this prompt resonated with them and what comments written by their peers might have influenced them.
- If time permits, learners should share how comments from their peers might match their own experiences in learning about challenging topics.

Learning Activity 2: (30 minutes)

00:30-00:40: Reading Your Poem

- Split learners into small groups, and assign groups to read either poem A or poem B. Make sure that an even number of small groups are made because eventually each group who has read poem A will have to join with a group who has read poem B.
- In pairs, learners will each be assigned one of the anonymous poems. After reading their assigned poem, they should discuss the accompanying questions.
    - Accompanying Questions Include:
        - *Do you think that the author would call Jerusalem, home? Why would they or why wouldn't they?*
        - *What emotional language is the author using throughout the poem? What Middot?*
        - *If you turned this poem into a short film, what kinds of imagery would you use and why? (Examples include documentary, drama, comedy, animation, claymation, etc.).*
        - *Why do you think that the author wrote this poem?*

        - *Do you think that the author is an Israeli or a Palestinian? What about their writing style or imagery might identify their nationality as such?*

00:40-00:55: Discussing the Poems in Tandem

- Learners reading poem A should join with learners reading poem B. Learners should be instructed to read the opposite poem that they did not read.
- Small groups should begin discussing their poems–and their discussion about said poem – with their new larger groups.
- Teacher(s) should rotate between groups to observe conversations.

00:55-01:00: Wrap Up

- Gathering back together as a full group, each learner is encouraged to quickly share one emotion that they felt while reading the poems and doing this activity.
- The teacher should reveal Mahmoud Darwish, Palestinian poet, as the author of poem A; and Yehuda Amichai, Israeli poet, as the author of poem B.
- If time permits, learners should share one thing that they are taking away from this experience. If there is no time for this activity, it should be addressed in group discussion later of in the future.

Digital Adaptations (for Zoom)

- Learning Activity 1:
    - For "Getting Out" our Feelings, rather than using post-it notes, the teacher should use a Google Document or another digital resource. Learners should be encouraged to comment on the writings of their peers using different colors and emojis.
    - For Unpacking Our Feelings and the Feelings of Others, learners will be temporarily sent to breakout rooms to discuss how certain prompts resonated with them for discussion with peers.
- Learning Activity 2:
    - This activity can happen using the breakout room feature as well, albeit the teacher will need to move their learners between breakout rooms and keep track of which groups have read poem A and which poem B.

Suggested Reading List

Adolescent Development

Steinberg, Lawrence. *Age of Opportunity: Lessons from the New Science of Adolescence* (New York: First Mariner Books, 2015.)

Wood, Chop. *Yardsticks: Children in the Classroom Ages 4-14.* 3rd Edition. Pages ix-xvi; 167-180. (Turner Falls, Center for Responsive Schools, Inc., 2015.)

Israel Education & Liberal-Minded Education

Aleph Bet of Israel Education, 2nd Edition. (Chicago: The *iCenter for Israel Education,* 2015.)

Grant, Lisa D., Kopelowitz, Ezra M. *Israel Education Matters: A 21st Century Paradigm for Jewish Education.* (Jerusalem: Center for Jewish Peoplehood Education, 2012.)

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Sinclair, Alex. *Loving the Real Israel: An Educational agenda for liberal Zionism* (Teaneck: Ben Yehuda Press, 2013.)

Mussar

Jaffe, David. *Changing the World From the Inside Out: A Jewish Approach to Personal and Social Change* (Boulder: Trumpeter Books, 2016).

Morinis, Alan. *Every Day, Holy Day: 365 Days of Teaching and Practices form the Jewish Tradition of Mussar* (Boulder: Trumpeter Books, 2010),

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Social Context

"Generation Now." *Jewish Education Project."* April 2016.

Davids, Stanley M., and Englander, Lawrence A. (eds). *The Fragile Dialogue: New Voices of Liberal Zionism*, (New York: CCAR Press, 2018),

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"Respected: Perspectives of Youth on High School & Social and Emotional Learning." Jennifer L DePaoli, Matthew N, Atwell, John M. Bridgeland, and Timothy P. Shriver. *The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL.,* November 2018.

Waxman, Dov. *Trouble in the Tribe: The American Jewish Conflict Over Israel.* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2016.)

Social, Emotional, Spiritual & Caring Education

Ben David, Aryeh. *Becoming A Soulful Educator: How to Bring Jewish Learning from Our Minds, to Our Hearts, to Our Souls—and into Our Lives.* (Woodstock: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2016.)

The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning: CASEL.org/

The Character Lab : CharacterLab.org/

Elias, Maurice J., and Tobias, Steven E. *Boost Emotional Intelligence in Students: 30 Flexible Research-Based Activities to Build EQ Skills (Grades 5-9)*. (Minneapolis: Free Spirit, 2018.)

