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University of San Francisco

**#YouNeverToldMe: What Jewish American Children Learn
about Palestinian Displacement during the Founding of the
State of Israel**

A Field Project Proposal Presented to
The Faculty of the School of Education
International and Multicultural Education Department

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts in Human Rights Education

By
Nancy E. Sheftel-Gomes
December 2020

#YouNeverToldMe: What Jewish American Children Learn about Palestinian Displacement during the Founding of the State of Israel

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

MASTER OF ARTS

in

HUMAN RIGHTS EDUCATION

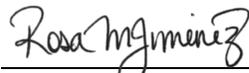
By

Nancy E. Sheftel-Gomes
December 2020

UNIVERSITY OF SAN FRANCISCO

Under the guidance and approval of the committee, and approval by all the members, this field project (or thesis) has been accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree.

Approved:



Rosa M. Jimenez, Ph.D.

Associate Professor/Thesis Chair

December 15, 2020

Date

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Much appreciation is due to my former students who bravely looked back at their experiences in Israel education and the impact on who they are today.

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ABSTRACT

#YouNeverToldMe: What Jewish American Children Learn about Palestinian Displacement during the Founding of the State of Israel examines how the education of Jewish American children in Jewish educational K-12 settings about the founding of the state of Israel omits details and events about the displacement of Palestinians and how knowledge gaps limit the possibility of dialogue among Jewish and Arab/Palestinian college students, and have a negative effect on Jewish identity. Within the methodological structure of Grounded Theory young adults, former students of the researcher, answer questions concerning their memories of what they learned about the founding of the state of Israel, their experiences in college interacting with Palestinians, and the impact on their Jewish identity. When Jewish college students are confronted with the fact that they were given a limited view of the history of the founding of the state of Israel and learn that injustices were committed in that long running conflict they question the value of their Jewish education and question their Jewish identity and their connection to the state of Israel. The data collected confirms that a gap in knowledge not only affects Jewish young adults' self image, it affects their view of the state of Israel, and encourages them to find ways to get to know Palestinians and to support peaceful pathways to further justice and respect, key Jewish values that they learned as children growing up in Jewish settings.

Key Words: Jewish education, human rights, peace education

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The Israel Palestine conflict has loomed large for the Jewish community both in the modern state of Israel and in Jewish diaspora communities. It is a polarizing conflict about which Jewish people hold very strong opinions. These views that have crossed communities and countries and generations during which time the young country has grown, fulfilled its mission as a refuge for Jewish people, expanded its territories, and gone from being the victim to being seen as the oppressor. Strong political stances divide families, influence how and what is taught in schools and shapes the future through children.

Israel Palestine sits at the crossroads of ancient trade routes in the southeastern portion of the Mediterranean Sea. Over the course of 73 years of statehood after several defensive wars, fighting for its existence against a coalition of Arab nations, Israel gained the hotly contested Golan Heights from Syria, what is called the West Bank which was mostly inhabited by Palestinians and was controlled by Jordan, the Sinai Peninsula and Gaza from Egypt. Through long hailed peace negotiations Israel returned the Sinai Peninsula to Egypt and after some time Israel returned Gaza to the Palestinian Authority, while retaining the Golan Heights and the West Bank. As the coalition of Arab nations withdrew support for the Palestinian cause, factions in the Palestinian Liberation Army (PLO) began a series of attacks referred to as the First Intifada, and the Second Intifada which included relentless suicide bombing of civilians in Israel, launched by groups from the West Bank and Gaza. Israel closed the borders, established checkpoints and built a security fence around the West Bank that divided ancestral lands and checkpoints along the shared border with Gaza. Israel limited the ability of Palestinians to easily enter Israel although many Palestinians work in Israel or sell their produce in Israel. Israel allowed Israeli

settlers to move into the occupied West Bank and over time cities and settler towns established themselves. The heightened security has reduced terrorist attacks and it has caused great bitterness for the Palestinian people who feel like second-class citizens in their own country. Over the last decade peace treaties between Israel, The United States and Israel with surrounding Arab countries have reduced support of the Palestinian cause and a period of normalization exist - a period when what has been considered unacceptable has begun to be accepted as the way it is, leaving the Palestinian people downtrodden and humiliated.(Goodman, 2018)

Israel has always been at the mercy of its enemies and at the mercy of its politically motivated supporters such as the United States and Russian, providers of weaponry and technology. They have also been at the mercy of the media who has painted one-sided pictures to influence world opinion leaving very little publicity space for the many grass roots peace initiatives and collaborations of individuals who are seeking to end the conflict, and to uphold the rights and safety of both Palestinians and Israelis. There are many groups of Israelis and Palestinians working together in Israel and around the world who get very little airtime. Combatants for Peace (CFP.org), Parents Circle Family Circle (PCFF.org), Sisterhood of Salaam Shalom(sosspeace.org), Seeds of Peace (www.seedspeace.org), and Youth Peace Initiative (youthpeaceinitiative.net), to name a few, are well intentioned and under publicized organizations that work to create understanding person to person. One particular coexistence project *Neve Shaalom/ Wahat Al-Salem* in Israel Palestine inspired and continues to inspire hopes for Israelis and Palestinians living together in peace.

As the director of a synagogue supplementary school for two decades and a teacher for as much time before, I supervised an Israel curriculum that was fluid, adjusting to current events

and waxing and waning support of the conflict. I reviewed weekly lesson plans for each class. A few years ago, when it came time in the curriculum for the 4th (9-10 year olds) grade unit on Israel, the teacher, a college student studying at San Francisco State University, prepared a lesson to open the unit that focused on the Palestinian people and the two-state solution wherein the Palestinian people would have sovereignty over a portion of their own land. He wanted to frame the unit to counteract the deficits that he had experienced in his own education with an in class debate. There were a few problems with his plan: the children were very young, there was no curricular context in their educational experience and the two-state solution was not universally accepted in our synagogue. I remember telling him, with many misgivings that we had to stay away from politics and teach about Israel in a way that would connect their students emotionally to our homeland, i.e., teach them to love Israel first.

About a decade ago, students who I had taught in supplementary school programs, in middle school and high school started coming home from college saying they had been taught the wrong story - the wrong set of facts - about the events leading up to the founding of the modern state of Israel. Like the 4th grade teacher, Jewish students were going off to college and being confronted with students fighting for justice for Palestine; they reported feeling unprepared to engage in dialogue or debates with their peers. These Jewish American students were surprised to learn that the one-sided Israel education they experienced omitted the voice of the Palestinian people and they had not learned all the facts. The revelation caused them to question their Jewish identity and the core values of Justice and Peace and it caused me to consider what we were doing wrong. I did not feel good about the accusation of deceit (even if by omission) and was challenged by the complexity of the conflict. This was not an isolated incident, as

indicated by the #YouNeverToldMe campaign (Breger, 2017), a hash tag movement casting light on the omission of the Palestinian narrative in Jewish American schools.

Recently, a former teacher in a Jewish supplementary school, shared an experience with me of her teenage daughter being cyber bullied. Her classmates targeted her because of her political stance for coexistence between Israel and Palestine. The girls involved had been classmates together in secular school and each had attended extracurricular synagogue-based school programs together. Their families represent the broad spectrum of attitudes, experiences and beliefs about the Israel Palestine conflict found in diaspora Jewish communities in the United States. The understanding of why Israel is a charged topic for Jewish American students (Zakai, 2018) lies in the intersection of educational, cultural and political influences, as well as collective memories that the students bring to the classroom and is influenced by the students' exposure to Israel as a place of unsettled conflict. This experience of the former teacher's daughter reflects the constant debate among Jews within Israel and in the diaspora about the relationship of Jewish identity to what happens in Israel and highlights the critical need to frame Israel education in the United States with peace education. In a study done by a history teacher in a Jewish day school 12th grade class, students wrote narratives of the history of Israel. The narratives universally included the key threads taught to American Jewish children of national struggle, Jewish victimhood, divine providence and conditions for Jewish in Europe and around the world with barely 9% mentioning Palestinian displacement. (Hassenfeld, 2015)

I find it confusing that even while Israel plays such an essential role in building Jewish identity, we are afraid to show our children where we may not have hit the mark on transparency because of our fear that if they knew what we have done wrong it would threaten their Jewish

identity. I am equally saddened that we are ashamed to show them that we may not have upheld the very Jewish values that we teach are essential to Jewish beliefs.

These experiences of college aged Jewish students are predictable in some sense because of the carefully curated curriculum many received as children. Grade school children are presented with a romanticized version of history that does not include the injustices that occurred in the past and are occurring now to many of the Palestinian residents of Israel and the occupied territories. Much like conflict, supporting narratives that have developed on both sides of the Israel Palestine conflict to justify the conflict, the Israel founding myth that is taught to Jewish American children only succeeds in entrenching the sides in the conflict.(Oren et al, 2015) As world leaders continue to fail in their attempts to create peace accords between Israel and Palestine, how US Jewish schools address the study of Israel has also failed by overlooking the possibilities of peace education. Instead of creating a culture of peace, it perpetuates the conflict.

There is a gap that is created when Jewish American children learn a version of the history of the founding of the state of Israel that excludes important details about the people who were living in the area of the Middle East called Palestine during the founding of the state of Israel. In this study I explored the experiences and perceptions about the study of Israel with Jewish young adults who were my students in a Kindergarten - 12th grade synagogue program.

Statement of the Problem

It is hard to imagine how a 73 year-long conflict can have an impact on children growing up 10,000 miles away. Jewish American children are intimately affected by the conflict between Israel and Palestine, within their communities, in their schools, and in their homes. Jewish American children have long been the objects of educational efforts to strengthen their Jewish

identity and their love for the state of Israel. They are the beneficiaries of efforts funded throughout the network of Israel education in Jewish Day schools, supplementary schools, camps, synagogues, community centers, and on summertime youth trips to visit the homeland. The hope is that when they become adults, they will retain their Jewish identity and their connection to the land of Israel, a connection that has been in existence for 2,000 years since the expulsion from their homeland by the Roman Empire in 72 CE and the start of the Jewish diaspora (Chazan, 2015.) Israel curriculum in Jewish American K-12 schools shines the light on the accomplishments of Israel as a small state populated by Jewish refugees and like most foundational stories, a story lends to myth.

Although the Jewish community is diverse, including a spectrum of practice from Orthodox religious practice to no practice at all, education and passing along the culture is a commonly held value. Community supplementary schools are commonplace, and children attend weekly classes outside of secular school hours as well as holiday celebrations and in that way are instilled with a feeling of belonging which is especially important since Jews are a minority in the United States. These communal opportunities create a framework for a sense of community.

The field of Jewish education(including Israel education) includes training of educators who develop curriculum and pedagogy, and training of teachers for schools that enroll from preschool through high school. One significant characteristic of Jewish supplementary education in America that affects the success of the educational efforts negatively is the fact that some students stop attending classes when they turn 13 and although some students attend throughout high school. If they do not, essentially their educational framework rightly focused to younger grades, limits the depth of what they might have been exposed to as a teen. At age-appropriate

levels a typical Jewish curriculum includes holidays, customs, Hebrew (the language of the Jewish people), prayer, history, sacred literature (the Torah) and the modern state of Israel. Teaching Israel presents many challenges for educators, especially presenting history and concepts in age-appropriate frameworks while conforming to the bias of the institution and avoiding politically charged issues. Some educational frameworks do not want to acknowledge the appearance of wrongdoing by the state of Israel.

Background and Need for Research

There is a gap in what K-12 Jewish students are taught about the events leading up to the founding of the modern state of Israel. Jewish children learn the history of Israel and how it relates to the stories in the Torah, also known as the Hebrew Bible, in many spaces including Jewish Day Schools, synagogue religious schools, in summer camps and at home. Although Jewish people in the diaspora have varied relationships with the modern state of Israel and a spectrum of depths of connections, Israel remains a central part of Jewish identity and a central component of curriculum both formal and informal (Sheps, 2009). Jewish High School students' knowledge of the founding of the modern state of Israel and its relationship to Palestine includes conflicting narratives and reflects how teachers and communities avoid the complexities of the Israel Palestine conflict.(Hassenfeld, 2016) Jewish American Israel education is concerned that learning about controversial events during the founding of the state of Israel might impact the students' relationship to Israel, along with concerns for answers of the enduring questions of who should teach Israel and how should Israel be taught, plus the question about how to teach about Palestine (Chazan, 2015).

