

INTEGRATIVE JEWISH EDUCATION = EMOTIONAL BONDING + COMPLEX THINKING

MOVING BEYOND AN EXCLUSIVE FOCUS ON SOLIDARITY

Researchers on Jewish education urge moving beyond an approach that teaches “a love of Israel” with an exclusive focus on Jewish solidarity. An educational message focused exclusively on Jewish solidarity ignores generational change and diversity of opinion regarding social and political changes occurring among both Israeli and non-Israeli Jews.⁷

To expand Jewish education, and integrate Israel meaningfully within it, we need to shift from treating Israel as an isolated or one-dimensional subject towards embedding it in every aspect of Jewish learning. This approach helps students see Israel not as an occasional topic but as a constant, complex part of Jewish belonging, one that complements themes of Jewish continuity, collective memory, and communal responsibility. Success requires an expanded vision of Jewish education where Israel isn’t confined to celebratory moments like Yom Ha’atzmaut but woven into the entire Jewish calendar, narrative, and experience. The following quote provides an example of strengthening students bond to Israel, while also integrating consideration of conflict and socio-political diversity.

"For Yom Haatzmaut this year we focused on personal stories from the State of Israel and the children interviewed parents and staff who lived in Israel at historically important times (ie Operation Moses) and they are creating a magazine based on these stories. This connects children in a personal way with Israel and demonstrates its importance to our school community. I work with 4-11 year olds. My focus is on teaching connections of the Jewish people to the State of Israel but also for the older children that there is conflict that was there before the 7th October and that different types of people live in Israel and we need to learn to live together peacefully, that is what we pray for everyday in our tefillot."

FROM “JEWISH SOLIDARITY” TO FOSTERING “JEWISH BONDING”

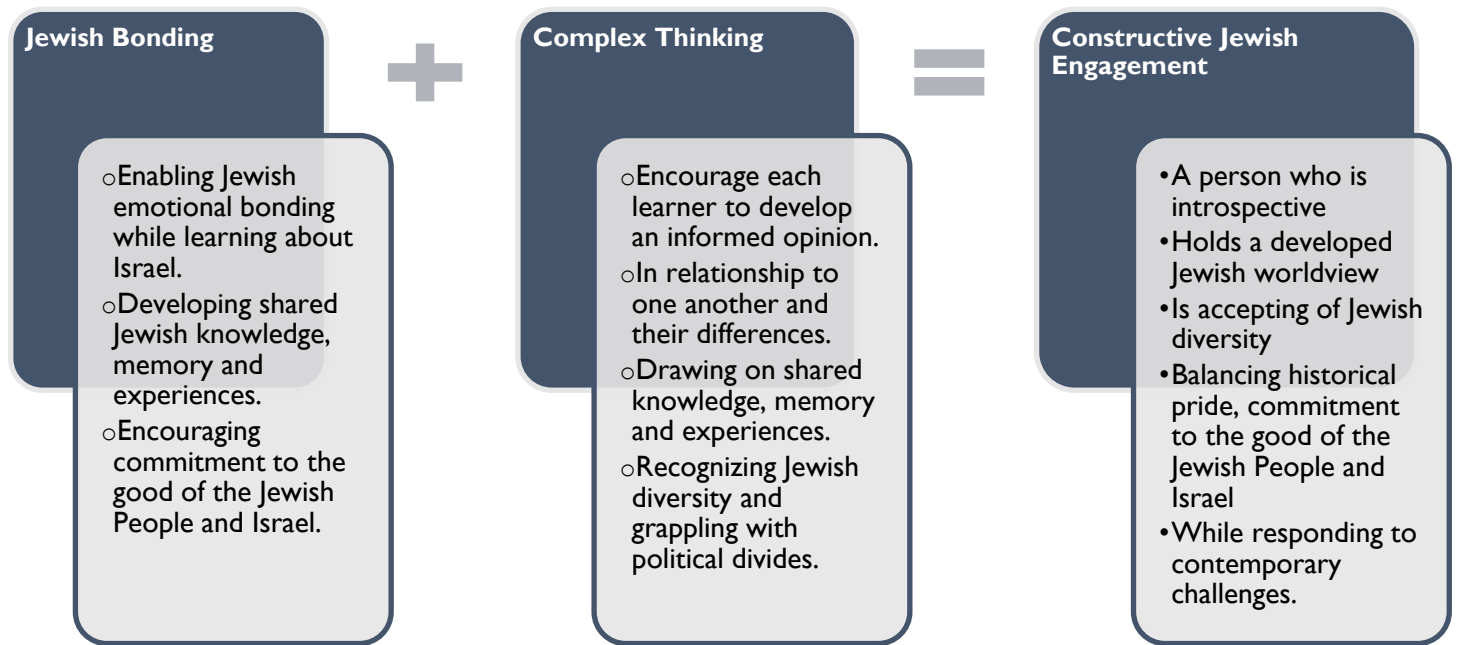
Educational approaches that integrate Israel throughout Jewish education encourage students to think in an expansive or holistic way about Jewish identification. Learning that involves complex narratives—such as Israel’s role in Jewish history, the ongoing Israeli Palestinian conflict, or diversity within Israeli society—requires students to engage with challenging questions. **This approach recasts the idea of “Jewish solidarity” to focus on “Jewish bonding;” it encourages the development of a Jewish self that is introspective, aware of Jewish diversity, and able to balance emotions of historical pride and commitment to the good of the Jewish people with a diversity of Jewish response to contemporary challenges.** It helps students reconcile complex perspectives as integral to collective Jewish identification, a practice that is especially vital in a world where students encounter many different narratives about Israel.

Jewish educators are being asked not only to address the traditional bonding role of Israel in Jewish life but to do so in a way that acknowledges the emotional, generational, and political complexities their students are experiencing. How do you at once enable both Jewish bonding and complex thinking?

