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A New Heuristic Device for the Analysis of Israel Education: Observations from a Jewish Summer Camp

ALEX SINCLAIR

In this article, I propose some new terminology and analytic tools that help us reflect on Israel educational activities with more sophistication. I analyze data from a four-week observation of a Jewish summer camp and new terminology is proposed from the analysis of the data collected during that observation. I argue that we may view Israel education through the prism of a graph along two axes: hi-resolution/lo-resolution, and disconnected/connected. I use this graph to reflect on my summer camp data and propose its use for other contexts of Israel education.

INTRODUCTION

As I walk into Camp Ramah on the second day of staff preparation week, the first thing that greets my eyes is a series of hand-written signs taped to trees, posts and walls. The signs say things like:

Ayelet testified against someone and sent him to jail
Lilach’s dog was killed by her best friend’s dog
Nurit teaches belly dancing
Moran’s mother is an oprah [sic!] singer
Sharon is scared of escalators

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1At the suggestion of the anonymous reviewers of this article, I have chosen to reveal the locus of this research as a Camp Ramah, while retaining its anonymity by not revealing its location and by using pseudonyms for all names throughout the article. This has enabled me to give the kind of thick background and context for the camp and its commitments to Israel education that would be unavailable if I tried to retain full anonymity. I am grateful to the reviewers for this perspicacious advice.

2I am grateful to the Melton Centre for Jewish Education of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem for a grant in support of the revising of this article from an earlier version.
Anat’s family call her “Bamba”
Noga has 8 siblings
There are 4 soldiers in the mishlachat
This is Talya and Oded’s first time in America

Some signs are in English, some in Hebrew. The Israeli names and the Hebrew make it immediately clear to anyone who knows camp that these signs refer to members of the mishlachat, the delegation of Israeli counselors who are sent to this camp (and to scores of others) by the Jewish Agency. A few days later, in one of the ice-breaking, get-to-know-us games that the mishlachat run for the other staff members, there will be an amusing “test” to see how much the American staff members remember from the signs.

At first sight this seems like an amusing, interesting, and original piece of Israel educational programming. It’s a great idea. But once that’s said, there’s not a lot more to say; and that’s a serious problem. Jonathan Ariel, Executive Director of Makom, The Israel Engagement Network, often compares (in oral presentations) the fields of Israel education and Bible education. The paucity of serious educational thought, language, descriptive terminology, and scholarship in the former field is brought into sharp focus when one compares it to the relative strength and depth of those in the latter. In Bible education, we can talk about different goals, orientations, approaches to the relationship between scholarship and education, reflective documentation of actual teaching, and so on. There is almost none of that in Israel education. There is a small group of researchers who have in recent years begun to develop the field of Israel education, and this article is a further attempt to develop our language and terminology in that field, so that in the future, we may be able to look at those signs, and other Israel education programs and activities, and not just say “what a great idea,” but in fact be able to analyze with more precision the Israel educational philosophy that is embedded within them.

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3So much so that there are really too many items to list in an in-text citation (see, e.g, G. Z. Dorph, 1993, 2002; Greenberg, 1959, 1969/1984, 1973/1984, 1977/1984, 1979/1984, 1985, 1990, 1990/1995; Holtz, 1999, 2003; Kaunfer, 2003; Schoneveld, 1976; Sinclair, 2004a, 2004b, 2004c, 2005; Tanchel, 2006; Zielenziger, 1989). Such is the relative strength and depth of the field of Bible education that this list is a long way from being comprehensive; and, in the comparison to our ability to make a similar list in Israel education, that is precisely the point.

4While small, this group is also big enough to warrant a footnote rather than an in-text citation. Alex Pomson and Lisa Grant have done work in this field, both separately and together (Grant, 2001; Pomson & Grant, 2004); short articles by various authors appeared in Jewish Education News, vol. 25, no. 1 (2004), in JESNA’s Agenda, no. 18 (2005), and in Sh’mia Magazine (February 2008); the two most senior contributors to this field are Barry Chazan and Steven M Cohen (see, e.g., Chazan, 1998, 2000; Chazan & Cohen, 2000; S. M. Cohen, 1990, 2002; Cohen & Liebman, 2000). An older but still important and highly relevant introduction to the philosophical issues behind many of the contexts in which Israel education takes place was written by Rosenak and Eisen (1997). See also my previous papers (Sinclair, 2003, 2006).
ISRAEL IN CAMP

To return to the signs: As a “reader” of these signs, it appears to me that they say several interesting things. First, they give a clear statement to the entire American staff that there are Israelis in camp. These Israelis are real people, with real lives, full of alternately amusing and humdrum details. It is fascinating to note that all but one of the signs is universal in focus rather than particularistic or “Israel-centric.” Thus, the impact of these signs is to tell the reader that the mishlachat is comprised of ordinary people: People just like them.