There is insufficient research into the barriers that exist for Jewish college students to learn about Palestinian narratives as history (Dessel et al, 2014). Researchers, not surprisingly,

found gaps in research examining what variables affected Arab college students' quest for information about the Israel Palestine conflict as well and what variables impacted their interest in collaborating with Jewish students (Yazbak et al, 2015). There is a gap in research considering how both Arab and Jewish American college students are impacted by the Israel Palestine conflict in the middle east and on American college campuses.

There is a gap in research to explore a transparent depiction of the Israel Palestine situation and a gap in pedagogic strategies to address the complexity of the situation with Jewish American children while balancing the multiplicity of parent political alignment (Breger, 2017). Engagement with the state of Israel is something that is culturally developed from early childhood. People getting to know each other to find common ground is not enough. Praxis, shared experiences and emphasis on peace education and coexistence - the practical aspects of education - have the potential for the greatest effect on behavior change. (Bekerman, 2007)

Purpose of the Study

One purpose of this study is to learn more about how Jewish American children learned about the events leading to the founding of the state of Israel. Although there are studies that examine educational praxis and pedagogy in Jewish day school and supplementary schools, children are rarely research participants, omitting their experience of learning from the conversation. (Sivan, 2019) This study will add to an under-studied area by asking young adults to reflect on their learning experiences as children. A second purpose of the study is to listen to the voices of the students who lived through the experience of studying about the founding of the state of Israel and to hear their experience of engaging with Palestinian students in college or into the work place. My aim is to illuminate Jewish student experiences, and make recommendations

for how to reimagine K-12 Israel education in Jewish American schools through the framework of peace education.

Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to answer these questions:

1. How do Jewish American young adults characterize what (and how) they were taught about the founding of the state of Israel and its impact on their Jewish identity? What was their K-12 Jewish education comprised of?
2. How have Jewish American young adults' perceptions/knowledge about Jewish history, current contexts, and the founding of the state of Israel shifted while in college/work settings?
3. What ideas and hopes do Jewish American young adults have for a more holistic, more just Jewish K-12 education?

Theoretical Framework/Rationale

Peace theory provides a framework to consider answers to the question, what do Jewish American children learn about the founding of the state of Israel? The rationale for this thesis is within the framework of peace theory. Peace theory requires transparency and students need to have a complete picture of the events that led to the founding of the State of Israel in order to have the understanding to interact with peers when they attend college, in order to be prepared to participate in dialogue with students who have a different perspective and understanding whether they are Jewish or Palestinian or Arab or none of the above. Students deserve to learn the truth and hear the truth in order to be able to reflect and understand the opinions and attitudes of their parents and teachers. Students should be given the tools to learn more than an ideological myth. Student experiences in finding out that they had not learned all the details of how the Palestinians

have been treated have the potential to weaken the student's Jewish identity, the opposite intention of the mythical version of Israel history that they had been taught (Chazan, 2015; Reingold, 2017).

Peace theory frames this study, with the concept that supporting peace-making capacities develops a culture of peace. Learning the history of the founding of the State of Israel at an early age can provide opportunities to engage with Jewish and Palestinian peers to support creating a culture of peace within which open informed dialogue becomes the norm. The questions explored with this research when considered within the framework of peace education theory suggest the need for changes in the educational approach currently used to teach Jewish American children about Israel and the need to develop praxis to support new paradigms in real time.

Peace education theory provides this thesis with a framework that supports peace-making capacities and develops a culture of peace. The first rationale for peace theory is the premise that there is a difference between teaching about peace and teaching for peace. News from Israel often focuses on violent protests and military actions. Israel curriculum often focuses on timelines of wars and conflicts, successes and failures, exactly the opposite of Galtung's third principle, 'peace is the absence of violence.' (Galtung. 1969) It is not surprising that the Israel Palestine conflict can extend to cyber bullying of a teenager in New York, modern day first world violence. These same children will no doubt inherit the Israel Palestine conflict in much the same ways it influences and is experienced in America today: political platforms, military aid, accusations of oppression and defensiveness.

Foundational peace education theorist, Galtung (1969) explores the signposts along the way between the absence of peace and social justice by carefully defining the terms - peace and

violence. Defining the elements of peace is essential to understanding the key problem that this thesis explores. The Israel Palestine conflict easily fits into Galtung's framework. There are moments of war, there are moments of peace that come from agreements and there are moments of peace that are created by boundaries. It's necessary to define the terminology as well as the boundaries to be able to move to the presumed better state of peace. Where do American Jewish children fit into Galtung's theoretical framework? They experience the Israel Palestine conflict by extension when they learn about the history of the founding of the modern state of Israel and they experience the conflict when they debate and dialogue within Jewish spaces and within the college spaces where they are exposed to information about the conflict for many the first time and when they hear the narratives of Palestinian and Arab students. Peace theory framed by Galtung's continuum of structural violence and positive peace provides a way of organizing the elements of the conflict both in the Middle East and as it plays out in American Jewish schools and communities. These two metaphors (Boulding, 1977) don't in and of themselves change anything. They do, however, provide a way of understanding the problem.

Reardon (2000) makes the claim that there needs to be a culture of peace as the foundation for peace, and that education for peace helps 'create some of the preconditions for the achievement of peace.' Reardon's view of the multidisciplinary nature of peace education theory reflects the diversity of the field that evolved from trying to understand the social, cultural and political effects of wars.

At the center of the Israel Palestine conflict is a history of wars between Israel and its neighbors and specifically with the people of Palestine who lay claim to the same land. Ties between diaspora Jewish communities and Israel are strong and complexly interwoven with family connections, religious connections, educational and existential connections. This rich

interplay of real and perceived realities very much depend upon belief in one sided stories to hold together. Reardon's theory that peace cannot be achieved without education to create understanding requires pursuing goals that are good for both groups or individuals. Her dialectic of teaching for peace and about peace suggests a teaching approach that not only presents the history but also a curriculum that puts the students in an environment that is framed by human rights. The central task of peace education is to create a culture of peace that upholds the norms of a peaceful society. For the children in Jewish American schools to do that, requires reframing the militaristic narratives that focus on glorifying the conflict and to replace them with the narratives of the people living the experiences on both sides of the conflict.

One of the underlying challenges of Israel education is the reluctance to tell students aspects of events that occurred because they put Israel (and by extension the Jewish people) in a negative light (sometimes deserved), which leads to the suspicion of wrongdoing. It is important that students examine all sides of history to be able to be part of a culture of peace (Reardon 2000). Seen through Reardon's framework, in the education for peace camp, students become change agents with knowledge of and acknowledgement of wrongdoings and learn skills to change the story going forward. In the education about peace camp by learning about the history from the Palestinian point of view the students develop compassion. This is one of the greatest challenges in Israel education because compassion is an essential precondition to caring about justice, a central Jewish value.

In their work, Bekerman & Zembylas (2011) have explored how to put theory into praxis recognizing how very difficult it is to change the perspectives that are the essential part of the consciousness of the groups or individuals. The authors suggest that in the communities that they studied in Cyprus and in Israel, groups are so very attached to their narratives, memories and

identity as they are within the Jewish American community that their stories can become barriers to peace. Hopefully, at the same time these barriers can also offer opportunities. For Jews around the world, identity is entwined with Israel on many inextricable levels. Focus on nurturing a strong Jewish identity is a key goal and a measure of success for Jewish educators. That nurturing is often at the expense of exposing students to both sides of the story. That strong identity gets in the way of peace education because of its connection to the mythology that fuels the conflict. By not exposing children to the full history of the founding of the state of Israel, educators are upholding the hegemonic perspectives that get in the way of any resolutions. (Bekerman et al, 2011)

Teachers themselves are influenced by their own relation to identity and in the Jewish classroom, with Jewish children taught by Jewish teachers, it becomes even more challenging to overcome the legacy of conflict. This tendency to idealize one's own group and demonize the other's group goes much deeper than the Israel Palestine conflict, and sadly for Jewish children reproduces historic experiences of the Jewish people.

Taken together, these authors present a continuum of the development of the field of peace theory and a rationale for understanding why it is important when teaching students, the history of the Israel Palestine conflict to confront even events that are counter to our desired self-image. Galtung's strongly defined framework is like the structural framework of a house with a floor for war and structural violence and up the stairs to a floor for positive peace and a big open space for the presence of justice. Reardon is like an interior designer identifying which room is for peace and which room is about peace. Bekerman and Zembylas's framework is a large veranda which encircles this framework that includes learning the narratives of both the founding

of the state of Israel and the conflict with Palestine to support peace education which fosters peace making capacities to develop a culture of peace.

Peace education by definition is not a subject that is taught. It is how we teach and how what is learned is made relevant to our students' lives. A comprehensive definition of peace education is multifaceted with the common goal to nurture critical learners who “ apply knowledge to solve problems and achieve possibilities.” (Reardon, 2000) Peace education and Jewish education share the same purpose to further social justice and equity for mankind. As a Jewish educator I see a pressing need to include the Palestinian narrative in Israel education curriculum. By rethinking Israel education within a framework of peace education we are forced to focus on the core Jewish value ,Shalom, peace, as the cornerstone of a culture of peace.

METHODOLOGY

Grounded Theory is the methodology that encourages looking for answers to research questions that are grounded in the real experiences of real people (Creswell 2007), in this case Jewish American students as they are taught about the history of the founding of the state of Israel in Jewish American schools and communal sites. The topic will be explored in two ways: a) questionnaires completed by current young adults who were former students of the researcher, and b) face to face meetings.

Setting

The young adult participants in this study are all in various settings today. However, they were as children a part of a shared Jewish community in Northern California's Bay Area. They all participated in educational and experiential learning programs at a large urban synagogue referred to as supplementary school. During the week they attended secular school while on

afternoons and weekends they attended what is often referred to as religious school or Hebrew school.

Participants

I recruited 19 young adults from Jewish American young adults who were my former students at one point during their K-12 school years. All participants are adults and between the ages of 20 and 32. All except one grew up in San Francisco, and all were born in the United States. The congregation at which they attended supplementary school is located in San Francisco. Nineteen signed the consent form, 18 completed the questionnaire and 6 participated in face-to-face meetings on Zoom.

Recruitment, Access, and Anonymity

The participants were recruited via my social networks. Many were former students of mine, who are now adult college students or young adults in the workplace. The synagogue where I was the education director is a community and we continue to interact. Participants were given pseudonyms and were ensured anonymity using various strategies. Questionnaire responses will be anonymous. Access will be requested to record the Zoom focus groups as a tool for the purpose of video memos, solely for analysis and the recordings themselves will not be published.

The plan for the protection of human subjects included: (a) engaging participants in the process of informed consent by describing the information sought, why they have been asked to participate and how the information will be used, (b) informing subjects of the study procedures and answering any questions they may have before they agree to participate, (c) making a plan for and discussing the confidentiality of records and identity with participants, including the use of pseudonyms, password-protected data storage, and storing contact information and raw data in

different files, (d) the recognition of any potential risk, such as discussion that may trigger emotions and making a plan for minimizing these risks includes establishing group norms at the beginning of the focus group, (e) identifying and discussing potential benefits, such as adding to the body of research of the effects of praxis and for participants to be part of an effort to turn conflict into an opportunity for peace education.

Data Collection

I collected data across 2-4 weeks during the Fall of 2020. There were two types of data collected for this study:

1. *Questionnaires*: All college student participants completed a qualitative questionnaire relating to the research questions using Google Forms. There were 13 questions in the first questionnaire related to the subject. Students were given the link to the questionnaire prior to the focus group. The questionnaires were sent electronically via email to participants and they were made aware that their answers would be anonymous. A second short set of questions were posed after the face-to-face meetings, via email.
2. *Focus group*: The focus group (face to face meetings on Zoom) included all young adults (N=6) and lasted approximately 60 minutes and included introductions and discussions of the themes that emerged from the questionnaire.
3. *Follow-up Interview*: I interviewed three of the participants from the focus group in order to gain further insight into their experiences. The interviews were conducted online via Zoom (audio/video) and recorded. They lasted approximately 30 minutes.

Data Analysis

I transcribed the data from the questionnaires, focus groups and interviews. I

conducted three rounds of coding: 1) an initial substantive phase to code directly for themes arising from the data in alignment with grounded theory, followed by 2) a second round using codes derived from my research questions and questionnaire. I refined and developed codes based on this iterative process. Coding was based on categories and themes. Private identifiable information will not be shared. The questionnaire provided the framework for the focus group and followed a Grounded theory zigzag between the questionnaire and the focus group participants and the research questions.