1. **Jewish Bonding:** Provide Jewish education in which Israel is a force for positive engagement with being Jewish, promoting commitment to and identification with the Jewish People; and,
2. **Complex Thinking:** Recognize that many Jews are wrestling with critical questions about the Israel’s politics, its role in the broader Middle East conflict and the impact of Israel on Jews who live in other countries, as well as on Palestinians and Arab Israelis.

⁷ Horowitz (2024), Chazan (2016), Sinclair (2013), Grant and Kopelowitz (2012), Pomson et. al. (2009). Many of the chapters in Zakai and Reingold (2024) address this topic from different angles.

Israel in Integrative Jewish Education



A Synagogue Rabbi

Your greatest challenge post-October 7th

• “As an individual I have felt deep Jewish loneliness and have found meaningful sources of connection, I think we have taken the connection of Jewish Peoplehood for granted over the years and we are now seeing a fraying. I realize my connection to the Jewish people is strong and that not everyone has that. My participation in several key experiences (DC rally, Pan-America Maccabi games as a parent, and travel to Israel) have helped me see and experience the importance of Jewish Peoplehood and the connection to Jewish life larger than the 475-household synagogue I serve. The challenge I feel for many average congregants is that we do not connect Jewish beyond our synagogue and that can be isolating.”

Your professional response to the challenge

• “In the immediate aftermath of October 7th I was creating weekly programs to respond to the complexity of Jewish life after the attacks. These programs had diverse focuses including educational, psychological, responding to antisemitism, and connecting to Israel. I just didn't have the capacity as a solo rabbi to keep up with the demand, the diversity of needs and the many demographics needing to be served.”

Please describe one effective or useful program, or piece of educational content or initiative you have put into place .

• “In the fall we partnered with other synagogues, the JCC, federation, the ADL, and the AJC, on responding to antisemitism. The program was for teens and parents.”

Drawing on the research findings, we propose Jewish educators approach the post-October 7th reality through a model that integrates Jewish bonding and complex thinking into their work.

Jewish Bonding

Jewish education at its core fosters a sense of belonging with other Jews in the context of local community and beyond - to both the historical and global Jewish People. Emotional Jewish bonding occurs when learners recognize one another as Jewish, viewing themselves as both part of a local and global community. By intentionally working to cultivate emotional connection, educators strengthen their students' sense of Jewish belonging both to one another and the Jewish People, both in "normal" times and times of crisis. **Without powerful and meaningful bonding experiences, of which Israel is a part, it is unlikely that an individual will arrive at a "positive" answer to questions of: Why does Israel matter to me? How do I relate to the challenges facing the Jewish People today, especially after October 7th?**

TRANSCENDENCE

Bonding moments often trigger emotions of transcendence in which one is lifted out of everyday life, experiencing a consciousness of belonging to a historical and global Jewish People. These are moments when one feels at one with other Jews.

"I was in a camp, and one of the Shlichim had just lost a friend in Gaza. It was the day before Shabbat. And I said to him, if you need help getting home, I can help you get a flight. And he said, this is my home, this camp is my home. There's actually nowhere else I want to be."

SHARED MEMORY, KNOWLEDGE, EXPERIENCE

Bonding moments are anchored and inculcate that which Jews have in common with one another, including shared historical memories, knowledge, and experiences. Moments in which we acquire and experience such knowledge are rooted in actions that are done together as a group, for example through ceremonies involving singing or religious ritual, or other moments in which being Jewish is experienced together.

"When I ask 'where do we face when we're praying?' every single kid in my program can say 'we face where the sun comes up in Jerusalem.'"

"Part of connecting to Jewish peoplehood is about telling the stories... celebrating Shabbat, engaging with Torah, and doing the holidays. These experiences deepen our commitment, and I think we need to foster these connections to strengthen Jewish identity, especially after the challenges we've faced."

Through shared Jewish knowledge and memory, one learns to read the world through Jewish eyes, gaining an understanding of one's personal life, issues of relevance to contemporary Jews, in relationship to Jewish history and the collective Jewish experience.

I designed a program that reflected on the 1983 Eurovision performance in Munich of the song "Chai" by Ofra Haza. The performance commemorated the killing of 11 Israeli athletes at the 1972 Olympics in Munich. 11 years after the Munich attack... she sang Chai [live]. They all wore yellow to signify the yellow stars in the Holocaust. It's like: 'you tried to kill us, and here I am in Munich singing a song about Jewish resilience.'"

KEY LIFE EVENTS

Bonding moments are present at key points in the life of an individual, their Jewish family and community, often expressed through life cycle (celebrating or mourning), commemoration and other types of ceremony.

"The Rabbi had the names of all the hostages... printed onto small pieces of paper... We read those names simultaneously. We didn't do it as a linear reading, 287 names... and we do it every Friday to this day."

[An Israel camp shaliach speaking of another summer camp counselor] "...She gave me a hug and said, 'Yuval, tomorrow when we say the mourner's Kaddish, we're going to say it for your friend [a soldier who fell in Gaza].'... It was just such a powerful moment of human connection, coming together and supporting one another."

"We dedicated so much of our school year to teaching about Israel and commemoration... helping our students understand the emotional and historical significance, not just through events but through their own families' stories. It's about connecting them to the past and the present."

EMPATHY AND COMMUNITY

Bonding occurs through community, when people feel seen and supported.

"The number one thing young Jews are looking for is someone who sees them—I see you, you are okay the way you are."

"People are showing up, looking for spiritual guidance... They're not looking for programs; they're looking for one-on-one relationships and support. They need a connection, especially when they feel they don't have that in other parts of their life."