In many ways these signs are a microcosm for how Israel happens in this camp. Israel is everywhere; it is ubiquitous. Campers have Israeli sports counselors, sing Israeli songs at dinnertime, and have Hebrew–Israeli culture activities every day. As Simon, a junior counselor who spent seven summers at camp as a camper, told me: “In camp, you hear Hebrew everywhere, you really feel in camp that you’re not in New York, you don’t really realize where you are . . . our shirts are in Hebrew . . . it’s as though it’s a small slice of Israel here . . .” (personal interview, July 11, 2006).

Indeed, there are so many Israeli counselors that American staff in a room can sometimes feel in the minority. And social and cultural connections are surely made. Israel in camp appears to answer with resounding success Barry Chazan’s (2000) admonition:

The road not taken by most of North American Jewish education (with some powerful and notable exceptions) would have presented Israel as a contemporary Jewish society that confronts individuals with the meaning of their Jewishness and invites them to develop a personal relationship with the Land, the Language, the People, and the Promise. It would focus on Israel as a presence rather than a problem. Such an approach would have highlighted Israel as a contemporary society, the centrality of the Hebrew language to cultural revival, Israelis as peers and colleagues, and Israel as a positive and attractive place to visit. (p. 129)

And yet within this success (and I will give more examples of it below), questions are raised. During the staff preparation week of camp, the Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit was kidnapped just outside the Gaza strip. To my knowledge, the issue was not discussed once in any formal camp activity. Of course, the Israeli staff members were glued to the Internet in their spare time, and I overheard several conversations in which the pros and cons of the government’s response were debated loudly and passionately in Hebrew. Yet, most American staff with whom I spoke had minimal, vague knowledge of what was going on. Most had heard that “something” had happened, but were ignorant of most of the details—and every single staff member I interviewed, both American and Israeli, stated that they had not brought up the issue with their campers.
Thus, in the first two weeks of camp, I observed what seemed to me to be a fascinating educational tension. Israelis and a general sense of Israel were, on the one hand, everywhere, all the time. On the other hand, major elements of the Israel that the Israelis themselves were actually talking about were totally absent. It was as if there were two different Israels being experienced: one by the campers and many of the American staff, and one by the Israelis; one from a less connected perspective, and one from a more connected perspective.

About two weeks into camp, the security situation escalated further with Hezbollah’s cross-border attack, kidnapping Eldad Regev and Ehud Goldwasser (z”1), and the subsequent military operation against Hezbollah in Lebanon. At this point, the situation jumped onto the radar screen of the entire camp, from youngest to oldest. The prayer for the State of Israel was said on weekday mornings, not just Shabbat; psalms were recited on Friday night with the whole camp present. Perhaps, in hindsight, the Gaza situation was still only “low level” intensity. It was only when the situation reached a much higher level of intensity, when pictures of Beirut International Airport in flames were on the front page of The New York Times, when katyusha rockets were falling on places that campers had actually heard of, like Haifa and Tzfat, that American campers and counselors became aware of the Israeli conversation. As I began to think further about my observational data, and in a series of conversations with my colleagues Esti Moskowitz-Kalman and Robbie Gringras of the MAKOM Israel Engagement Network (www.makomisrael.net), it became clear that there was no single adjectival continuum that sufficed to explain what I had seen. A more complicated, multidimensional analysis was necessary. There was something of the “disconnected/connected” perspective that helped to explain my observations, but there was something else too: the spectrum between what we might call a low-resolution and a high-resolution view of Israel. A lo-res view of Israel sees the contours of a picture, the basic outlines of what is going on. As the picture gets more hi-res, one sees more and more of the details, and the picture thus gets much more nuanced and sophisticated.