Kessler, Rachael. *The Soul of Education* (Alexandria: Association and Curriculum Development 2000.)

Kress, Jeffrey S., and Elias, Maurice J. "Social and Emotional Learning in the Jewish Classroom: Tools for a Strong Jewish Identity." *Journal of Jewish Communal Service.* Spring/Summer 2001. Vol 77.

Kress, Jeffrey S. (ed.). Growing Jewish Minds, Growing Jewish Souls: Promoting Spiritual, Social, and Emotional Growth in Jewish Education. (New York, URJ Press, 2013.)

Noddings*, Nel. The Challenge to Care in Schools: An alternative Approach to Education,* 2nd Ed. (New York: Teachers College Press, 2005).

Panorama Education: PanoramaEd.com/

Wiggins, Grant and McTighe, Jay. *Understanding by Design, 2nd Edition.* (Alexandria: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2005.)

Yeager, David S. "Social and Emotional Learning Programs for Adolescents." *The Future of Children*, Volume 27, Number 1, Spring 2017.

Suggestions for SEL Activities

Elias, Maurice J., and Tobias, Steven E. *Boost Emotional Intelligence in Students: 30 Flexible Research-Based Activities to Build EQ Skills (Grades 5-9)*. (Minneapolis: Free Spirit, 2018.)

Flippo, Tara. *Social and Emotional Learning in Action: Experiential Activities to Positively Impact School Climate* (London: Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, Inc., 2016.)

The *iCenter for Israel Education*'s "Eich Atem Margishim Hayom" [How Are You feeling?] Mood Posters: TheiCenter.org/Resource/eich-atem-margishim-hayom-mood-posters

The Character Lab : CharacterLab.org/

Character Strong: CharacterStrong.com

Suggestions for Additional Content and Context to teach complex narratives on Israel

Adwan, Sami, Bar-On, Dan, and Naveh, Eyal. *Side by Side: Parallel Histories of Israel-Palestine*. (New York: The New Press, 2012).

Chazan, Barry. *Israel: Voices from Within*. (Northbrook: Third Place Publishing, 2020.)

Halevi, Yossi Klein. *Letters to My Palestinian Neighbor: With an Extensive Epilogue of Palestinian Responses*. (New York: Harper Perennial, 2018.)

Foyle, Naomi (ed.). *A Blade of Grass: New Palestinian Poetry.* (North Yorkshire: Smokestack Books, 2018.)

Rabinovich, Itamar and Jehuda Reinharz. *Israel in the Middle East: Documents and Readings on Society, Politics, and Foreign Relations, Pre-1948 to the Present, 2nd Edition* (Lebanon: Brandeis University Press, 2008.

Shavit, Ari. *My Promised Land: The Triumph and Tragedy of Israel*. (New York: Spiegel & Grau, 2013.)

Shehadeh, Raja. "A Palestinian Responds to His Israeli Neighbor." *The New York Times*. August 24, 2018. Accessed January 19, 2021. https://www.nytimes.com/2018/08/24/books/review/letters-to-my-palestinian-neighbor-yossi-klein-halevi.html.

Waxman, Dov. *The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict: What Everyone Needs to Know.* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019.)

Appendix A: Educators Interviewed

Name	Interview Date	Organization	Demographic	Location	Advocacy based?
Dr. Barry Chazan	9.17.2020	Spertus, iCenter for Israel Education	Scholar, Teaches Israel/Jewish Educators	Chicago, IL	No
Helene Drobenare	10.14.2020	Camp Young Judaea Sprout Lake	Jewish children and teens, grades 2-11	New York, NY	No
Robbie Gringras	10.13.2020	Makom, The Jewish Agency, Freelance	Performer, Scholar, Teaches Israel/Jewish Educators	Kibbutz Tuval, IS	No
Miri Kornfeld	10.20.2020	StandWithUs	Jewish & non-Jewish teens, Grades 9-12	New York, NY	Yes & No
Dr. Jeffrey Kress	11.06.2020	Jewish Theological Seminary of America	Scholar, Teaches Jewish Educators	New York, NY	n/a
Dr. Naya Lekht	10.27.2020	Club Z	Jewish Teens mostly from Russian-speaking homes, grades 8-12	Los Angeles, CA	Yes
Rabbi Maura Linzer	10.06.2020	Temple Beth El of Northern Westchester	Reform Synagogue, K-12 religious school program	Chappaqua, NY	No
Abby Pitkowsky	09.25.2020	Jewish Education Project	Scholar, Teaches Jewish/Israel Educators	New York, NY	No
Avi Posen	10.05.2020	OpenDor Media, Unpacked for Israel	Creates Jewish & Israel Educational Videos for all demographics	Haifa, IS	No