Complex Thinking

The ability to identify emotionally with other Jews - locally and globally, includes complex thinking and reflection. In this approach, **educators create space for discussions, encouraging deep and meaningful Jewish identification without pressuring learners to adopt a singular narrative that often occurs when only Jewish bonding is the focus.**

Jews develop their personal answer to "why is it important for me to identify as a Jew?" by considering themselves in relation to the diversity of Jewish perspectives, including perspectives on Israel. These are educational moments in which individuals develop a self-understanding as to what type of Jewish life they wish to lead. Individuals develop their personal worldview rooted in values and ideologies through conversations with others in family, friendship, collegiality and community, and formal and informal educational contexts.

Education for complex thinking is vital for fostering an environment where learners can also engage with big questions and challenges that life brings. With a focus on Israel in Jewish education, the goal is to foster a balanced and thoughtful understanding of "Israel's place in my world," helping learners form their own informed opinions.

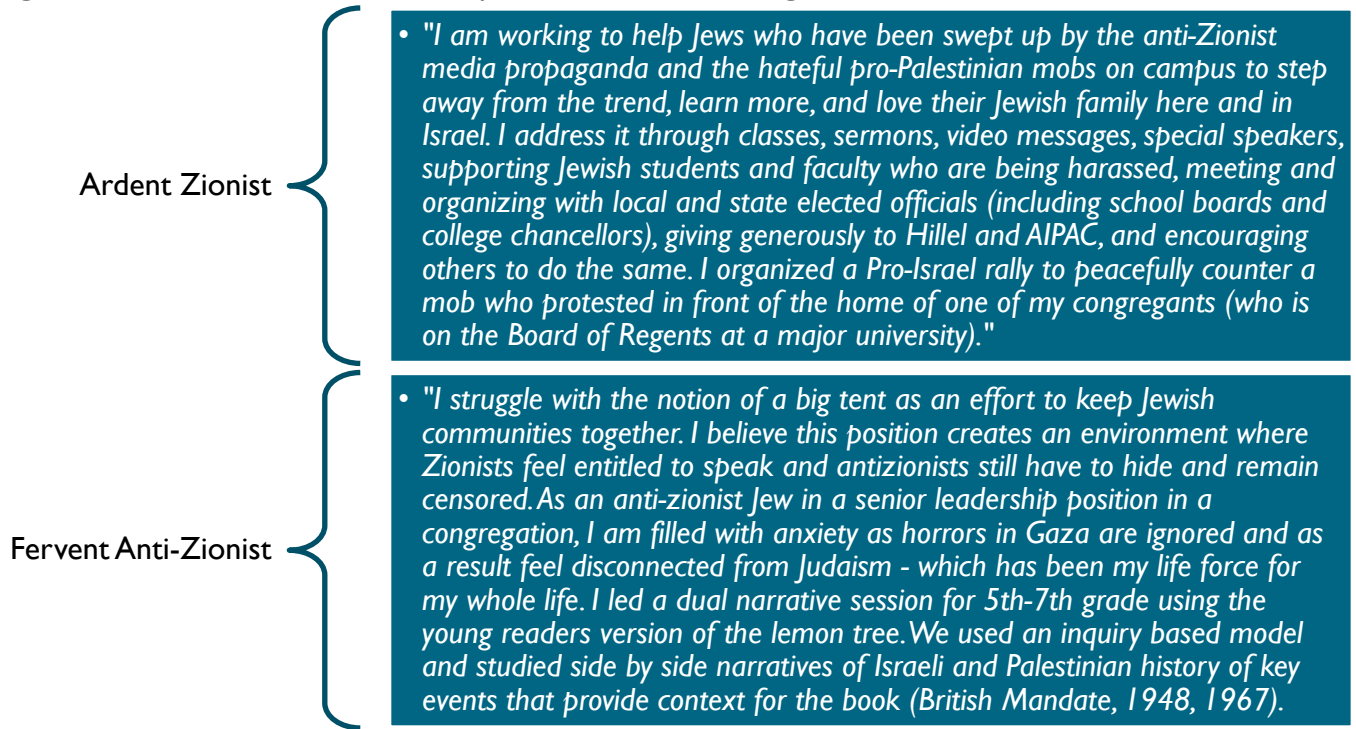
How does the post October 7th period compare to past crises in Jewish history? How did Jews react then? How should we react now? What are the Jewish values and narratives that can help me grapple with this moment? What are the values and narratives of Palestinians or others – Jewish or non-Jewish - who think differently than me are using?

"We believe that by giving our teens more education, more perspective, it gives them more nuanced language so that they can approach any conversation or argument about Israel more equipped... even if it's hard, or especially if it's hard."

Educational moments involving complex thinking might be cordial or not, they can involve conversation, debate and argument, in which each offers an opinion about the way that human and Jewish life *should* be. Self meets society, a moment in which I reflect on who I am, what I want for myself, my family, my community and the society in which I live.

AN IDEOLOGICAL SPECTRUM – ARDENT ZIONISM ↔ FERVENT ANTI-ZIONISM AND ALL THAT IS IN BETWEEN

Zionist ↔ Anti-Zionist: At the book ends of the Jewish ideological spectrum are ardent Zionists and anti-Zionists who regard each other with intolerance and speak in dualistic terms of good and evil.



In between the polar positions, are a range of approaches that accept varying degrees of interpretation or acceptance of alternative points of view, while trying to nurture Jewish bonding. The following are three examples often voiced among survey respondents: 1) teaching multiple or dual narratives, 2) a big tent approach to enable communication across differences and 3) distinguishing between the actions of the government of Israel and Israel the country.