The disconnected/connected continuum and the lo-res/hi-res continuum can in fact be formatted as the x and y axes of a graph (see Figure 1).

Within this graph, we can plot, with generalizations and stereotypes to be sure, four basic modes of Israel engagement. We might suggest, with an array of full disclosures and tentative riders and qualms about the risks of stereotyping and generalizations, that many American Jews inhabit the bottom left quadrant. They engage with Israel from a somewhat “disconnected” perspective, and

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5I am deeply grateful to Esti Moskowitz-Kalman and Robbie Gringras, for these insights. If the graph is considered to be a successful heuristic framework, they may claim equal or greater parts in its formulation than I. I am also grateful to Jonathan Ariel, Shalom Orzach, participants at the Network for Research in Jewish Education conference of 2006, and participants at the Israel Education Think-Tank at the Melton Centre for Jewish Education at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, for their comments and critiques on earlier versions of this article.
that engagement is often or usually done in a lo-res format. As we move up the y axis, it becomes clear that hi-res does not necessarily mean more “committed” or “connected.” A CNN Middle East correspondent may (or should) have a very hi-res understanding of Israel, but continues to engage from a disconnected perspective, therefore inhabiting the top left quadrant. In the bottom right quadrant, I would suggest, again tentatively, that we find many members of the American Jewish communal leadership: those who certainly feel “connected” to Israel, who view it not as “other” or “separate,” but as deeply tied to their Jewish identity, to their sense of Jewish self; such people are deeply committed to Israel in all sorts of ways, but nevertheless may sometimes retain a fairly lo-res view of what actually goes on. The complicated and sometimes frustrating complexities of Israel, which come into sharper focus in a hi-res view, may not be present. Finally, many contemporary Israel educators might suggest that the educational outcomes that we truly seek in Israel engagement are American Jews who inhabit the top right quadrant of the graph: those who feel “connected,” who feel deeply committed to Israel and who see it as an integral part of their Jewish identity, and who also have a hi-res view of Israel, replete with its details, complexities, frustrations, and realities, both wondrous and worrisome (see Figure 2 for a graphical summarization).

In the rest of this article, I will explore this graph more fully, explaining how what I saw led me to this representation. The analysis of what I observed in camp through this graph will lead us to some powerful and useful insights about Israel engagement that pertain not just to summer camp, but to the American Jewish community as a whole. The broader theoretical goal is, of course, to offer this graph as a contribution to the descriptive terminology that we use about Israel engagement.
Camp Ramah's commitment to Hebrew and Israel goes back to its very beginnings: “Zionist education has formed a part of the Ramah educational philosophy from the very start” (B. I. Cohen, 1989). Ramah’s first educational principles, written in 1947, state that campers will be prepared for Zionist community life, and that staff members must be able to function in the Hebrew language; no fewer than four out of the six initial guiding principles mention Hebrew or Zionism (not “Israel”, since the State itself was not yet founded; B. I. Cohen, 1989); and during Ramah’s history, it has introduced innovations like the bringing of Israelis to camp as a mishlachat (originally a Ramah-only event, now spread much wider), and it has pioneered other aspects of Israel programming, like taking groups to Israel on “Ramah Seminar” and creating Tichon Ramah Yerushalayim, its High School in Israel program. Chazan (1989), in perhaps the most important yet forgotten essay on a vision for the teaching of Israel at Camp Ramah, argues that Hebrew has been and must remain the lingua franca of Ramah camps (and, indeed, of American Jewry), that Ramah must “present Israel as an expression of the Jewish dream in the context of reality,” that Ramah must “lead American Jewry out of its greatest embarrassment: the fact that it has not visited Israel,” and that camp must be a place where “American and Israeli young people must learn to live, breathe, feel, cry, doubt, and pray together” (pp. 99, 108). Indeed, Hebrew and Israel are mentioned either at length or in brief in almost all of the essays in the two main edited collections about Camp Ramah (S. A. Dorph, 1999; Ettenberg & Rosenfield, 1989). This, then, is an educational context that has always seen and continues to see the place of Israel in its midst as one of its most important goals. In that
sense it provides the perfect locus to think about how the American Jewish community “does” Israel engagement. In Camp Ramah, we do not find questioning of “whether” we should have Israel and Hebrew be intrinsic parts of the educational experience; questions of “how” and “why” take center stage (see also Aviad, 1988; B. I. Cohen, 1983; Gottfried, 1995).