Researcher's Positionality

The first time I went to Israel was in 1967, before the 6-Day War. I was fresh off the Anti-Vietnam War protest trail, young and idealistic going to see my people in Israel. Israel loomed large for me growing up. I didn't know it then, but it was a pivotal time in Jewish identity. Israel came into being at a time when Jews were fleeing all Europe trying to find safe harbors. The Zim Lines boat that I took from Genoa to Haifa was filled up with displaced people on the last leg of their wanderings finally, 20 years later, arriving in *Eretz Yisrael*, the land of Israel. When I stepped off the boat on the dock in Haifa my illusions began to crumble. Having just recently stood on the other side of the fence from US soldiers at the Pentagon protesting the Vietnam War I was conflicted by the sight of so many soldiers everywhere. Hitchhiking from the north to the south I met people from around the world who had immigrated, people who had been expelled from Arab countries, and people who lived in villages where ancestors were buried in graveyards. On one of my rides, the driver drove through some of those villages looking for new construction, something that was forbidden. I returned to my life in Massachusetts, very conflicted.

Then the 6-Day war broke out and I saw a different side of myself. My friend had a color TV and most days at 6:00pm I was at his house watching “our boys.” With Vietnam I thought I was anti-war, with Israel I learned differently. That was the beginning of my critical awareness of identity, another facet of what it means to be an American Jew. It was the beginning of reconciling my identity as a Jew, a white skinned American, a Zionist and politically a dove. And it added one more factor of identity to navigate, one more angle of positionality to measure and one more chapter of surviving as a diaspora Jew.

My family was not Zionist although they were religious. As a large clan of Hasidic Jews who had made their way to the United States during one of the great waves of immigration when the door was open, the land of Israel of their imagination lived in the stories in the Torah from thousands of years ago and on the pages of prayer books with the persistent theme of longing for Zion (a name for Israel), providing hope, *Tikvah*. Although my parents and grandparents lived during the time when the Zionist movement to return to our native land was nothing but a remote possibility, I feel like I grew up with the state of Israel. I learnt Hebrew as a young child, celebrating holidays, saving my pennies to plant trees in Israel, and writing letters to a penpal, a boy my age in Haifa. I even had a friendship with Israeli Scout, Jonathan Netanyahu, when I worked as a camp counselor in high school. The existence of Israel was a very real source of pride and belonging, something that was elusive growing up as an “other” in central Massachusetts.

Something changed after the 1976 War when Israel truly went from being the oppressed to appearing to be the oppressor. Although it is often described as a complex situation, basically two peoples want sovereignty over the same land. None of the many attempts to negotiate peace has succeeded. Israel occupies the lands that it won in a series of defensive wars that provide

continuing justification for occupation and discontent. The Palestinian people feel humiliated and with every treaty forged by neighboring Arab nations with Israel, they feel further disregarded, resulting over the past few decades in violent uprisings, deadly bombings, and futile retaliations all of which fuel the enmity on both sides. This is a side of life in Israel Palestine that is difficult to teach to young children.

Throughout most of my adulthood I have been a Jewish educator, working in camps and supplementary school programs while raising my children and pursuing my business careers. In 2018 I retired from a 20 year position as the education director at a large San Francisco synagogue where I directed a supplementary school and supervised early childhood through high school classes and programs.

One of the main goals of Jewish education is to nurture a strong Jewish identity and a connection with the state of Israel. It is often through participation in these programs and summer youth trips to Israel that Jewish children can overcome the feeling of exclusion that comes from being a minority. My goal as education director was to lead an immersive, experiential program where children could experience and learn about Jewish traditions and life within the context of a community built on the basic principles of Torah: peace, respect, equality, fairness, justice and in that way learn to be a Jew and to feel Jewish within a Jewish community. Community based Jewish learning often requires a collaborative process which sometimes means teaching one thing and not another.

For a Jewish child growing up in Israel there are two experiences that are different than growing up a Jewish child in the United States. Israeli children always know about war, living on contested land, and they always know about the Holocaust, because of the high number of Israeli citizens who were survivors. On both Holocaust remembrance day, *Yom HaShoah*, and

Israeli Memorial day, *Yom HaZicharon*, across the whole country a siren goes off and all the people stop what they are doing to stand and remember those who gave their lives - even the traffic on the highways stops and people get out of their cars. There is no question about whether to tell the whole story. In this Reform synagogue in San Francisco, it is different.

In some respects, this thesis is an attempt to right the wrongs that we have done through omission by bringing the Palestinian narrative to the history we teach. I am driven to ask the questions in this thesis because of the Jewish values that inform everything that I do and the desire to ground Jewish education with integrity. When I began this Master's in Human Rights Education, I was drawn to develop a broader understanding of the Israel Palestine conflict in every class. As I got deeper into the scholarship and views of dedicated researchers, I realized that I had to start in an area of the conflict where I had first-hand knowledge and might actually be able to fill a need. The critical peace perspective gave me hope that by uncovering subjective knowledge, by challenging the long-accepted truths in Israel education in the US and exploring the wisdom of former students a new perspective could emerge. (Bajaj & Hantzopoulos, 2016) There is a sense of urgency to change the trajectory of the reenactment of the Israel Palestine conflict that we have been creating by not including the voices of the Palestinian people in how we teach the history of the founding of the state of Israel. The children we are teaching are both the inheritors of an unresolved conflict and those who will be responsible for the solutions.

Limitations of the Study

This study has several limitations: (a) the participants in the focus group were once students of the researcher and will be relying on their recollection of their K-12 education, (b) the information gathered will be from what the former students remember about an educational experience in their childhood (c) the COVID-19 pandemic limited the possibility of planning in

person focus group meetings, and (d) there is an inherent power differential between the researcher and the focus group participants since she was their teacher, which may create an expectation that will need to be considered in focus group design. To mediate bias an anonymous questionnaire for the students and the focus group with facilitated with great diligence to ask open-ended questions and convey intent for honest answers.

Significance of the Project

This study has significance for: students, teachers, administrators of communities of belonging and researchers in the field of history education about areas of conflict because of the potential to reframe the study of history of the Israel Palestine conflict within peace theory. Teaching of the Israel Palestine conflict from a framework of peace education can bridge between existing educational practices in Jewish American Israel education about the founding of the state of Israel and honest dialogue about the relationship between Israel and Palestine today both in the state of Israel and 10,000 miles away in encounters on college campuses between students debating the Israel Palestine conflict. This study may be of interest to advocacy groups and funders of Israel education initiatives working to strengthen the ties between American Jewish identity and the state of Israel. The consideration of how Jewish American school children's attitudes and perspectives of Israel Palestine could change course when they become adults if their learning is based in a peace framework, instead of perpetuating conflict, should be especially valuable for educators in other arenas of conflict in the world.

Definition of Terms

As a Jewish educator this terminology is from everyday usage, part of the daily lexicon in Jewish communal life and are defined by my experience, with the exception of BDS that is a very specific modern term that I chose to use a formal definition.

1. The Jewish people

The Jewish people are survivors of a monotheistic middle eastern tribe who settled in the area today known as Israel over 5,000 years ago. The Roman Empire conquered and exiled them almost 2,000 years ago. Some returned to Israel and reestablished a homeland in the decades prior to 1948 and others live dispersed around the world yet remain connected through the practice of Judaism.

2. Diaspora

Diaspora is used to mean generally a specific people dispersed in several countries while maintaining ties with their country of origin and with other groups from the country of origin dispersed in other countries. (Sheffer, 2002) In this paper diaspora refers to Jews living outside of the land of Israel from which they were exiled by the Romans in 70 CE.

3. Jewish Education

Jewish education is a multidimensional intentional approach to pass on through education, Jewish religious observances, practices, history, languages and culture. It consists of teacher education, curriculum development and educational best praxis.

4. Israel Education

Israel education is based on the centrality of a connection to the state of Israel to Jewish identity and to the belief that it is important to strengthen the bond of Jewish students in the diaspora with the state of Israel.

5. Israel Palestine conflict

The conflict in Israel Palestine is referred to in a variety of ways: The Occupation, Israeli/Palestinian war, The Palestine/Israel conflict, or the Middle Eastern War. When I began writing about it I decided to choose the most neutral terminology that I could find.

I chose to use an alphabetical order.

6. Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS)

Activists and supporters call for a boycott of Israel until the country complies “with international law and Palestinian rights.” (Harris, 2019)

7. Supplementary School

The Jewish supplementary school system, generally associated with synagogues, is a system of education that meets outside of secular school hours, often afternoons and weekends, to teach customs, history, and Hebrew in a Jewish communal context. These schools are generally referred to as Hebrew School and Religious School.

8. Day School

Jewish day schools are schools for Jewish students that teach both standard secular curriculum in addition to Jewish history, Hebrew and Jewish texts.

9. Jewish Identity

This term has many meanings within the Jewish world, depending upon the context. In this study, Jewish identity is being used to refer to how the student connects to being born Jewish and to what degree that heritage informs how they see themselves.

10. Shalom

The Hebrew word Shalom means peace. Peace is a central Jewish value and one of the first Hebrew words that children learn. Salaam is the word for peace in Arabic.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

The claim of worth for this literature review is that experiencing the narratives of Israelis and Palestinians when learning the history of the modern State of Israel, empowers Jewish American students to learn from the voices of citizens of Israel and Palestine and promotes a culture of peace. The body of scholarship that justifies this claim includes three sets of reasons - that students who do not have a complete picture of the events that led to the founding of the State of Israel are: (a) unprepared to interact with peers when they attend college and are uncomfortable participating in dialogue with supporters of Palestine; (b) downplay their connection to Israel and reproduce the opinions and attitudes of their parents and teachers; and (c) express interest in learning more once they are exposed to the history of all residents of Israel Palestine.

Peace education theory frames this body of scholarship, especially the concept that supporting peace-making capacities and understanding develops a culture of peace. Side by side reasoning is used to connect the evidence that learning of historic events leading up to the founding of the state of Israel at an early age can provide opportunities to engage with Jewish/Israeli and Arab/Palestinian peers to support creating a culture of peace within which open informed dialogue becomes the norm. A gap in research suggests the need for further exploration and the development of praxis to support new paradigms.

Peace Theory

Theory develops as a reaction to some event or collection of events that compels us to examine what happened, to better understand how to replicate or interrupt the condition. In this paper, peace theory will be used to create a framework for evaluating the dynamics and parameters of the Israel Palestine conflict as they impact kindergarten through high school Israel education of Jewish American children – from not war/peace to not peace/war towards solutions (Galtung 1969). The field of peace education evolved from the philosophical explication of the wars of the 20th century, the establishment of the United Nations and the enactment of the UDHR, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Galtung (1969) defines peace and discusses the signposts between the polarities of absence of peace and social justice asking what do the words of these definitions mean in practice? Reardon (2000) seeks to answer the question: What is peace and is there something to learn from these events? Bekerman and Zembylas (2012) measure theory against their praxis in the field, answering the question: What are the influencing factors to put theory into praxis? This progression of thought is important because it illustrates the evolution of peace education from responding to conflicts, wars and treaties to considering social policy implications like education and housing.

Peace theory as examined by Galtung (1969) seeks to define peace in the context between the extremes of the absence of personal violence and ultimate social justice outcomes. This scholarship is informed by peace research that seeks to unpack the conditions for promoting aspects of peace, delving into the conditions - past, present and future- of realizing peace. By looking into all sides of the condition of peace and using multiple approaches it is possible to think about the various choices that affect critical aspects of peacemaking such as arms control or forms of social action that combine the absence of personal violence with the fight against

social injustice. Peace theory grew out of Galtung's research into conflict theory and Galtung meticulously uses that foundation to build a framework to define peace. He presents how he will use the term peace for "social goals" (p. 167) that are complex but attainable, as in the context of this scholarly work, peace is the absence of violence and that there are many types of violence. A universal definition of peace is essential to uncovering the interactions that generate or negate it, at least within the context of this academic conversation between scholars. Additionally, violence is defined as the "cause of the difference between the potential and the actual," i.e., peace or not peace. Like the condition of peace, there are many variations of violence that are in relationship with the many nuances of the definition of peace.