Teaching Multiple or Dual Narratives



A Big Tent: Working to Enable Communication Across Differences

- Your greatest challenge post-October 7th

 - *The monolithic/defensive approach of the organized Jewish Community that is NOT behaving in alignment with Jewish values of pikuach nefesh and 'elu v'elu'. Most Reform Jews believe in tikkun olam but suddenly even the Reform movement has become unidimensional and shaming of diversity.*
- Your professional response to the challenge

 - *"I am working to create spaces for healing and connection, to honour diversity but I feel hampered by the one-sided/not Jewish responses of most people who are scared to question because even the Reform movement has become Orthodox in its response. Where is the big tent that we say we are trying to build????"*
- Please describe one effective or useful program, or piece of educational content or initiative you have put into place

 - *"Interfaith dialogue with a focus on each person bringing one text that helps them to stay hopeful in an increasingly binary/divisive world where religion is weaponized."*

Distinguishing the Government of Israel from Israel the Country

- Your greatest challenge post-October 7th

 - *"How can I continue to be a Zionist in the diaspora when the government of Israel is doing terrible things IN MY NAME. I feel powerless and angry. How has the meaning of Zionism changed? How can I help people separate Judaism as a religion and Israel as a political entity."*
- Your professional response to the challenge

 - *"Remain open minded. Trust the citizens of Israel to step up and get rid of the Netanyahu government and forced expansionism. Facilitate conversations in which people feel safe to express their opinions without fear of rejection from other Jews."*
- Please describe one effective or useful program, or piece of educational content or initiative you have put into place

 - *"On Shabbat mornings, I lead a minyan for 3rd - 6th grade. There is time each week to share the current news, ask for responses to the matzav [situation], and answer student questions about the situation. We also talk about WHERE people get their news and how to decide if the news source is trustworthy."*

ACQUIRING KNOWLEDGE WHILE DEEPENING JEWISH RELATIONSHIPS

A cross-cutting theme in the diverse examples of pedagogy provided above for the purpose of Jewish emotional bonding and complex thinking is the interaction between “knowledge acquisition,” and the development of “interpersonal relationships between learners.” The knowledge learned takes on meaning from the discussions and other types of interactions between the learners and/or the learners and their educator.

The following are five general approaches respondents the survey respondents take that we identify as bringing both Jewish bonding and complex thinking, each emphasizes a particular body of knowledge with a focus on: (1) **emotional engagement**, (2) **Jewish peoplehood**, (3) **historical knowledge**, (4) **contextual understanding**, and (5) **politics and moral knowledge**. Each approach is outlined below with a few examples.

I. Emotional Knowledge: Bridging Bonds and Critical Reflection

The emotional connection to Israel is critical in fostering a strong sense of belonging. Educators are helping students build empathy and emotional awareness while also encouraging them to reflect on their feelings about the conflict and in the process acquiring knowledge about Israel or other related issues.

"My colleagues and I have done our best to offer educational resources and 1:1 support with our teens at this time as they navigate these challenges. This has included emotional support, opportunities to express community solidarity and more. The greatest challenge has been helping the teens feel safe and supported outside of Synagogue/BBYO as they deal with rabid Antisemitism/Anti-Zionism, hate, harassment and so much more. A big role I have played this year is in the public schools attending to issues with teachers and administration as a representative of the Jewish community. We have developed a community program for teens to engage with questions about Israel, be equipped with knowledge to fight misinformation and antisemitism and more."

2. Jewish Peoplehood: Strengthening Collective Belonging through Secular and Religious Rituals, Culture and Text

Educators emphasize the role of **Jewish peoplehood** and the centrality of Israel in Jewish life, using this as a platform to foster both emotional connections. This helps students understand their place within the broader Jewish collective, both historically and in the present day. The work includes Jewish rituals both religious and secular, such as prayers and songs and the study of sacred and other texts to reinforce the connection between students and the broader Jewish world. The emphasis is on shared Jewish culture and experiences of Jews worldwide. While fostering emotional bonds to Israel and the Jewish People – those bonds can range from feelings of solidarity, to grappling with complexity or criticism of Israel.

Text and Prayer

- *"We discussed a Hillel teaching in our first open sanctuary after 10/7. We reminded ourselves of where we were as Americans on the evening of 9/11, and then looked at the text. It was much easier now for most to prioritize, as we did in 2001, the need to be for ourselves, yet not completely having to question who we are by not abandoning completely our concern for others. The greatest discussion focused on our realization that both of these events moved our understanding from an imperative for timely action to a rueful prayer that when the time became right again, we could recalibrate back towards the ideal of these words."*

Popular Culture

- *"I've used a lot of songs that came out since October 7 to show a range of Israeli reactions to the massacre and the war."*

Singing and Learning

- *"I implemented daily and then weekly gatherings of our entire student body (675 students) for prayer, hearing speakers and singing together."*

Singing and Protest

- *"We led a Ceasefire march in November where the students were able to create their own messaging for peace and justice and we walked through our neighborhood singing protest songs and being visible players in the Jewish resistance during this time of extreme bigotry in our community."*

"Teaching the students the information that they need to understand the situation and develop their own opinions about the situation. It felt very rushed as they had no Israel history until that point. I want to teach them in a way where it feels more important than a regular history class. I gave a basic outline of the most important information needed and then filled in the rest as questions arose and as the more creative and interactive lessons were given. I created a version of the changing map of Israel to help my students understand the importance of each of the events we learned about."

4. Contextual Knowledge of the Current Conflict: Media and Critical Thinking

Educators help students understand the current political landscape, focusing on media literacy and contextualizing the conflict in a way that allows for both bonding and complex thinking. Addressing media portrayal of Israel encourages students to think about the narratives they consume, fostering both intellectual engagement and emotional connection to Israel's current challenges. Simplifying current events for younger students helps them form a basic connection to the Jewish people and Israel, while also laying the foundation for more complex thinking as they grow older.

