

Excerpt From:

# **REFORM ZIONISM**

**AN EDUCATOR'S PERSPECTIVE**

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**Section 4 - Aspects of  
Zionist Jewish Education**

# Policy Guidelines for the Joint Authority<sup>1</sup> for Jewish Zionist Education<sup>2</sup>

## ***Education for Zionism***

Any Zionist education is by definition Jewish education. Only potentially, however, is Jewish education Zionist education — whether or not it engages in Hebrew language study, Israel studies, or even an Israel Experience. The contents of Jewish and Zionist education may be similar in many stages of the educational process, but the whole rationale of Jewish-Zionist education, from preschool to the post-secondary level, is unique. The policies of the Joint Authority for Jewish-Zionist Education should give expression to the uniqueness of Jewish-Zionist education.

The special attributes of Jewish-Zionist education are the following:

1. It regards the educational process as a single organic entity, embracing cognitive and emotional components, that begins with early childhood and continues to university studies and beyond.

It entails cooperation among its constituents: formal and non-formal education in the Diaspora, and the Israel Experience. There must be a measure of dissonance — educational tension — among these components. This constructive tension is a prerequisite for Zionist educational “movement” as distinct from “organization” for pro-Israel Jewish education.

This being the case, the Authority should formulate practical criteria leading to an overall strategy. The Authority’s budget policies should provide incentives to communities and/or sectors that adopt such an overall strategy.

2. Jewish-Zionist education takes place in dynamic “fields” of community and intimate partnerships. Any educational setting is a “field” in which relevant role models promote processes of socialization and acculturation that inculcate Jewish-Zionist norms.

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1. Formalized in 1991 as a partnership between the World Zionist Organization and the Jewish Agency.  
2. Unpublished Mimeo Circular, Department of Jewish Education and Culture in the Diaspora, Joint Authority (World Zionist Organization and Jewish Agency for Israel) for Jewish Zionist Education — JAJZE, July 1992.

The Authority should promote processes conducive to the formation of foci of role models that project a Jewish-Zionist culture which offers an alternative to the norms of existing Jewish society. It is especially important to present these alternatives to persons in their teens and early twenties, for these are the age groups in which personal identity coalesces. Youth movements are examples of frameworks which have role models personifying Jewish-Zionist alternatives, and hence individuals in the movement may opt for a Jewish-Zionist identity as they advance toward adulthood and formulate a personal ideal.

The Authority should select a policy promoting the development of Jewish-Zionist movement among selected target populations of Jewish youth, both within the existing youth movements and those outside the classic youth movements. Special effort should be made to foster these processes among youngsters who already take part in general organizational settings affiliated with the World Zionist Organization, such as B'nai B'rith and various religious groupings.

Thus, in non-formal education the Authority should promote, qualitatively and quantitatively, the training of counselors for work in direct contact with the young. These would serve as role models for the acquisition of Jewish-Zionist norms. Thus numerous focal points of Jewish-Zionist education would be created, which, by virtue of the Zionist role models and attractive experiential settings, would attract others to the Zionist idea.

However, the frameworks that offer Jewish-Zionist education must adopt an explicit program of value clarification over and above the experiential dimension. This value clarification should help the young cope cognitively with the Zionist idea and the alternatives for its fulfillment in personal and public life.

3. We regard Jewish-Zionist schools as more than schools per se; they are educational centers and study communities which inculcate Jewish-Zionist culture and, above all, our national language, Hebrew. To accomplish this in day schools, there should be a policy of enough hours of Hebrew language study so that students will be able to study Jewish subjects (e.g., Bible, Jewish history, tradition, calendar) in Hebrew.

Formal Jewish-Zionist education should strive for an integration between general-Jewish subjects so as to impart cognitive understanding of and emotional identification with the uniqueness of Hebrew civilization in the context of the surrounding culture. The Joint Authority should develop principles of integrative and value education of this kind. The Authority

should train teachers and pedagogical counselors to become adept at formulating such Jewish-Zionist curricula in diverse cultural surroundings.

To promote formal education of this type, the Authority should also emphasize teacher training for skills in direct contact with students. A teaching staff imbued with Jewish-Zionist values and equipped with pedagogic skills for imparting them is a prerequisite for formal education in a Jewish-Zionist educational center.

The Joint Authority, collaborating with Diaspora organizations committed to Jewish-Zionist education, should encourage the writing of study units — Hebrew, Jewish and Zionist studies — suitable for supplementary schools. The Authority should also develop study units for non-formal education settings in which formal education takes place, such as summer camps.

4. The Israel Experience, when properly structured, is the centerpiece in the process of Zionist value clarification and confrontation. However, as with any centerpiece, the significance of the Israel Experience as a part of the process of Zionist education is gravely limited, unless there is both a period of preparation as well as follow-up after returning to the Diaspora.

The Authority should give clear priority to long-term Israel Experiences. Such programs are far more likely to provide an educational basis for value changes in the direction of Jewish-Zionist norms. The long-term programs are the most likely to develop a potential for Aliyah as well as Diaspora Jewish-Zionist leadership. Therefore, long-term Israel Experience activities should be promoted in non-formal education and should be included as part of the curriculum in formal Jewish education.

As for the short-term Israel Experience, its value in Jewish-Zionist education is chiefly when it is part of a process that has continuity. Ideally, such continuity leads into an educational process that puts youth in confrontation with the challenge of alternative paths leading to personal Jewish-Zionist fulfillment.



The Education Authority should allocate its resources commensurately with the size of the potential and actual target population groups. The Authority should encourage research that sheds light on factors that may foster Jewish-Zionist educational processes, with special reference to the centers of Jewish population in the West that face the risk of demographic decline and cultural and physical assimilation. In order to focus such research properly, such research should be

preceded by in-depth, case-study examination of existing examples of successful Jewish-Zionist education.



Jewish-Zionist education aims to perfect the individual, the nation, and the world. The tension that this generates is the very heart of the Prophetic trend in Judaism — a trend that the Zionist movement has revived in modern times. Zionist education is committed to the tension between the priest (the *cohen*), who adheres to the existing path, and the prophet, who strives for perfection. Zionist education aims to instill this tension, by educational means, in the lives of both the individual and the people. This fructifying tension constitutes the matrix in which the process of Zionist value clarification and confrontation takes place.

The goal of Jewish-Zionist education is to shape a mature young adult living in Zionist tension and striving to join others (we hope he/she does this in Israel) in the ongoing effort to resolve this tension in their personal lives and in the Jewish community, both in Israel and in the Diaspora.