In one of the foundational explorations of peace theory, Reardon (2002) suggests that peace education theory exists as a response to the wars and unresolved conflicts of the last century and until this day. This theory is used to examine the relationships between the various and expanding possibilities of peace education such as teaching about peace while simultaneously teaching for peace. The dynamics of education about peace and education for peace are influenced by participants' knowledge of the world and existing preconditions. Peace education theory is a framework to support peace-making capacities to develop a culture of peace in order to be able to envision peace. There is a requirement of a precondition to peace - a fertile ground - in order to nurture a culture of peace. The way to create that culture of peace is through peace education, by providing tools to envision peace and a roadmap to the competencies needed to get there. This original scholarship is important because it fosters the belief that peace is a dynamic concept and the intersecting influences that must be acknowledged evolve and change over time and place.

Throughout their research partnership Bekerman (2012), who teaches anthropology of education in Israel, and Zembylas (2012), whose areas of concentration include educational philosophy and curriculum theory in Cyprus, explore aspects of peace education in areas of conflict from the perspective of achieving certain solutions. Their stated goal in writing *Teaching contested narratives* (2012) is to explore the theoretical foundations as stated in the sub-title of the book - *Identity, memory and reconciliation in peace education and beyond* - and what that actually means as it relates to peace education. Recognizing there is no simple solution, they explore the multiple influences of culture, ethnicity, nationality, and religion. The authors demonstrate how the influences of collective memory as created through narrative, impact the way students, parents, teachers and institutions interact. The way history is often presented in schools becomes a barrier between the different views of the conflict and impedes a culture of peace and normalizes the condition of conflict. The authors synthesize their extensive research, analysis and publications of experiences of education in areas of conflict to suggest that students need to be able to engage with the contested narratives in their classroom learning spaces and to use the complexities of the conflicts to create new learning opportunities that are not bounded by the sociopolitical, historical and hegemonic perspectives. They see students as possible design theorists and explorers who can engage with original sources to uncover the history in relation to their interaction, allowing each student the freedom to see relationships that connect them to the materials and build new relationships to the subjects.

This study's thesis claims that including narratives of Israelis and Palestinians about the history of the founding of the state of Israel in Israel education curriculum, contextualizes the diaspora experience of Jewish identity in American Jewish schools. In order to foster peace education, the negative peace aspects of the Israel Palestine conflict must be confronted.

In summary, peace theory conceptualizes the landscape of peace and its opposite, violence, through (a) Galtung(1969) who recognizes that the factors that influence peace could be the factors that can actually influence change, (b) the seminal work of Reardon (2000), which carefully defines peace, and (c) Bekerman and Zembylas' (2012) progression from definition to praxis, recognizing that the structure of conflict limits change. It is through the lens of peace theory that this thesis focuses on Jewish American children and what they recall learning about the events leading to the founding of the state of Israel and the continuing conflict between Israel and Palestine. Consideration will be given to three areas: K-12 Jewish education experiences, college age experiences and observations, and suggest praxis - educational experiences that influence the student's complex relationship with the land of Israel and their Jewish identity. The following sections describe this research and justify the claim that experiencing the narratives of Israelis and Palestinians about the founding of the modern State of Israel, reframes American students' Israel education and promotes a culture of peace.

Jewish American Israel Education Excludes Key Historic Events

This body of research explores how Jewish K-12 educational settings teach Jewish children about Israel Palestine. Each study demonstrates that it is a complex issue to address within the diaspora adult Jewish community and all the more for children, and teachers. Reingold (2017) who taught and worked at the time of his research in Toronto, Canada, demonstrates that the issues are as complex for him as the teacher and his students as they were for Hassenfeld (2016) teaching in the United States, so much so that each educator was motivated to research what their student's relationship to Israel was at the beginning of the class and how it changed (or did not change) during each of their studies.

Breger (2017), an investigative journalist, set out to explore her experience as a former Jewish Day school student where Israel was presented in mythical terms. The hashtag “#YouNeverToldMe” (Breger, 2017, p.50) became an expression of the shock that Jewish college students experienced setting foot on diverse college campuses. Breger (2017) suggests this was related to the declining commitment to Israel of the American Jewish community and the subsequent push in the field to reignite the dream among young Jews through subsidized trips to Israel. Sheps (2009) explores the educational materials available and observes how over time the language used can support various nuanced political points of view, subtly influencing student perceptions.

These articles highlight the relevance of exploring the way schools present the Israel Palestine conflict to Jewish children. This scholarship informs approaches to teaching about Israel that are based on experiences, expectations and best practices within the communities throughout the San Francisco Bay area and around the United States. Concern about how to teach Israel Palestine built when students started returning from college and reporting that they wished that they had learned about the “real” story of Israel Palestine. The omission of some details of the history of how the modern state of Israel came into existence has been intentional and does not serve students well, and it is, at worst, hypocritical. These are only a few articles but they contribute to understanding the field in an important way because the researchers each focused on a particular question that allowed them to put their own bias aside. These four studies describe real students, educators and stakeholders. They also point out that there is a gap in the research. This topic is a flash point within Jewish communities. Tension between competing ideologies and stakeholders is not unique to this particular conflict and there may be more to

learn about areas of conflict in other countries and regions within which there are conflicting narratives.

The aspect of the problem addressed by Sheps (2009) is how methods of education used in K-12 Jewish schools impact the ways that Jewish students see themselves, each other, and their relationship to Israel Palestine and how these methods reinforce Zionist ideologies, beliefs and loyalties. The purpose of Sheps' study is to explore and evaluate the significance of educational materials and images to see how they influence dialogue, self-reflexive understanding, and ultimately the possibilities of peace. The participants and setting included eighty-two textbooks used in the 1st-12th grade classrooms of two Jewish schools in Edmonton, Canada, Edmonton Talmud Torah and The Calgary Jewish Academy. The key findings include that methods of education used by diaspora communities such as the two schools in the study influence the ways that the students perceive their Jewish identity and influence their relationship to the conflict in Israel Palestine by reinforcement of Zionist ideology and beliefs. By defining terms and explaining their relationship to the topic, Sheps draws connections to foundational works by Jewish philosophers and social scientists concerning identity and ethnicity. The author presents historic data within a chronological context to delimit the history from a particularly Jewish western point of view and counteracts the ambiguity of language generally used about Israel Palestine outside the Jewish world. Maintaining anti-bias/neutral language in an article such as this is a challenge and essential to discussion surrounding how the language used in the textbooks exhibits internal biases.

Hassenfeld (2017) and Reingold (2017) in two similar separate studies, like Sheps (2009), examines the multiplicity of Jewish students' relationships to Israel and how they negotiate their relationship to that multiplicity uncovering where teachers and communities try to

avoid those complexities. Both of these studies analyze narratives of the history of Israel written by high school students in Jewish Day Schools in the United States and in Canada, representing different denominations of Judaism, to explore the factors that influence that relationship. Their findings note different narrative themes that appeared individually and also in combination including the narrative of Palestinian displacement, which challenges the normative American Jewish perspective and may hint at a nascent generational switch of focus.

Reingold (2017) focused on controversial events during the founding of the state of Israel and how learning about them impacts the student's relationship to Israel. Reingold wanted to know how students in a Jewish high school in Canada in the final semester of their senior year learnt about the founding of the State of Israel and if learning about key negative events changed their feelings of connection to Israel. In analyzing the curriculum for the class, the researcher (who was their teacher) wondered how the political and historic parts of the 12th grade curriculum impacted the students, since for many this was their first exposure to those topics. Surveying at the beginning of the semester and at the end of the semester bookended the journaling by the students, narratives that became raw data to address the author's questions. It is typical among Jews to learn different narratives some of which are in conflict in much the same way as Israel and Palestine are in conflict. The pedagogic exercise used by Reingold presented an opportunity for students to take a look at parts of Israel Palestine history that are often omitted. The author uses a qualitative survey to map the classroom challenges of teaching a contested history reflecting the reality of the Israel Palestine conflict. By learning about something that they had not already learned about Israel Palestine history, the students were able to preview experiences that they might experience when they go to college. By learning in this

reflective way within the safety of their high school classroom the students were able to process and reflect on what they had learned.

Sheps (2009), Hassenfeld (2017) and Reingold (2017) each illustrate the power of narrative as tool to investigate how Jewish American children learn about the Israel Palestine conflict: in school in textbooks, in the stories concerning the founding of the State of Israel that students learn at homes and in communities, and from the stories that students tell after learning about historic events that are often omitted in their communal history acquisition.

Breger (2017) outlines how Jewish American children develop a relationship with the state of Israel, a complex diaspora relationship with a country that is at once a homeland, a refuge, a spiritual center and a colonial government in some people's eyes including Jews and non-Jews. Breger observes that as Jews become more secure in their diaspora refuges, Israel becomes more of a distant ideal for some, and for others a place worth fighting for, reflecting the multiplicity of Jewish belief and experience. Breger explores the challenges and successes of Jewish education in the United States and examines the history of teaching about Israel through interviews with Jewish educators and communal leaders and her own personal experience growing up in a Jewish community and attending a Jewish day school. The article Breger wrote was the first in a series in Moment Magazine to explore Jewish American children's relationship to the land of Israel. The diversity of the Jewish American community is reflected by the nuanced approaches of Israel education and Breger finds one thing that is consistent throughout - a strong relationship with Israel is an important part of Jewish identity along with the enduring question about what to teach about Palestine.

In summary, research demonstrates that Jewish American Israel education excludes unsavory aspects of the history of the founding of the State of Israel. This research includes (a)

research that illustrates how the use of language in textbooks in Jewish day schools edit and influence what is presented to the students, (b) research that demonstrates through the use of the pedagogic tool of narrative how students construct multiple versions of history, and (c) research that acknowledges the complexity of teaching contested history when even within one community there are multiple compelling retellings. This body of research indicates and predicts that students are not prepared to engage in dialogue with Arab/Palestinian American students when they go to college.

Jewish American College Students Unprepared for Dialogue

Similar to the gaps in curriculum covering the history of the founding of the State of Israel as taught to American Jewish children in K-12 settings, research demonstrates information gaps that affect American Jewish college students. This includes: (a) research that illustrates barriers that may exist for Jewish college students to learn about Palestinian narratives and history, (b) research that exposes how the normalization of the power imbalance in Israel Palestine is replicated among students on college campuses in the United States, and (c) research that claims that along with gender and family beliefs, contact with Jewish students are predictors as whether Arab students would be open to collaborating with Jewish students for peace. These claims are important because they provide the context and areas of the environment that students participate in and experience post high school as they enter the more diverse world of college and perhaps may even get to study together, Jewish students and Palestinian students side by side, studying the big ideas from the backdrop of their own identity.

To begin, research illustrates that barriers exist for Jewish college students to learn about Palestinian narratives and history. Evidence of this can be found in Dessel, et al (2014) who referring to Jewish students claim, “Interactions between students’ political views about Israel

and family and parents' belief predicted student attitudes about Palestinians" (p.365). The influencing factors were examined through both qualitative and quantitative analysis of an anonymous online survey distributed on campus. The researchers used previous research to determine the survey questions. From the analysis of the quantified results, they were able to extract themes to address during inter-group dialogue, post survey interviews and from the final paper that students were required to write.

Similarly, the findings of Yazbak et al (2015) indicate that even though normalization of the power imbalance in Israel Palestine is felt among students who took the four semester long Intergroup Dialogue (IDG) class at the University of Michigan taught by the researchers, Arab and Jewish American college students want to know more about each other. This research indicates that both Jewish and Arab college students enter college knowing very little about each other or each other's narrative of events leading up to the founding of the state of Israel. Normalization is a factor of the Israel Palestine conflict that refers generally to accepting the status quo and not trying to change anything. The researchers conclude that unless the issue of normalization is addressed it will stand as a barrier to dialogue. In the context of IGD, discussion about normalization provided a talking point that connected to the many facts of the Israel Palestine conflict.

Related to this, this research investigates how Arab American College students' experiences are also impacted by the Israel Palestine conflict. The authors indicate that there is a gap in the research about experiences on American college campuses, especially given the growing campus movements to BDS. The researchers made inferences from this small sampling (n=66) who responded to postings on campus listserves, to begin to interrogate the Arab/Palestinian experience and how that experience fits into the context of the Jewish/Israeli

American narrative. This is an important study that contributes to this body of research because it (a) begins a discussion and brings Arab/Palestinian students into the discussion and (b) in a study about conflict it brings both sides into the picture and uncovers an important similarity of experience for American Jewish/Israeli and for America Arab/Palestinian students.