“Working out what information I need to disseminate to my students. What's appropriate and what's inappropriate? I also discuss with colleagues in order to provide a framework and tools for my students that include information but not opinion. An amazing program which I did for 8th grade involved them sending me videos and images that they had seen on social media, and we reviewed them as a class, clarifying the agenda of the poster. The qualifications and information that they may have, whether there is education and knowledge or simply a media following. We encourage the students to ask where does this person know this information from. It was very valuable and didn't insist on one perspective to be taken.”

5. Political and Moral Knowledge as a Tool for Critical Engagement and Connection

Political and moral knowledge helps students engage critically with Israel's role in the modern world, while also fostering a sense of responsibility and connection to the Jewish people. Maintaining open dialogue with students about political beliefs, even when they differ, helps foster connection and understanding, while also engaging with the complexities of contemporary Jewish identity. Ethical discussions around Israel's political actions challenge students to reflect on moral dilemmas, helping them develop critical thinking skills while also deepening their commitment to Jewish peoplehood and Israel's centrality.

“I am a strong Zionist but am furious that there's been no disavowal of Kahanism from major American Jewish institutions, despite Kahanism's role in so much of the current horror show. Meanwhile I am watching my students who engage with Olami get pulled to a rightwing constituency that dehumanizes Muslims. I make sure to maintain good relationships with all students and don't ostracize them when I struggle with the political beliefs they're acquiring because if our organization ostracizes them, it will make them even more steely.”

“My challenge are teens learning the slogan 'the only good Arab is a dead Arab' at another Israel oriented club in our community and then bringing that viewpoint to my group. I have shared that unlike that club, the organization I work for is pluralistic and we do not make such blanket statements. I worked with our Shinshinim [young Israeli working for year in the community] to have meaningful conversation, but I told the students that were only filled with hatred for Muslims that their attitude is not welcome in my organization. We ran a program at a convention highlighting alumni who have died in the war so far. Instead of focusing on how they died, we did community service projects for causes each person was connected to in life.”

INTEGRATIVE EDUCATIONAL GOALS – JEWISH BONDING + COMPLEX THINKING

Ideally Jewish educators engage their learners with Jewish life and Israel, through Jewish bonding and complex thinking. The result is, in the ideal, a deep sense of connection, feeling of Jewish belonging and mutual support while also fostering each individual’s stance toward Israel. This stance can range across a spectrum of opinions, from strong support for the policies of the Israeli government to critical perspectives.

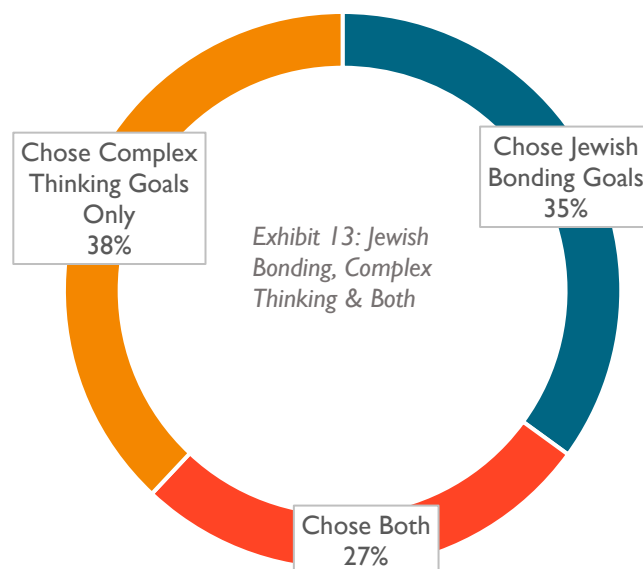
When asked about their educational objectives in responding to fallout from October 7th:

- **Complex Thinking:**
 - 58% of the respondents cite complex thinking goals
 - 41% of these respondents also cite Jewish bonding goals.
- **Jewish Bonding:**
 - 55% cite Jewish bonding goals.
 - Of these 44% also cite complex thinking goals.

Exhibit 12. In the post-October 7th context, which of the following are your principal educational objectives? Select up to 3 choices

	Educational Goals	%
Complex Thinking Goals (selected at least one)	To facilitate respectful conversation and allow for expression of opposing viewpoints	58%
	To encourage complex thinking	
	To encourage grappling with moral challenges	
	To help learners make sense of the situation through a values lens	
Jewish Bonding Goals (selected at least one)	To strengthen a sense of Jewish solidarity	55%
	To nurture a sense of connection to Israel	
	To support advocacy for Israel	
	To promote a commitment for the welfare of other Jews	
Other Choices	To provide knowledge	37%
	To strengthen our community	25%
	To convey hope, and counteract despair	23%
	To convey empathy for Israelis’ suffering	7%
	To convey empathy for Palestinians’ suffering	7%
	To stimulate curiosity	6%
	To support protest of Israeli policy	2%

Overall, 27% choose at least one of the complex thinking and Jewish bonding goals among these three choices (exhibit 13).



JEWISH BONDING AND COMPLEX THINKING BY EDUCATIONAL SECTOR, AGE, GENDER AND POLITICAL ORIENTATION

Approaches to Israel in Jewish education differ based on educator demographics and political orientation regarding both American politics and Israel. We learn that the overall trend shows a strong correlation between age, years of experience and socio/religious/political orientation. The younger, least experienced and more politically left-wing are more likely to only chose complex educational goals, the opposite is the case for those who only choose Jewish bonding goals. Age of learners and institutional sector also show distinct trends. **Note that in no case are those choosing both Jewish bonding and complex thinking goals the largest group. In other words, the majority of Jewish educators tend to emphasize one or the other approach, rather than integrating Jewish bonding and complex thinking.**

Beyond the tables shown here, also see appendix 2 for more detailed information.