Finally, the socioeconomic makeup of campers is, as would be expected, largely, although not exclusively, middle and upper middle class. About half of the campers attend Jewish day schools during the year; almost all of those who don’t have attended or are currently are enrolled in some kind of supplementary Jewish educational context. Most of the families of campers would be defined as highly affiliated Jews (S. M. Cohen & Eisen, 2000). The vast majority of the American staff were previously campers at this camp or at other similar camps.

METHODOLOGY

I employed three methodologies in this research project: participant-observation ethnography, semi-structured qualitative interviews, and an action research mode of practitioner-researcher reflection.

First, as a participant-observer (DeWalt & DeWalt, 1998), I observed as many different situations and occasions in camp as possible when Israel was or could have been handled. Whenever I knew in advance that a program would be dealing with Israel in some fashion, I made sure to be there, taking notes on what was going on, noting statements made by counselors and campers, sounds, voices, and actions. If I overheard campers or counselors talking about anything to do with Israel, I listened in. I watched Israeli song sessions in the dining hall, the camp’s Israeli dance festival, Shabbat discussion groups, and Jewish studies classes. I was given permission by the camp director to observe a meeting of the camp’s senior staff in which they discussed the situation in Israel, and I also observed several meetings between the head of the mishlachat and other staff members, both American and Israeli. In addition, dozens of impromptu conversations over the time I spent in camp made up another set of data that comes under the rubric of the participant-observation methodology. In trying to conduct myself according to Geertz’s (1973) now famous dictum to make the strange familiar and the familiar strange, I was helped by the fact that although I am familiar with most contexts of Jewish education, I did not grow up going to summer camp, and much of camp world and culture remains opaque to me.6

6There are several recent excellent ethnographies of Jewish educational contexts, especially those related to Israel education (Goldberg, Heilman, & Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 2002; Heilman, 1999). However, it should be noted that these studies had as their context Israel education within Israel. Israel education in American Jewish contexts is much less researched (one exception is the fascinating inside-outside personal-academic study by Habib, 2004).
Second, I conducted 12 formal semi-structured interviews with both American and Israeli staff members. These interviews were approximately 30 minutes in length and used a different protocol for the Americans and Israelis. Interviewees included members of the mishlachat, American counselors and junior counselors, and the interviewees held a variety of positions in camp, ranging from Jewish studies teachers to bunk counselors to sports staff. They varied in age between 18 years and their mid-50s. The interview protocol was built according to standard qualitative guidelines (Seidman, 1998). In addition to these formal interviews, I had literally dozens of short conversations or mini-interviews with different staff members, which enabled me to view and process the formal interviews in a more sophisticated way. These short conversations are hard to categorize from a methodological perspective: They were more formal than the kinds of conversations referred to above that fit more clearly into the rubric of participant-observation; they were often the kinds of initial conversations that are conducted in building and refining an interview protocol, although here they were done concurrently with, rather than prior to, the more formal interviews.

Third, as someone known to be a professor of Jewish education, I was on several occasions turned to by members of staff with requests to be involved in their programs, questions about particular ideas, and so on. I thus found myself leading a discussion about Israel with groups of ninth-grade campers; brainstorming with the head of camp about how to deal with the war in Israel with different age groups in camp; and talking to eighth-grade campers about my experiences living in Israel. In all these practitioner settings, I made sure to keep extensive notes about what I had done, why I had done it, what educational considerations went through my mind in planning them, and what questions and issues were raised by my own self-evaluation and comments or responses from the campers or staff with whom I was working (Hubbard & Power, 1999, 2003; Lampert, 2001; Lampert & Ball, 1998).

I should note that I moved between these three frameworks seamlessly. I would be finishing an interview with a counselor in the educational resource room when a group of other counselors would come in and start planning an activity about Israel, which I would then observe, thus necessitating a switch from qualitative interviewer to participant-observer; I would lead an activity on Israel with a group of counselors which then became the basis for an interview with one of them; and so on. This flexibility in methodology and the consequent possibility of “triangulation” of data was, I believe, a profoundly successful modality for my research in camp, and led to some fascinating insights that would not otherwise have been attained. I will give a specific example of this triangulation below.