In summary, research demonstrates that Jewish American college students lack preparation to dialogue about the Israel Palestine conflict. This includes: (a) Dessel et al (2014) who addressed the gap in the literature dealing with the barriers for American Jewish college students in addressing Palestinian perspectives; (b) Yazbak, et al (2015) who examine how American college students both Jewish/Israeli and Arab/Palestinian position themselves around the topic of normalization in Intergroup Dialogue; and (c) Yazbak et al (2018) who explore whether and how Arab American college students engage with the Israel Palestine conflict on campus. Taken together, this body of research justifies the claim that Jewish American college students are not prepared to dialogue about the Israel Palestine conflict. Related to these points, the next section addresses Praxis and interventions to support change.

Potential of Praxis

Similar to the previous section, which focuses on college students' challenges in dialoguing about the Israel Palestine conflict, the research in this section demonstrates the challenges to bringing theory into praxis. Analysis of research suggests that praxis, intergroup dialogue, shared experiences and emphasis on peace education and coexistence - the practical aspects of education - have the greatest effect on behavior change. The research asserts that the three essential questions driving Israel education are: why should American Jews learn about Israel, who is most equipped to teach them; and how can Israel education foster positive identification with Israel without whitewashing over the imperfections of the Jewish State

(Zakai, 2014, p.286). Critiques of existing scholarship observe the omission of the voices of children in Jewish education research and the ethical challenge of research with children. Praxis is important because Jewish American students' relationships to Israel develop over a lifetime and are foundational to Jewish identity and why/how Jews connect to Israel. Praxis is the "how to" of the theory and provides guidance for Jewish American teachers who have the important job of presenting the topic to children and negotiating conflicting communal goals.

To begin, research illustrates that there is a need to set the stage for interventions in how we teach Jewish children about Israel. Evidence of this can be found in Bekerman (2007) who cites his many years of bringing educational research to the topic of co-existence between Israel and Palestine, and in this particular piece of scholarship offers alternative approaches for a seemingly intractable situation. Similarly, Zakai (2014) raises many of the essential questions surrounding the purpose of Israel education and in doing so reaffirms the complexity of the task of developing pedagogic strategies for different perspectives. Zakai (2017) suggests that since children are the object of most Israel education models that research should include children and suggests praxis to address the challenges that working with children include.

Related to how we teach American Jewish children about Israel Palestine, Bekerman (2007) generalizes his research investigating the efficacy of intergroup encounters in Israel between Israelis and Palestinians to the field of peace education in areas of conflict around the globe. The internal and external conflicts experienced by both Jewish and Arab American college students are driven by the same dynamics of group belonging and cultural identity as in the state of Israel. Evidence of this existential quandary can be found in Zakai (2014) who claims that central to the goals of Israel education is developing and maintaining a personal and positive connection to the state of Israel.

How American Jews develop and maintain a relationship to Israel and even finding ways to include children in the research, is examined by Zakai (2019) who uncovers interesting approaches and praxis that have relevance to how we teach the subject in general such as storytelling and games as tools to experience how children see the world. The ethical challenges of using children to explore the development of a complex cultural connection in a diaspora people emphasize and reflect the complexity of the relationship to Israel for Jewish adults throughout the diaspora, which is reflected by the experiences of young adults recorded in Chapter III. Taken together with Zakai (2014) and Bekerman (2007) this research highlights the challenges that Israel education faces in framing, maintaining and strengthening American Jewish connections to the state of Israel in spite of and because of the Israel Palestine conflict.

Summary

This literature review claims that experiencing the narratives of both Israeli and Palestinians when learning about the founding of the modern State of Israel, reframes American students' Israel education experience to include the voices of all the residents of Israel and promotes a culture of peace. Evidence that supports this claim demonstrates that students who do not have a complete picture of the historic events that led to the founding of the state of Israel are unprepared to interact with peers when they attend college and unprepared to participate in dialogue with supporters of Palestine and Arab American students. In addition, they downplay their connection to Israel and often reflect and reproduce the opinions and attitudes of their parents and teachers. One of the most interesting findings was that both Jewish and Arab students expressed interest to learn more about each other. This claim and body of evidence address that learning the history of the founding of the state of Israel at an early age can provide

opportunities to engage with Jewish and Arab peers to support creating a culture of peace within which open informed dialogue becomes the norm.

CHAPTER III

FINDINGS

Introduction

The Jewish people are known colloquially as the people of the book and education is a highly held value through which Jewish values, culture, history and beliefs are passed down from generation to generation. The Jewish people are a diaspora people with an almost 6,000-year history who are descendants of a tribe of people who lived in the region that is now the state of Israel until they were exiled by the Romans 2,000 years ago. Israel was re-established as the Jewish homeland in 1948, after millennium of statelessness, wandering and persecution that culminated with the Holocaust. Throughout the diaspora communities set up schools wherein learning became the vehicle for preserving tangible connections to Jewish communities everywhere. Today a system of Jewish day schools provides both secular and Jewish instruction including Hebrew language, history, customs and beliefs and synagogues hold supplementary school classes and programs during the week after secular school and on the weekends. Over the last century, the land of Israel became a central focus and key part of Jewish identity building curriculum and especially in the last 50 years trips to Israel became a rite of passage for Jewish teens.

During the past decade there has been a public shift in attitude concerning Israel that has caused some of the students who I taught in elementary and high school once they stepped onto college campuses and into the workplace, outside of the cultural bubble they grew up in, to question their enduring understandings with respect to the state of Israel. What they learned about the Israel Palestine conflict through campus protests awakened concerns about justice and equity in a way that left them conflicted about the Jewish values they were taught and their

Jewish identity. Their concern caused me to question the goals of Jewish education and to look for answers to key questions to understand how we could have better prepared them.

This study used a grounded theory design to uncover answers to key questions through the reflections of former students who are now in their 20's and 30's: How have their perceptions/knowledge about Jewish history, current contexts, and the founding of the state of Israel shifted while in college/work settings? How do they characterize what (and how) they were taught about the founding of the state of Israel and its impact on their Jewish identity? What are their ideas and hopes for a more holistic and just Jewish K-12 education?

Setting Shifts

COVID-19 restrictions required the physical setting of the research to move to virtual online platforms including text, email, Google Forms, Facebook, Instagram, telephone and Zoom. Those restrictions served to emphasize the intangible communal settings and the broad community connections that exist for the participants even though they are grown up and in many cases are living elsewhere. This reflects the unique features of Jewish life, the existence and participation in a broader community, no matter where you go in life, and is a feature of Jewish identity that is not affected by COVID-19 restrictions. In addition, the virtual format allows for freedom of expression about an often hotly debated topic, the Israel Palestine conflict, without having to run the risk of offending anyone in the ways that in person meetings do. The virtual format made it easier to keep focused on the questions and not get lured into a debate about the way to solve the conflict. The focus of this research is not how to solve the Israel Palestine conflict, rather it is how to teach about, for and because of it. The first step is to interrogate what was learned and what, looking back, the participants think they would have liked to have learned.

Most of the participants I invited grew up in San Francisco and throughout their youth attended classes in the supplementary school in the synagogue their families belonged to where I was the education director, with the exception of one who grew up outside the area. A third of them now live across the US with one currently in Peru. Of the participants living in San Francisco, two are now teachers in the same synagogue school.

Review of Participants

To find participants I contacted former students for whom I had contact information via email. I also reached out to former students who I follow on Instagram or asked friends and parents for contact information. I used snowball sampling as a recruitment method to have participants recruit others who might be interested. In total I reached out to 62 individuals. From that initial outreach, 19 signed agreed to participate. Of the 19 questionnaires sent to those who signed the consent, 18 were completed. Three individuals (siblings) refused to participate. The stated reason was that the topic was too hard and divisive and a sore spot in their family. Each of the participants were my former students and were also employed as staff in the school during their high school years between three and fifteen years ago. This study is an interview into their memories, perspectives, reflections, and current understandings of these topics. Six of the participants also met with me individually for informal conversations on Zoom about the questions, their responses and their experiences, and two responded to further follow up questions. It was difficult to find times to meet as a focus group, which was the original plan, which is why I set up virtual office hours (or meeting times) when they could join as they were able.

Table [1] Participants

Pseudonym	Age	Location/city	Major/work	Day School /Supplementary School
Sue	20	SF	Student/Psychology	n/a
Sam	24	SF	Student/Philosophy	Both
Julie	28	SF	Student/Nurse Practitioner	Supplementary school
Mark	23	Denver	Student/Economics	Both
Jim	25	SF	Student/Business	Supplementary school
Eve	24	SF	Psychology/Graduated	Both
Cathy	24	SF	Environmentalist	Supplementary School
Ruth	26	SF	Law School	Supplementary School
John	20	SF	Finance/undergrad	Supplementary School
Mike	22	SF	Recent college grad	Both
Kate	27	SF	Social Worker	Supplementary School
Naomi	28	SF	Jewish Educator	Supplementary School
James	21	SF	Student/Political Science	Supplementary School
Susan	32	Peru	Journalist	Supplementary School
Gary	32	NYC	Rabbinic Student	Supplementary School
Ivan	32	SF	Medical Management	Supplementary School

FINDINGS

In addressing the findings, it's helpful to contextualize a bit more of the Jewish education that I was a part of with the participants when they were children and youth. About a decade ago I started hearing from former students of mine, who were encountering Anti-Israel/pro-

Palestinian activists on college campuses. At the same time teaching assistants in the program, I directed who were undergraduates at a local university were also literally experiencing confrontations daily. Two questions came to mind: 1) Did they have adequate knowledge to be able to engage with their peers in dialogue? 2) What changes in the K-12 curriculum in our supplementary school programs are needed to help our students better understand the situation from multiple perspectives and a peace education lens? I was especially concerned about the interplay and fine line between Anti-Israel/Anti-Zionism and Anti-Semitism that exists in the media, in politics and in everyday life as experienced by my former students. The irony is that in Israel, the Israel Palestine conflict is often referred to as - the situation - *matsav* - and the situation is playing out thousands of miles away on college campuses.

After searching academic literature to see if my concerns for students encountering Israel Palestine have been researched, I found was that there was limited research that investigated directly what my former students were experiencing, although Jewish educators and organizations were beginning to be concerned especially because of the overtones of anti-Semitism, a hot spot.

In late 2017, Moment Magazine began a series of articles about Jewish education. In the first installment, investigative journalist Sarah Breger(2017) set out to explore her experiences as a former Jewish day school student where Israel was presented as mythical. When the hashtag #YouNeverToldMe (Breger, 2017, p.50) became an expression of the shock that some Jewish college students experienced setting foot on diverse college campuses, it caught her attention. To build an understanding of how the participants in my study's experiences compared to what Breger (2017) discovered in her investigation, my participants were asked to complete a questionnaire to answer questions to provide supporting information including demographic

questions about themselves and content questions about what they remember learning about Israel and what they remember learning about Palestine. Reflecting the diversity of engagement within the Jewish world, some of my former students participated in formal Jewish education from Kindergarten (or even pre-school) to 12th grade. Others who started their formal Jewish education later and ended earlier, missed the foundational curriculum of the history and geography of Israel and the Israel Palestine conflict, as well as the history of Jews during the diaspora. Another consideration is how or where the education took place.

Jewish American Israel Education Excludes Key Historic Events

One of the key findings that participants' responses suggested is a gap between what they were taught about the founding of the state of Israel and what they were not taught (or later found out); that is, their Jewish American Israel education excluded key historical events. Much of Jewish education is in informal settings such as summer camp or youth groups and lacks the adherence to fact-based curriculum, focusing more on emotional and cultural connections and relying on second hand experiences, magnifying the potential to carry forward as bias rather than truth. When asked what they remembered, except for one respondent who said, "I don't remember," only one in this study mentioned Palestine/Palestinians. Much of what they remembered clearly reflected what Breger (2017) called the unspoken goal of "love of Israel" (p.52). It was also exactly what I remember saying to the teacher, one of those university students, who wanted to begin his Israel unit for 4th graders (9 year olds) with the Israel Palestine conflict and I remember telling him, "we can teach them to love Israel, but we cannot start with Israel Palestine." These examples signal what was reflected in other responses, that a lack of how to discuss controversial and painful histories in age-level appropriate ways or

because of a desire to promote love for Jewish identity, the full Israel/Palestine history was omitted or glossed over.