AGE

Younger educators are more likely to prioritize complex thinking, while older are more likely to emphasize Jewish bonding. The youngest educators are the least likely to adopt both bonding and complex thinking goals.

Exhibit 14: Age	Chose Jewish Bonding Goals Only	Chose Both	Chose Complex Thinking Goals Only	Total
22 to 24 + 18 to 21	39%	6%	55%	100%
25 to 29	30%	21%	49%	100%
30 to 34	24%	28%	48%	100%
35 to 39	26%	20%	54%	100%
40 or 49	28%	28%	44%	100%
50 or 59	38%	33%	29%	100%
60 or older	43%	27%	30%	100%
NET	33%	26%	41%	100%

GENDER

Female and male educators are similar in terms of their educational goals, with those choosing an alternative gender formulation standing out as far more likely to emphasize complex thinking goals only.

Exhibit 15: Gender	Chose Jewish Bonding Goals Only	Chose Both	Chose Complex Thinking Goals Only	Total
Woman	32%	28%	40%	100%
Man	39%	23%	38%	100%
Non-Binary + Gender Fluid + Gender Queer + Prefer not to say + Other	16%	16%	68%	100%

YEARS IN PROFESSION

Educators with fewer than five years in the profession lean towards complex thinking (59%), while veteran educators are more likely to choose both Jewish bonding and complex thinking goals.

Exhibit 16 Years in Profession	Chose Jewish Bonding Goals Only	Chose Both	Chose Complex Thinking Goals Only	Total
Less than 5	30%	11%	59%	100%
5-9	32%	23%	44%	100%
10-14	29%	27%	44%	100%
15 – 19	31%	27%	42%	100%
20 or more	36%	31%	33%	100%

AGE OF LEARNERS

Educators working with college age and young adult learners are far more likely only choose complex thinking goals and are far likely to choose Jewish bonding goals.

	Chose Jewish Bonding Goals Only	Chose Both	Chose Complex Thinking Goals Only	Total
Exhibit 17: Age of learners				
Early childhood	38%	28%	34%	100%
Elementary school age	38%	27%	35%	100%
Teens (middle and high school)	36%	27%	37%	100%
College Age	21%	25%	54%	100%
Young Adult learners (20's and 30's)	21%	25%	54%	100%
Adults (40+)	31%	23%	46%	100%
Families	32%	29%	39%	100%
Seniors	35%	25%	40%	100%
Other, or more than one of these	33%	23%	44%	100%

to
less

EDUCATIONAL SECTOR

Significant variations exist across the sectors. Jewish day school educators are the most likely to only choose Jewish bonding practices and are among the least likely to only choose complex goals.

In contrast, and in line with the findings on educators working with young adults (see above), those working on college campuses are among the most likely to only choose complex thinking goals. Social Justice/Service Learning and Innovation sectors also stand out as being far more likely to only choose complex thinking goals.

	Chose Jewish Bonding Goals Only	Chose Both	Chose Complex Thinking Goals Only	Total
Exhibit 18: Sector of Jewish Education				
Jewish day school/yeshiva	45%	26%	30%	100%
JCC	41%	15%	44%	100%
Jewish youth group / movement	40%	20%	40%	100%
Jewish Federation / foundation	39%	22%	39%	100%
Jewish preschool or early childhood center	38%	29%	33%	100%
Israel education / advocacy organization	36%	33%	30%	100%
Jewish summer camp	36%	17%	47%	100%
Jewish supplementary school (e.g. Hebrew school, Sunday school, after-school program)	35%	28%	37%	100%
Synagogue / congregation / minyan / religious organization	34%	26%	40%	100%
Social justice / service learning	27%	14%	59%	100%
Something else	21%	26%	53%	100%
Engagement	20%	30%	49%	100%
Innovation	19%	23%	58%	100%
College campus Jewish organization (e.g. Hillel, Chabad on Campus)	18%	21%	61%	100%
Self-employed / independent contractor / "gig" worker	13%	31%	56%	100%

DENOMINATION

As one moves from working for an Orthodox to more liberal denominational institutions so one is more likely to only choose Jewish Bonding goal to only choosing a Complex Thinking goal.

	Chose Jewish Bonding Goals Only	Chose Both	Chose Complex Thinking Goals Only	Total
Exhibit 19: Denomination				
Haredi + Chabad + Orthodox (other than Haredi or Chabad)	52%	24%	23%	100%
Conservative	40%	28%	32%	100%
Reform	35%	27%	38%	100%
More than one	30%	24%	46%	100%
Reconstructionist	15%	31%	54%	100%
None / Other	23%	25%	52%	100%

ISRAEL AND POLITICAL WORLDVIEW

Feeling Attached to Israel

Jewish educators are, having chosen to work in the field, highly identified Jews. Thus, it is not surprising that, on Israel the large majority “feel emotionally attached to Israel.” Among those only choosing bonding goals and those choosing both almost all “strongly agree” that “I feel emotionally attached to Israel. That drops to two thirds of those who only chose complex thinking goals. However, even among this group almost all at least “somewhat agree.”

Support – Ambivalence - Criticism and Political Worldview

In line with the broader thesis of this report, feeling attached to Israel does not mean that all hold a singular understanding of what Israel, and the actions of the Israeli government mean to them. As we move from those who only choose bonding goals to who only choose complexity goals, we move from less to more ambivalent, more supportive to more critical. Those who choose both are consistently in the middle.