Dr. Lori Sagarin	10.19.2020	Temple Beth Israel	Scholar, Reform Synagogue, K-12 religious school program	Skokie, IL	No
Aviva Schwartz	10.12.2020	IfNotNow Chicago	Jewish teens, Grades 9-12	Chicago, IL	Yes
Leah Solomon	11.05.2020	Encounter	American Jewish Professionals	Jerusalem, IS	No
Barak Stockler	10.13.2020	Congregation Kol Ami	Reform Synagogue, K-12 religious school program	White Plains, NY	No
Rabbi Loren Sykes	09.02.2020	URJ Heller High & NFTY-in-Israel	Jewish Teens, Grades 10-12	Kibbutz Tzuba, IS	No
Rabbi Mara Young	10.07.2020	Woodlands Community Temple	Reform Synagogue, K-12 religious school program	White Plains, NY	No

Appendix B: *Middot* Card for Unit 1, Lesson 1

עֲנָוָה *Anava* | Humility	שְׁלֵמוּת *Shlemut* | Wholeness	כָּבוֹד *Kavod* |Respect
תִּקְוָה *Tikvah* | Hope	אֹמֶץ לֵב *Ometz Lev* | Courage	אֱמֶת *Emet* | Truth
שָׁלוֹם *Shalom* |Respect	דֶּרֶךְ אֶרֶץ *Derech Eretz* | Proper Behavior	צְדָקָה *Tzedakah* | Righteous Giving
יֹשֶׁר *Yosher* | Honesty	סוֹבְלָנוּת *Savlanut* | Patience	סַקְרָנוּת *Sakranut* | Curiosity

* Note, this is just a sample. Ideally educators should feel empowered to list many more than just these twelve *middot*.

Appendix C: Jerusalem Poems for Unit 2, Lesson 8

Poet A[256]

In Jerusalem, and I mean within the ancient walls,
I walk from one epoch to another without a memory
to guide me. The prophets over there are sharing
the history of the holy ... ascending to heaven
and returning less discouraged and melancholy, because love
and peace are holy and are coming to town.
I was walking down a slope and thinking to myself: How
do the narrators disagree over what light said about a stone?
Is it from a dimly lit stone that wars flare up?
I walk in my sleep. I stare in my sleep. I see
no one behind me. I see no one ahead of me.
All this light is for me. I walk. I become lighter. I fly
then I become another. Transfigured. Words
sprout like grass from Isaiah's messenger
mouth: "If you don't believe you won't be safe."
I walk as if I were another. And my wound a white
biblical rose. And my hands like two doves
on the cross hovering and carrying the earth.
I don't walk, I fly, I become another,
transfigured. No place and no time. So, who am I?
I am no I in ascension's presence. But I
think to myself: Alone, the prophet Muhammad
spoke classical Arabic. "And then what?"
Then what? A woman soldier shouted:
Is that you again? Didn't I kill you?
I said: You killed me ... and I forgot, like you, to die.

Questions

- *Do you think that the author would call Jerusalem, home? Why would they or why wouldn't they?*
- *What emotional language is the author using throughout the poem? What Middot?*
- *If you turned this poem into a short film, what kinds of imagery would you use and why? (Examples include documentary, drama, comedy, animation, claymation, etc.).*
- *Why do you think that the author wrote this poem?*
- *Do you think that the author is an Israeli or a Palestinian? What about their writing style or imagery might identify their nationality as such?*

[256] Source: https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/52551/in-jerusalem

Poet B[257]

On a roof in the Old City
Laundry hanging in the late afternoon sunlight:
The white sheet of a woman who is my enemy,
The towel of a man who is my enemy,
To wipe off the sweat of his brow.

In the sky of the Old City
A kite.
At the other end of the string,
A child
I can't see
Because of the wall.

We have put up many flags,
They have put up many flags.
To make us think that they're happy.
To make them think that we're happy.

Questions

- *Do you think that the author would call Jerusalem, home? Why would they or why wouldn't they?*
- *What emotional language is the author using throughout the poem? What Middot?*
- *If you turned this poem into a short film, what kinds of imagery would you use and why? (Examples include documentary, drama, comedy, animation, claymation, etc.).*
- *Why do you think that the author wrote this poem?*
- *Do you think that the author is an Israeli or a Palestinian? What about their writing style or imagery might identify their nationality as such?*

[257] Source: https://kaitlinsgill.wordpress.com/2013/04/01/yehuda-amichais-jerusalem/

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