In quantifying the responses to the question: What do you remember? 60% of the responses fell under key categories that are Jewish identity markers: homeland, identity, pride, history, travel, family and friends. The responses to this question are similar to an analysis of the aspect of the problem addressed by Sheps (2009). Sheps explores how methods of education used in K-12 Jewish schools impact the ways that Jewish students see themselves, each other, and their relationship to Israel Palestine and how these methods reinforce Zionist ideologies, beliefs and loyalties. Sheps' findings demonstrate that methods of education used by diaspora communities such as the two schools in his study influence the ways that the students perceive their Jewish identity and influence their relationship to the conflict in Israel Palestine by reinforcement of Zionist ideology and beliefs. This is in sharp contrast to what Ken Stein, the founder and president of The Center for Israel Education (CIE) at Emory University states, "Israel is not just about who's arguing with whom. It has to do with Israeli literature...culture... economy... and the role that Israel plays in Jewish identity worldwide" (Breger, 2017). To an outsider, words like Zionism and ideology may sound political but for my research participants - half of whom have family who live in Israel, twelve of whom have been to Israel and have deep connections they made with Israeli teachers and camp counselors, this is personal, and Israel is a very real part of who they are. The data generated by the question - What do you remember learning about Israel? - provides a snapshot of a spectrum of predictable communal perspectives and concerns:

- Don't remember
- It was a Jewish State
- An independent state
- A nation for Jews

- Because of Holocaust
- A place for Jews
- Safe place for Jews after the holocaust/but isn't very safe
- A lot of Jews live there
- They speak Hebrew
- It's in the desert
- Shared holy spaces
- Its where the Torah is set
- The promised land in the Torah
- Other people were there when the Jews arrived 5000 years ago.
- I never felt the entitlement that others did.

From current events, it would appear that the most significant aspect of the modern state of Israel is its conflict with the Palestinian Authority. Hassenfeld (2017) and Reingold (2017) in two separate studies, like Sheps (2009), analyzed high school students' writings about Israel Palestine identified narrative themes including the controversial narrative of Palestinian displacement, and the contrast to the foundation story they had already learned. Similarly, the responses to the questions by my former students, repeatedly expressed that looking back, they felt under informed and without an understanding about what shaped the conflict, they asked for unbiased accounts of events surrounding the founding of the state of Israel, more about the Palestinians, to not be taught Zionism, to hear the truth, to learn less about Israel and more about diaspora Jewish identity, more context and critical history. In sum, the responses of the participants in this study point to a gap about the founding of Israel and the Jewish/Palestine conflict.

There is another factor to consider that adds to the pedagogic complexity - the underlying connection between Jewish identity and the state of Israel. Reingold (2017) refers to his head of school's rationale for a semester of Israel Studies in a North American high school, believing that it would add to their Jewish identity and their identity as a diaspora Jew. Israel education in North American Jewish schools universally includes building a strong Jewish identity as a key educational goal reflecting the on-going challenge that I experienced as a

Jewish leader. We call it school, we have measurable pedagogic goals, and at the same time stress the overall immeasurable importance of imparting a feeling of connection and belonging in the students, a feeling that is essential to Jewish culture and peoplehood.

Table [2]. Participants' age range of Learning about the Holocaust & Palestine

Age range they learned about the Holocaust (N=18)	Age range they learned about Palestinian Displacement and Jewish/Palestinian Conflict (N=16)
0-7 years old (N=7)	7-9 years old (N=2)
8-11 years old (N=6)	10-13 years old (N=5)
12-14 years old (N=5)	14-17 years old (N=8)
	18 years old (N=1)
Median Age = 9	Median Age = 13

Related and of interest is the relationship between when this group remembers learning about the Holocaust and when they remember learning about the displacement of Palestinians during the founding of the state of Israel. Of the 18 questionnaire participants, 5 learned of the Holocaust under the age of 6, 4 between 7 and 8, 3 learned in 5th grade (when it was introduced formally into curriculum) and 4 learned in middle school when it is part of European history covered in secular middle school, with a median age of 9. In contrast, the questionnaire responses received concerning learning about the displacement of Palestinians averaged older, were older with two participants learning between the ages of 7 and 9, four in middle school, five in junior and senior years of high school and one in college with a median age of 12-13. The differences in the age of learning about the Holocaust and the age of learning of the displacement of Palestinians during the formation of the state of Israel raise many questions to further

investigate. Questions abound about why can the Holocaust be taught in age-appropriate ways, and not the Palestinians displacement/conflict?

Jewish American College Students Unprepared for Dialogue

The information gathered about the participants' experiences when they entered college and had greater opportunities to interact with Palestinian American students reflect that they lacked information both from what they learned in Jewish settings and from their communal and cultural experiences growing up. Learning about someone differs from getting to know someone. The limited exposure to the Palestinian narrative within the context of Israel education until High School is exacerbated by the fact that there are fewer students enrolled in Jewish secondary supplementary school programs than in elementary school programs and that Jewish Day school attendance is available to a very small sampling of Jewish American students. Additionally, programs that do not bring Jewish students face to face with Palestinians increase the objectification of Palestinians and the danger of the single-story narrative of the Israel Palestine conflict. Asked whether they know any Palestinians, the questionnaire participants who reported knowing Palestinians also reported avoiding conversation about the conflict. The one exception among my respondents was "Kate" who lived across the street from a Palestinian American family and spoke of meeting people in the middle of the road between their homes and talking with each other: "because I lived across the street from a Palestinian family, I had been aware of the displacement of their people for some time before I learned about it in school."

These comments tell a story about the participants' experiences and also describe areas of potential, these are the areas that offer educational direction, especially when peace is the goal:

In college "Kate" shared, "Palestinians did not want to talk to me in college once they found out my dad is Israeli." "Ruth" shared "I had only read about Palestinians oppression in news stories." "James" shared, "Even though I know Palestinians, I have never heard this part of [their] story." The responses to many questions about knowing

Palestinians or their full story all followed this same sentiment: of not knowing or hearing their stories first hand, or not knowing them well enough. Even when a participant's best friend is middle eastern/Palestinian she did not know this part of their lived experiences or history.

Research illustrates that barriers exist for Jewish college students to learn about Palestinian narratives and history. Evidence of this can be found in Dessel, et al., (2014) who, referring to Jewish students claim, "Interactions between students' political views about Israel and family and parents' belief predicted student attitudes about Palestinians" (p.365). The data gathered through my study confirms that student's belief systems concerning Israel Palestine develop from a variety of perspectives that represent the diversity of the Jewish community and the family history of the participant. Those influences include: personal connection to the Holocaust, family living in Israel, family refuge story, and degree of observance. The questionnaire responses to the question Have you ever discussed the Israel Palestine conflict with a Palestinian? fall into three general categories: those who have not, but would like to, those who have and agree to disagree, and those who have participated in scripted facilitated experiences.

Similarly, the findings of Yazbak et al (2015) indicate that even though normalization of the power imbalance in Israel Palestine is felt among students who took the four semester Intergroup Dialogue (IDG) class at the University of Michigan taught by the researchers, Arab and Jewish American college students want to know more about each other. Their research indicates that both Jewish and Arab college students enter college knowing very little about each other or each other's narrative of events leading up to the founding of the state of Israel. The responses to the study's questionnaire support their research as well. The length of the 73-year-old conflict and wars, spanning several generations, itself creates a barrier that becomes part of family narratives and reinforces differences that are focused on two people wanting the same

land 7,000 away in the Middle East. One of the recurring themes in responses is truth, generating a long list about areas they wanted to know more about, these include:

- Unbiased account of events surrounding the founding
- More about the Palestinians
- About the treatment of Palestinians
- More context
- Critical history
- Still don't understand the events around the founding of Israel
- Disconnect in what taught
- Missing details
- Israel's security
- Conditions for Palestinians
- Perspective of an Israeli
- Not given clear picture of Israel's problems

Related to this, Yazbak et al (2015) investigates how Arab American college students' experiences are also impacted by the Israel Palestine conflict. The authors indicate that there is a gap in the research of this demographics' experiences on American college campuses, especially given the growing campus movements to BDS, Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions. The researchers made inferences from the small sampling who responded to postings on campus listserves, to begin to interrogate the Arab/Palestinian experience and how that experience fits into the context of the Jewish/Israeli American narrative. In some ironic way both Jewish American college students and Arab American college students are thrown into the political arena on campus, each feeling unprepared, each of them reenacting a conflict 7,000 miles away, each with insufficient knowledge of the other. The participants in this study expressed deep concerns:

- Jewish identity as a defense
- Prejudice at a young age
- Pro-Israel Bias
- Overwhelming
- That the fighting will not end
- The shared religious spaces
- Effects of colonialism
- Never achieving peace

- Always remember the day that Israel became independent

These phrases point to a series of existential concerns about whether the conflict could ever be resolved with comments like “the fighting will not end” and “never achieve peace.” They also expressed concern that the importance of Israel to Jewish identity should not be a reason to erase the Palestinians. They recognize a strong Israel bias with Israel’s actions always being justified in how the history of the founding of the state of Israel was presented to them. They found a similarity between how the treatment of Palestinians in the occupied zones reminded them of the oppression of African Americans in the United States. From the perspective of young adulthood, they wondered how changes can occur when there is ingrained prejudice from such a young age.

In summary, research demonstrates that Jewish American college students lack preparation to dialogue about the Israel Palestine conflict. This includes: (a) Dessel et al (2014) who addressed the gap in the literature dealing with the barriers for American Jewish college students in addressing Palestinian perspectives; (b) Yazbak, et al (2015) who examine how American college students both Jewish/Israeli and Arab/Palestinian position themselves around the topic of normalization in Intergroup Dialogue; and (c) Yazbak et al (2018) who explore whether and how Arab American college students engage with the Israel Palestine conflict on campus. Taken together with research noted above, data collected with this questionnaire supports the claim that Jewish American college students are not prepared to dialogue about the Israel Palestine conflict and presents many gaps that need to be filled.

Potential of Praxis

The research cited in this section demonstrates the challenges to bringing theory into praxis. The participants in this study experienced first-hand in their k-12 Israel education and are experiencing in their post-secondary school life on campuses and in the work world the gaps in their Israel education. Analysis of research that suggests that praxis, intergroup dialogue, shared

experiences and emphasis on peace education and coexistence - the practical aspects of education - reinforces the effect that praxis can have on behavior change. Praxis is the “how to” of the theory and provides guidance for Jewish American teachers who have the important job of presenting the topic to children while negotiating conflicting communal goals. From my experiences training teachers to present the topic of Israel in the classroom, praxis is what teachers ask for the most, asking for materials, lesson plans and activities with which to bring the topic to life. The participants’ perspectives cry out for including the narratives of Israelis and Palestinians in Israel education. In the following section I make connections to how the literature informs this need, and provide Peace Education as a pathway for curricular interventions.

To begin, research illustrates that there is a need to set the stage for interventions in how we teach Jewish children about Israel. Evidence of this can be found in Bekerman (2007) who cites his many years of ethnographic research on the topic of co-existence between Israel and Palestine. Supporting evidence can be found in the responses to questions posed in this thesis ‘s questionnaire. Bekerman (2007) offers alternative approaches for a seemingly intractable situation stressing that there is a need for new criteria for understanding the Israel Palestine conflict. Bekerman (2007) frames intergroup dialogue from an active peace perspective needed to even make open conversation possible. It suggests that the participants need to step outside their identity in order to see each other. This view puts Jewish identity as taught and experienced in K-12 Israel education at odds with peace education and a barrier to being open to getting to know the other.

The internal and external conflicts experienced by both Jewish and Arab American college students are driven by the same dynamics of group belonging and cultural identity as in the state of Israel. Stepping outside Jewish identity is not an easy exercise for Jewish young

people who have grown up in Jewish communal institutions. Jewish identity building starts at a very young age, even with how Jewish children are named. For instance, traditionally, Jewish children are named for a deceased family member, and in that way the connection to family history is reinforced. Traditional names for Jewish children are rooted in the stories in the Hebrew Bible, a central organizing document for the Jewish people. A cornerstone of Jewish identity is the Hebrew name which connects the person's identity to the collective narrative. One of the questionnaire participants recalled:

I remember that I learned about Joshua, the spy, because he shared the same name as me. I remember that when the Israelites finally arrived to Israel, the land was occupied, and the spies were glorified.

This reflects a powerful connection to Jewish identity, Jewish history and the land of Israel that is part of this participant's sense of self from an early age.

Another participant recalled:

...history discussions around the second temple period through modern history helped to form an understanding about the history of Israel and subsequently encouraged my Jewish voice to react to my people and religion being affected in a negative manner.