- ❖ **Proud of Israel:** When asked their reaction to the statement “In general, Israel makes me proud to be Jewish,” we see greater ambivalence as we move from those only choosing Jewish bonding goals to those who only choose complex thinking goals. Just 25% of those who only choose complex thinking goals “strongly agree” that “Israel makes me proud to be Jewish” (exhibit 20 below).
- ❖ **Political Worldview:** We see a similar dynamic on issues touching on critique of Israel’s military response in Gaza and political worldview both on American and Israeli politics. Those who only choose Jewish bonding goals are more supportive of Israeli war conduct and to the right of the political spectrum, and the opposite for those who only choose complex thinking goals. Those who choose both are more likely to take a middle or moderate position (exhibits 21, 22 and 23 below)

Exhibit 20: Attachment to Israel		Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total
I feel emotionally attached to Israel	Chose Jewish Bonding Goals Only	90%	7%	1%	2%	0%	100%
	Chose Both	86%	13%	0%	0%	0%	100%
	Chose Complex Thinking Goals Only	64%	24%	5%	3%	4%	100%
In general, Israel makes me proud to be Jewish	Chose Jewish Bonding Goals Only	72%	17%	8%	3%	1%	100%
	Chose Both	57%	32%	6%	6%	0%	100%
	Chose Complex Thinking Goals Only	25%	31%	14%	16%	14%	100%

Exhibit 21: Israel’s military response in Gaza has:	Gone too far	Been about right	Not gone far enough	Total
Chose Jewish Bonding Goals Only	12%	39%	49%	100%
Chose Both	26%	35%	38%	100%
Chose Complex Thinking Goals Only	60%	20%	19%	100%

Exhibit 22: Identification on American Political Spectrum	Chose Jewish Bonding Goals Only	Chose Both	Chose Complex Thinking Goals Only	Total
Very conservative	71%	14%	14%	100%
Conservative	66%	21%	13%	100%
Moderate	44%	27%	29%	100%
Liberal	29%	33%	38%	100%
Very liberal	23%	20%	57%	100%
Progressive	9%	18%	73%	100%
Other	10%	20%	70%	100%
I prefer not to state	57%	19%	24%	100%

Exhibit 23: Identification on Israeli Political Spectrum	Chose Jewish Bonding Goals Only	Chose Both	Chose Complex Thinking Goals Only	Total
The right (Likud, Bibi) + The far right (e.g., Ben Gvir)	73%	15%	12%	100%
Religious-Zionists	61%	24%	14%	100%
The center or center-left (e.g. Lapid, Gantz)	37%	29%	34%	100%
The left (e.g., Labor, Meretz)	8%	26%	65%	100%

SUPPORT SYSTEMS FOR INTEGRATIVE JEWISH EDUCATION

Jewish educators are the frontline leaders guiding students and communities through one of the most challenging periods in recent history. The events of October 7th may be challenging, but they also offer Jewish educators a unique chance to reaffirm the centrality of Israel for Jewish belonging, while simultaneously grappling with the diverse perspectives and generational shifts among their students. We learned in the previous sections that most Jewish educators do not feel equipped to rise to the challenge. The surveys asked educators for input into two relevant areas: 1) curriculum and pedagogical support and 2) and workplace environment.

CURRICULUM AND PEDAGOGIC SUPPORT

The survey respondents indicated the need for curriculum and pedagogic support across four areas shown in exhibit 24 below, including:

1. **Curriculum** in general, and for Peoplehood/Zionism/Jewish Ideas, understanding Israeli and Palestinian narratives, and for greater knowledge of Israeli history, society and current events.
2. **Communication across differences** in general, and support for discussions with non-Jews, and for those with antagonistic perspectives towards Israel.
3. **Educator peer support** including connecting with other educators to share ideas, community engagement and dialogue and trips to Israel with peers.
4. **Processing Crisis:** Help in supporting students with emotional processes.

Exhibit 24. With respect to the educational support you need to best help your learners grapple with the post October 7th events, which of the following would be most useful to you? Select up to 3 choices.

Support needed*	%	
Curriculum	Ready-to-use curricular materials + Approaches to discussing the situation with children	43%
	A framing of the relationship of Peoplehood and Zionism today + Jewish ideas and texts	33%
	Resources on understanding Israeli and Palestinian narratives	30%
	Facts and information about Israel + Learning more about the history, context, and events having to do with the war	23%
Communication Across Differences	Approaches to discussing the situation with non-Jews + Resources for working with learners who hold antagonistic perspectives towards Israel	32%
	Enhanced communication skills, particularly around contentious issues	14%
Educator Peer Support	Connection with other educators to share ideas + Community engagement and dialogue	29%
	A trip to Israel for educators or community professionals	14%
Processing Crisis	Help in supporting students with emotional processing	18%

* Note some of the answers are grouped using factor analysis

Exhibit 25 below shows the areas of requested support for which there are significant differences between those who only chose Jewish bonding goals, those who only chose complex thinking goals and those who chose both. We learn:

- ❖ **Jewish Bonding Focused:** To the extent that educators emphasize bonding so they are more likely to seek general curricular support and for learning that is focused on Israel's history, society and current events.
- ❖ **Complex Thinking Focused:** For understanding Israeli and Palestinian narratives the opposite is the case. To the extent the educator is focused on complexity, so that are more likely to want curricular support in this area. Very few of those who only focus on complex thinking goals are interested in educator trips to Israel.
- ❖ **Choose Both:** Those who choose both Jewish bonding and complex thinking goals are the most likely to focus on communication across differences.

Exhibit 25		Chose Jewish Bonding Goals Only	Choose Both	Chose Complex Thinking Goals Only
Curriculum	Ready-to-use curricular materials + Approaches to discussing the situation with children	54%	48%	35%
	Facts and information about Israel + Learning more about the history, context, and events having to do with the war	31%	22%	20%
	Resources on understanding Israeli and Palestinian narratives	19%	32%	42%
Communication Across Differences	Approaches to discussing the situation with non-Jews + Resources for working with learners who hold antagonistic perspectives towards Israel	28%	40%	34%
Educator Peer Support	A trip to Israel for educators or community professionals	20%	18%	8%

SUPPORT FOR INTEGRATIVE JEWISH EDUCATION

The in-depth interviews provide an understanding of how the above-mentioned areas integrate in practice into educators' work and organizational environments, covering four areas: 1) Curriculum integration, 2) professional development, 3) institutional support and 4) ethical guidance.