Another participant shared their connection to their identity:

In religious school I was proud to be Jewish and felt connected to Israel. Now, although I am proud to be Jewish, I am ashamed that Jews are directly connected to Israel. If I had learned more about the Palestinian conflict during religious school, I may not have been as excited about Judaism.

This is an example of a former student who is struggling:

I see my Jewish identity as divorced of Israel. Israel has no bearing on my Jewish identity. What I learned and internalized about being Jewish is so different from the values I see Israel representing that I hold one without regard for the other.

This is an example of being proud:

I do remember feeling proud to be part of such a rich cultural community and proud of the Jewish people for coming together after such awful experience [Holocaust]. The resilience of the Jewish people was my greatest takeaway and it felt like such a privilege to be in Israel.

Evidence of this existential quandary comes up in Zakai (2014) who claims that central to the goals of Israel education is developing and maintaining a personal and positive connection to the state of Israel. Jewish identity is a universal Jewish quandary not only for educators responsible for its transmission but also for the students as they navigate their own positionality especially in relation to the state of Israel and how it is perceived through the Israel Palestine conflict in the world's eye.

Taken together with Zakai (2014), Zakai (2019) and Bekerman (2007) the thoughtful and personal responses to this questionnaire highlight the on the ground challenges that Israel education faces in framing, maintaining and strengthening American Jewish connections to the state of Israel in spite of and because of the Israel Palestine conflict. One of the participants commented that I should know what they learned since I directed the programs that they participated in and know what they were taught.

This response raised questions that led me to invite participants to join in face-to-face conversation on Zoom to share and to discuss what they felt are the biggest issues for them today. Ultimately, six of the participants dropped into Zoom office hours to share more of their personal concerns with me:

- I wish I did not have to deal with this
- I can't rely on Israel for my Jewish Identity
- I would rather talk about God than Israel
- I sometimes feel like an outlier

- Need to tie Israel education to social justice
- I would like to know why Israel is tied to broader American politics
- I am concerned about omissions in secular education such as the Holocaust and other genocides
- Social media distorts history and fact
- Israel is part of our narrative
- How do we rationalize the roots of the Israel Palestine conflict in the Torah?
- Sometimes I am embarrassed by Israel
- Is there a cover-up going on?
- At this point in time after 9 months of COVID there is a lot of Israel apathy among my Jewish friends.

The general feeling that learning about the complexity of the founding of the modern State of Israel needs to occur in middle school and high school when students are more mature, is countered by the challenges of supplementary school education to other extracurricular activities of teenagers. Reframing younger American students' Israel education experiences to include the voices of all the residents of the people who live in Israel Palestine could be pivotal in promoting a culture of peace by presenting them in a peace building format.

There is concern about the objectification of the Palestinians - studying about them rather than getting to know them. Evidence that supports this claim demonstrates that students who do not have a complete picture of the historic events that led to the founding of the state of Israel are unprepared to interact with peers when they attend college and unprepared to participate in dialogue with supporters of Palestine and Arab American students. Evidence from the questionnaire points to the lack of knowledge of Palestinians and the Israel Palestine conflict one

reason why dialogue between Jewish and Palestinian young people feels difficult and awkward. In addition, the experiences related in the questionnaire responses confirm that Jewish American students downplay their connection to Israel and are apathetic and circumspect about Israel. One of the most interesting findings from the research was that both Jewish and Arab students expressed interest to learn more about each other. Results from the questionnaire confirmed a desire to interact more and support the claim and body of evidence addressed, that learning the history of the founding of the state of Israel at an early age can provide opportunities to engage with peers to support creating a culture of peace within which open informed dialogue becomes the norm. The gap in what students learn about the founding of the state of Israel and what they don't learn about the Palestinian people is reflective of a gap in research that this thesis seeks to begin to fill.

Peace Education

Peace education in areas of conflict is often considered in broad strokes with big goals to effect huge changes or so it seems when reading the wisdom of the leaders in the field reviewed for this research include: Galtung (2018), Reardon (2000), Bekerman (2012) and Zembylas (2012). Conflict, however, is ultimately personal; personal in who is most affected by actions that are governed by politics and power and decisions made remote by time and space. The themes that emerge across multiple areas of peace education in areas of conflict provide a structure within which to analyze individual conflicts such as the Israel Palestine conflict. (Bajaj & Hantzopoulos, 2016) This thesis has investigated in what ways the conflict affects Jewish American students when they encounter Pro-Palestinian Anti-Israel activism on college campuses. This research has investigated through the eyes of former students of the researcher the foundation for understanding the conflict that their formal Israel education provided. The

research provided a personal look back at how the educational pedagogy helped or fell short of providing adequate and relevant information in the words of people who experienced it. By relating their own experiences and their own vision for the future, the participants in this study bridge a history of a war and how it affects them and a future with the potential for something different, within the framework for peace education. For them, that bridge is built on two key Jewish principles - speaking the truth (*emunah*) and upholding justice (*tzedakah*) - and are the path to peace (*rodef shalom*). Peace exists at the center of multiple social constructs, ways of organizing for the common good, which are generally accepted aspirations for survival. These are complex but attainable goals. (Galtung, 2018)

The truth is that when this group of former students were enrolled in religious school the full story about Israel's fight for independence could not be told. One compelling reason was that it countered the popular myth. Another was the oft used concern that exposing children to depictions of violence threatens to their sense of well-being. Another was the fear that by exposing children to the parts of the history that exposed wrongdoing their Jewish identity would be weakened. What the participants remember about learning of the conflict speaks to the complexity of the region of social orders that Galtung refers to and to the complex ways that the participants have created their current understanding:

There is a large disconnect between what I feel is being taught and what Jewish young adults have to come to realize as they learn of others' experiences
The topic was always presented in a pro-Israel light, though the degree of this certainly varied by subject

I feel like the Israeli-Palestinian conflicts are such a mess of he said/she said, and it feels overwhelming at times to learn the truths and create my own opinions.
I honestly don't remember being told any of the details about it other than it was formed in light of the Holocaust, and that it was an ally to the USA. I think there are a lot more details that they could have gone into about its formation.
Israel's ability to continue to sustain itself despite rampant anti-Semitism and increased tensions in the region.

I am concerned that Palestinians have poor living conditions to the Israeli government. I am concerned that the fight will not end soon. I am concerned that both sides have such prejudice from such a young age.

My concerns had to do with how holy spaces and Jerusalem in particular would be shared by all parties who they were important to.

Around what? I have a lot of concerns about a lot of things. Around Israel? That it's nation seemingly unwilling to grapple with the colonial nature of its founding and is currently treating members of its population like second class citizens. I am additionally frustrated by the way the U.S. postures it and how evangelicals use it as a prop. Also, the way Jewish identity is utilized to defend colonial action by both the U.S. and Israel.

I was very upset as the daughter of an Israeli at the idea that anyone would not like Israel. I didn't understand how Israel was different from other countries.

We will never come to a peaceful two state solution.

My main concerns were about human rights in Israel, and about people in the Jewish community that surrounded me not thinking critically enough about Israel. I am concerned for the future of the land, and for ALL the people who live there, especially the folk living in the West Bank and Gaza Strip (anywhere occupied by the government). My concerns are that youth do not have a reason to feel connected to Israel, as many of us feel our Jewish identity is not defined by Israel.

These reflections do well to define the absence of peace in Israel Palestine in the eyes of American Jewish young people as they try to find their own position in this continuum between peace and violence including concern for human rights, bias and manipulation through misinformation. They also present the picture of what it is like for Jewish American students to be in the middle of a dispute, because they are Jewish, because of their identity, although they are 7,000 miles away and hardly know any Palestinians at all. Their concern for human rights creates hope and highlights the connection between Jewish values and Galtung's pairing of non-violence and social action. (Galtung, 2018)

When viewed through Reardon's lens of peace education, we have to remember that we are considering how the Israel Palestine conflict affects children educated in Jewish American

schools as reflected on by former students of the researcher between the ages of 20 and 32. They are in the conflict and outside the conflict at the same time. It is their homeland's conflict and by extension their conflict, it is their identity's past, present and future and therefore their own existential conundrum, and they are Americans. "We live in a world of disparities where only few enjoy advantages, a world of hopelessness." (Reardon, 2000) My former students feel these disparities in their responses concerning the Palestinian people and at the same time see disparities here in the US and protest them. I see a parallel between the key Jewish values that these students learned: truth, justice and peace and Reardon's belief that peace is possible when people are educated to seek mutually beneficial goals, creating what she calls a culture of peace. Creating a culture of peace is different than only reacting to violence and war. A culture of peace provides an ongoing foundation to build collaborative social structures that are absent when a people is 'othered' or erased from the narrative as happens when the narratives, histories and stories of the Palestinian people are omitted from the story of the founding of the state of Israel.

Central to the work of Bekerman and Zembylas is how the influences of collective memory as created through narrative, impact the way students, parents, teachers and institutions interact. Less than half of the participants know any Palestinians personally and two have Palestinian friends but do not know their stories and do not talk about the Israel Palestine conflict with them. When considering what actions, it takes to create, maintain and further peace the absence of actually meeting and getting to know Palestinians and Palestinian Americans is a serious omission, and while my students may have learned about peace they haven't learned for peace. The absence of the narratives of Palestinians creates a barrier to open dialogue and sets up a no man's land and establishes a distance that makes it ok to not discuss the Israel Palestine conflict and establishes an artificiality in the relationship, reinforcing the otherness to which

Palestinians are subjected, and erases their existence. For the one participant who had Palestinian neighbors growing up, the value of getting to know each other is clear: I grew up across the street from a Palestinian family, and they invited me to their home in the West Bank when I went to Israel, but my mom was too worried I would be unable to return home, so I unfortunately never went there. I have heard some of their stories, but the feelings of community, generosity, loving-kindness and respect are at the core of this family and their relationships with others.

SUMMARY

Clearly, in order to foster peace education all aspects of the Israel Palestine conflict must be confronted. If Jewish American students are going to be able to understand the Israel Palestine conflict, they need to know all aspects of the history and they need to respect all the people that live there. Jewish American students have a unique kind of agency in this conflict with an identity that straddles two countries and the ability to influence peace outcomes through advocacy, politics and media as long as they have the tools to do it by becoming possible design theorists and explorers for different peace outcomes. (Bekerman and Zembylas, 2011)

Challenges exist, not small among them is the issue of Jewish identity that has been central to the Jewish education cause. Overemphasis of the centrality of Jewish identity has led to keeping certain truths hidden and has encouraged a personal Jewish mythology. The mixed message to “create a peaceful and democratic society where all groups can exist” and “a desire that the steps taken will not debilitate the hegemonic group identity,” (Bekerman and Zembylas, p.215) is as much a central challenge to peace education in areas of conflict as it is to my former students:

In religious school I was proud to be Jewish and felt connected to Israel. Now, although I am proud to be Jewish, I am ashamed that Jews are directly connected to Israel. If I had learned more about the Palestinian conflict during religious school, I may not have been as excited about Judaism.

Education is a social process that has the potential to enact change. Everyone has a cultural context and rather than recreate the conflict in how we teach about Israel, educators have the opportunity to help their students become collaborators and creators and to use education for what it was designed for. (Bekerman & Zembylas, 2012) In this case creating a culture of peace.(Reardon, 2000)

Recently I had the opportunity to hear two women speak to each other at a local synagogue. They are both members of the Parents Circle, a joint Israeli Palestinian organization for bereaved families from both Israel and Palestine and they speak to people around the world. When asked what was the most important value that they hoped would come out of their work they each said that there is nothing without peace. Peace education includes interaction between individuals, cultures/identities and learning; interactional, contextualized, historicized processes. (Bekerman & Zembylas, 2011)

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

The first time I heard the term “the Palestinian exception” was when I attended a workshop at Teachers4SocialJustice (T4SJ) two years ago. The workshop was called Teaching Palestinian and was put on by members of AROC, Arab Resource and Organizing Center, San Francisco State University students and was focused on the experiences of Palestinian children in the San Francisco Unified School District. The presenters focused on the history of the Palestinian people, the history of the Israel Palestine conflict and the challenge for students to find their history and identity in the curriculum they were taught from. It was the first time I heard the term, “Palestinian exception,” which refers to the omission of references to Palestinian history, erasure of a people and an identity. That got me thinking about how the Israel Palestine conflict is taught to Jewish American students in Jewish educational settings and the meaning of “the Palestinian exception” in that context. (Sheftel-Gomes, 2019)

That workshop set me on a quest to investigate in what ways I participated in “the Palestinian exception” while leading Israel education programs, writing Israel curriculum for K-12 Jewish American supplementary school classrooms. Israel education is geared to strengthen Jewish American students’ connections with the modern state of Israel and to enhance the centrality of the land of Israel to Jewish identity. There is a long list in my memory of the times that Palestine and Palestinians were not included in Israel curriculum: not in the timeline from Torah to modern times at the Israel teach-in, not in the clever motivating exercise of creating maps of Israel using different kinds of ice cream and sprinkles like Breger experienced growing up (2017), not even in the frequent recounting of battles, victories and losses. This was intentional, limited by communal politics and competing stances about a conflict on the other

side of the globe which is a flashpoint even in a classroom 7,000 miles away from the contested land of Israel Palestine, on college campuses and on social media.