1. Curriculum for Integration of Israel into Jewish Education

Expanding “traditional” Israel education to address historical and political complexities, engaging students with nuanced topics such as Israel's history, social dynamics, and current issues. Professional development frameworks like accessible synchronous or asynchronous online seminars that are accessible or in-person immersive experiences such as professional development trips to Israel.

"What we're trying to do is get camps to shift their Israel education. And to think about how do you teach the history of Israel, the importance of Israel to the Jewish community and to the world with complexity and with nuance and with great care? ... Israel education before October 7th in North America has not done what it needed to do... It was hummus, it was Israeli dance, it was Israeli music... It was really surface... And what it did... those young adults are like 'you lied to us! You didn't tell us how bad the government was! You didn't tell us about the occupation or the settlements... And so now instead of just seeing that there's nuance and complexity, they're thinking we hate Israel. We're now anti-Zionists."

Jamie Simon, Chief Program Officer, Foundation for Jewish Camp (FJC)

3. Professional Development for Responding to Crisis and Conflict

Professional development to help students process emotions related to conflict and crisis. These include training programs that provide tools to meet students' immediate emotional needs, as many grapple with antisemitism, community divisions, and isolation.

"What was clear to us is that we needed to talk about what the judicial reform represented. What does it mean to be a Jewish democracy? What are the competing values and ideas at the heart of this debate?"

Dr. Jonathan Golden, Founder, HeartStance Education Consulting

4. Institutional Support for Dialogue and Community Cohesion

Institutions create community spaces for open dialogue on challenging topics, fostering inclusive environments where differing views on Israel coexist without deepening divisions. The goal is to strengthen Jewish bonding and values amid diverse ideological perspectives.

"We need to ensure that our educational content doesn't just dwell on the heavy aspects, but also includes elements that uplift and inspire... It's about finding that balance, so our teens don't feel overwhelmed."

Liron Lipsky, Director of Education, BBYO

"Our clergy held a series of sessions for high schoolers and their parents to tell them specifically about Israel... to give them some tools to understand and to talk about how they were feeling about all of this."

Sharon Tash, Director of Education, Temple Micah, Washington, D.C.

5. Support for Providing Ethical Guidance

Educators guide learners offering both intellectual and emotional support while learning content that addresses Israel's political and cultural-historical significance. Learning includes ethical guidance and community-building, providing a holistic framework that helps students and families navigate the crisis.

"We have to start to figure out how to relate to Israel beyond the politics... It's the people, it's the land, it's the history, it's the culture. ... We have to help define what it means to stand with Israel... Israel has to be more than what the government is, right?"

Rabbi Rick Kellner, Rabbi of Congregation Beit Tikvah, Columbus, OH

WORK ENVIRONMENTS AND FEELING SUPPORTED

A minority of respondents feel fully aligned with their colleagues and/or supervisors (exhibit 26).

- ❖ 36% feel that their personal views on the Israel-Hamas war largely align with those of their supervisors.
- ❖ 45% feel able to talk with their colleagues about their opinions on the Israel-Hamas war “in a manner that makes a productive contribution to my work.”

Exhibit 26. With a focus on your place of work, or immediate circle of colleagues, do you agree or disagree with the following statements:

	Very strongly disagree or strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Very strongly or strongly agree	Total
My personal views on the Israel-Hamas war differ from those of my supervisors	36%	23%	18%	13%	11%	100%
I am able to talk with my other colleagues about our opinions on the Israel-Hamas war in a manner that makes a productive contribution to my work	7%	6%	15%	27%	45%	100%

Feelings of being out of synch with one’s supervisors and/or unable to speak in a productive fashion with colleagues increases as respondents move from those who only choose Jewish bonding goals to those who only choose complex thinking goals (exhibits 27 and 28)

- ❖ 70% of those who only choose Jewish bonding goals hold personal views on the Israel-Hamas war that largely aligned with their supervisors, in comparison to 45% of those who only chose complex thinking goals.
- ❖ Those who only choose Jewish bonding goals are twice as likely to “very strongly agree” that they can engage in productive conversations with their colleagues.

Exhibit 27. My personal views on the Israel-Hamas war differ from those of my supervisors

	Chose Jewish Bonding Goals Only	Choose Both	Chose Complex Thinking Goals Only
Disagree (all answers)	70%	62%	45%
Agree (all answers)	30%	38%	55%
Total	100%	100%	100%

Exhibit 28. I am able to talk with my other colleagues about our opinions on the Israel-Hamas war in a manner that makes a productive contribution to my work

	Chose Jewish Bonding Goals Only	Choose Both	Chose Complex Thinking Goals Only
Disagree (all answers) or Neither agree nor disagree	26%	27%	29%
Agree	24%	25%	33%
Strongly agree	23%	27%	24%
Very strongly agree	27%	22%	14%
Total	100%	100%	100%

What is your greatest challenge post-October 7th?

Colleagues {

- "Moral certainty, and the lack of the American Jewish world to recognize that we have no influence on Bibi's policies. Fighting just to get my colleagues to recognize that Palestinians are people is exhausting and terrifying."
- "Feeling like I'm making a big enough difference. Frustrations with colleagues who criticize Israel without understanding the context of where we are in time."

Organization {

- "I am feeling pressure holding the values of predominantly Zionist donors and Ant-Zionist participants, continuing programmatic work under the 'big Jewish tent' that Jewish people don't see their values reflected in at this moment."
- "How do I balance my own political views on the issue, the views of my organization, the views of my learners, and the views of other key stakeholders.."