The Israel Palestine conflict is not an easy topic, it is one that is often avoided in order to keep peace within families and institutions. At a recent Jewish educator's conference there were no sessions about Israel, let alone Palestine, although at least one third of the two hundred and twenty-five sessions related to anti-racism and social justice in the US. In a paper published this summer in +972 Magazine, the question is raised - Why are US Jews standing up for Black lives and not Palestinian lives. (Kroll-Zeldin, 2020) This question illustrates the corner that American Jews have backed themselves into concerning standing up for Jewish values. Standing up for Black Lives Matters exemplifies the core Jewish values that we say are central to Jewish identity, yet, as Kroll-Zeldin points out, when we do not apply them universally and in this case to the Palestinian people, those Jewish values diminish. As this study's participants see it, Israel's treatment of Palestinians is why they feel less connected to the state of Israel and for them, being Jewish is different from the values Israel represents. They are proud to be Jewish yet ashamed to be directly connected to Israel whose leaders don't see the hypocrisy of doing what Columbus did in the Indigenous Americans, to Israel. ("Kate")

RECOMMENDATIONS

In many ways, Jewish day schools and supplementary schools' inclusion of Jewish values in their pedagogy and praxis provide the moral compass that is the essential foundation to move forward with an Israel education that includes the Palestinian narrative. The moral lessons that Jewish American students learn from Torah are illustrated in the lives of Biblical characters who are often deeply flawed humans who must struggle with moral dilemmas, face great danger

and ultimately survive to fulfill the commandments to be partners with G-d in repairing the world. Those values and examples provide a roadmap to face, not hide, the struggles that the Palestinians have endured at the expense of the founding of the state of Israel. We cannot solve the Israel Palestine conflict inside Jewish American day schools and supplementary schools. What we can do is overcome fear and provide an Israel education that encourages understanding and perspective through compassion and understanding of all the people in Israel and Palestine and makes the invisible visible.

The connection between the land of Israel and the Jewish people in the diaspora is as indelible as the disconnections for the Palestinian American students in the San Francisco public school classroom who find their story overlooked in the San Francisco Unified School district classrooms. The attempts to change the California state curriculum to reflect the diversity of students, leads the country, yet in spite of progressive Bay Area attitudes, encounters xenophobia and erasure. Excluding the Palestinian story in history, geography and social studies curriculum in secular schools perpetuates the injustice to the Palestinians, the “Palestinian Exception” that the participants in this study feel so strongly against.

The connection between Jewish values and Israel education is a mandate that is strongly felt by this study’s participants and represents the highest goals of Jewish education. Israel education needs to realign with the Jewish values that are the core of Jewish curriculum, Jewish communal worship and most of all *Tikkun Olam* - repairing our world. The commandment - *Tzedek, Tzedak* (Justice, Justice) thou shalt pursue - is the intersection of core Jewish values and peace education and brings us back to the theoretical framework for this study.

Peace education studies grew out of the horrors of World War II in an attempt to interrogate the forces that disrupted the morality of the world. By examining, defining, and re-visioning the meaning of peace, the groundwork was set for change by enacting social justice. The aftermath of World War II established a governing body, the United Nations grounded in Human Rights, and new countries India and Israel who are still struggling to make human rights a reality. In both situations, countries established to right wrongs, did wrong. It is a monumental task that is weighted down by the very wrongs that they were established to right: who has the right to status, shelter and wellbeing. To succeed, peace education has to be an inclusive process, it has to be in a context that considers the perspectives of all the participants and mostly has to give agency to the participants to be open to solutions that perhaps have not been considered before.

Israel education for American Jewish children need only to return to the core Jewish values that already inform Jewish education so well described by participants in this study when asked to define the connection between treatment of Palestinians, Jewish Values and their own Jewish identity.

That it is my ethnicity or religion does not mean I can ignore it, if anything because it is my people committing immoral action, I have a greater responsibility to stand against it. The Jewish values I was taught are ones of love, compassion, and healing the world. My moral self (while complicated and influence by many factors and traditions) is deeply Jewish and in many ways inseparable from my Jewish self. (“Mike”)

I think that our Jewish values call upon us to be kind to strangers and the weak and therefore we have a special obligation to be kind to the Palestinians, who have been disenfranchised by the creation of a Jewish state. (“Ruth”)

There is much more to learn from this study that Jewish educators could use to frame their thinking about how to teach about the founding of the state of Israel to Jewish American children in K-12 setting. Additional questions remain to be answered such as how to align

schools, homes and communal settings to support “the need to know” as students go on to higher education and work settings. Another question is in what way does omitting the Palestinian narrative in Israel education reflect an innate fear of being the other that is part of the Jewish historic narrative? How is bias reflected in the materials that are used to teach children and how are teachers trained? What are the challenges that teachers experience and how can peace praxis support them?

The writing of this thesis has been an investigation into “the Palestinian Exception” in the K-12 Israel education of the participants in this study and its effect on the participants ability to interact over the Israel Palestine conflict as they went out into the world. The participants were eager to express their opinions and retell their experiences and highly engaged in the topic, whichever side they positioned themselves on. While their knowledge of the experiences of Palestinians during the foundation of the state of Israel may have had gaps in details, their willingness to grapple with the topic and their honesty concerning the effects on their Jewish identity provide insights and signposts for further exploration.

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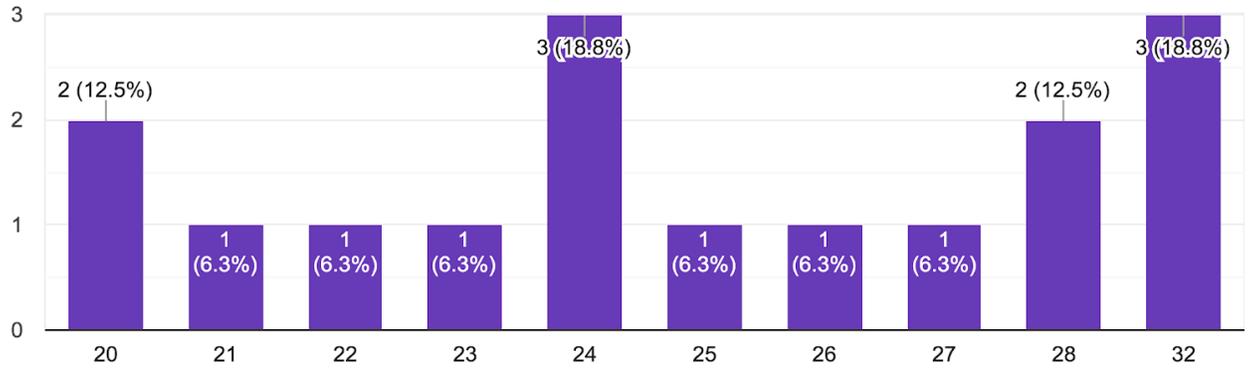
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APPENDIXES

QUESTIONNAIRE CHARTS

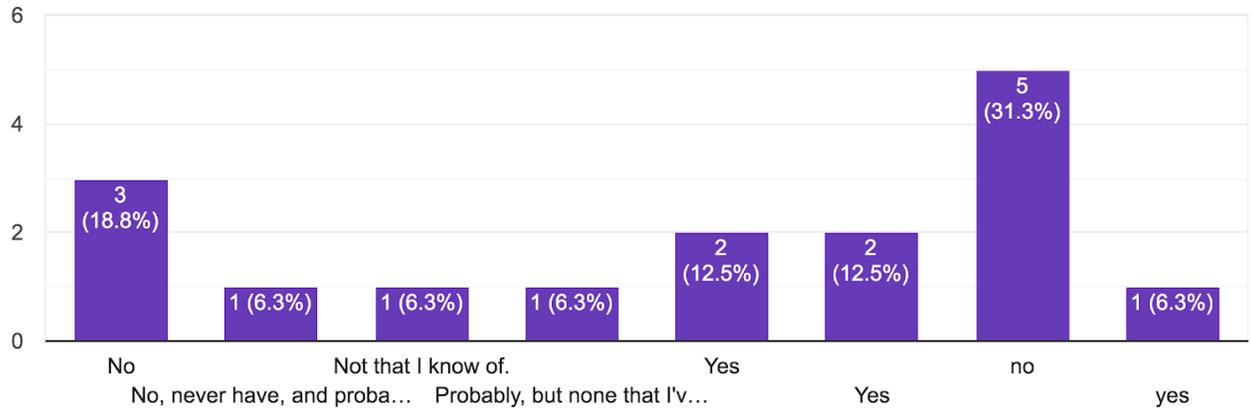
1-How old are you?

16 responses



6-Do you have family in Israel?

16 responses



7-Have you been to Israel?

16 responses

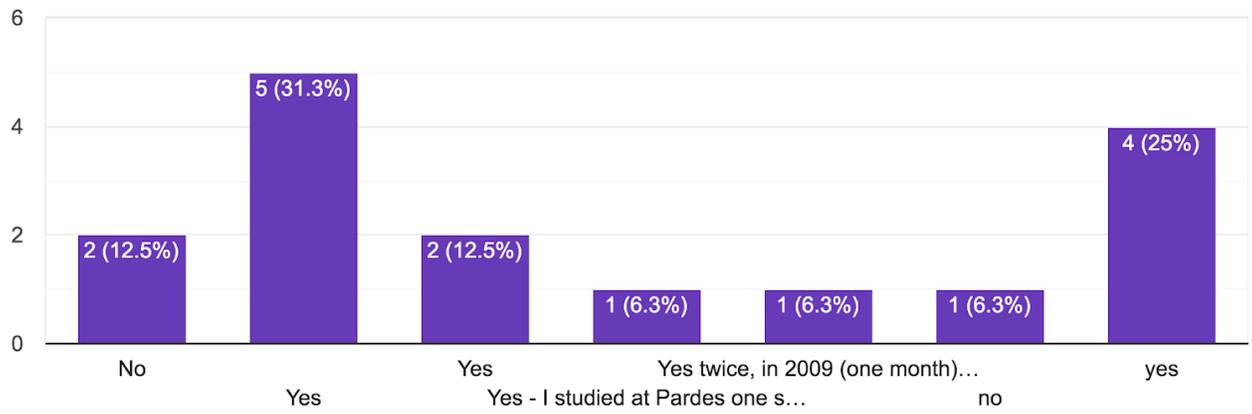


Table [1] Participants

Pseudonym	Age	Location/city	Major/work	Day School /Supplementary School
Sue	20	SF	Student/Psychology	n/a
Sam	24	SF	Student/Philosophy	Both
Julie	28	SF	Student/Nurse Practitioner	Supplementary school
Mark	23	Denver	Student/Economics	Both
Jim	25	SF	Student/Business	Supplementary school
Eve	24	SF	Psychology/Graduated	Both
Cathy	24	SF	Environmentalist	Supplementary School
Ruth	26	SF	Law School	Supplementary School
John	20	SF	Finance/undergrad	Supplementary School
Mike	22	SF	Recent college grad	Both
Kate	27	SF	Social Worker	Supplementary School
Naomi	28	SF	Jewish Educator	Supplementary School
James	21	SF	Student/Political Science	Supplementary School
Susan	32	Peru	Journalist	Supplementary School
Gary	32	NYC	Rabbinic Student	Supplementary School
Ivan	32	SF	Medical Management	Supplementary School

Table [2]. Participants' age range of Learning about the Holocaust & Palestine

Age range they learned about the Holocaust (N=18)	Age range they learned about Palestinian Displacement and Jewish/Palestinian Conflict (N=16)
0-7 years old (N=7)	7-9 years old (N=2)
8-11 years old (N=6)	10-13 years old (N=5)
12-14 years old (N=5)	14-17 years old (N=8)
	18 years old (N=1)
Median Age = 9	Median Age = 13