Perhaps the most important thing to note is the timeframe of my research. The four-and-a-half weeks that I spent in Camp Ramah took place...
in June to July 2006. As noted above, this was a period when the security situation in Israel was particularly acute and tragic.

**ISRAEL ENGAGEMENT IN CAMP RAMAH**

Israel is presented to the campers as a tremendously fun place and culture. For example, in the dining room after dinner on weeknights, a guitar-playing member of the mishlachat often led Israeli songs which the campers joined in with heartily. “Od Yavo Shalom Aleinu” was a perennial favorite; so was “A-bani Bee,” Israel’s Eurovision-winning song from the 1970s. Many campers didn’t just sing, they got up and danced, doing the conga round the dining hall. The spirit was truly a sight to behold.

It’s erev 4th of July, and later on this evening at 8 pm there will be fireworks over the agam. But over dinner, the feeling is Israel, not America. At the younger [age divisions’] dinner, C. gets up on the mike with her guitar and starts singing. The songs are not all Israeli, but most are. She sings Od Yavo Shalom and many of the campers get up from their tables and start doing the conga round the chadar ochel. It’s really an amazing sight. Half an hour later, it gets even more amazing. It’s dinner time for the older [age divisions]—the kids who are cooler, more cynical, often harder to get excited about Jewish things. This time O. from the mishlachat gets up with his guitar and Y. does the vocals. They sing a few Israeli songs from recent and not so recent times. The moment that bowls me over is when they sing lo kalah hi lo kalah darkeinu. All the campers join in, the roof is raised . . . then many, and then most, of the campers, actually stand on their benches and sing along. I look at one table of girls, I guess they’re [tenth/eleventh-grade campers], and they’re standing on their benches singing madly just like at a pop concert, hands swaying in the air, eyes shut, at the top of their voices. I find this amazing. These kids are quite literally in some kind of ecstatic state over Israeli music, and they’re well aware that the singers are real live Israelis not much older than them, who they are getting to know and love as role models. If this isn’t Israel alive in camp, nothing is. (fieldnotes, July 3, 2006)

Subsequent reflection on this incident, and dozens like it, has failed to dull my amazement. Indeed, each time I return to these notes, I am struck anew. These teenagers are by all accounts the hardest demographic group to excite Jewishly. Drop-off rates post-bar/bat-mitzvah are extremely well documented (see, e.g., Kosmin & Keysar, 2000; Saxe, Kelner, & Brodsky, 2001). As I hinted at in my fieldnotes, teenagers can be cynical of adult manipulation, they resist being told what to do, they push the boundaries of authority. So, what is it that makes these teenagers in camp so profoundly and ecstatically
buy into the cultural context here, a context that they are almost certainly aware has been carefully constructed by adults? The apparently familiar here is truly strange.

Israel happens in dozens of other ways in camp, but music is one of the most frequent and popular modalities. One evening I observed a program on Israeli music for the age division of kids going into ninth grade. This program was run by the mishlachat, with the American staff of the age division also present, and it was for the entire division of about 80 campers. The kids were split into a round robin of five groups: pop, rock, hip hop, Mizrachi (sephardi/eastern), and army bands. Campers shuttled between the five groups so that by the end of the program, each camper had experienced each type of music. Each group was led by one or two members of the mishlachat, who began by giving a 1- to 2-minute introduction on the music genre, followed by the playing of a song or two that represented the genre. The Mizrachi music group was told a little about the geographical origins of the Mizrachi communities. In the pop section, they told the story of the Israeli “boy band” Hi-Five. In the rock section, the counselor started by saying in animated fashion “Israeli rock is the best!” and proceeded to explain why. In the army band section, the group leaders, all current soldiers, were dressed in their uniforms and made the campers “stand to attention” while they explained what army bands were. last, in the hip-hop section, differences between Israeli and American rap were set out: American rap is all about money, sex and drugs, whereas Israeli rap is about government and war.7

What are the chanichim [campers] getting from this? A cacophony of different sounds, the message that there is lots of different Israeli music and that it’s cool—these are young mishlachat people close in age to them and they are clearly into the music; and the music, even if it is not familiar, is clearly “cool” and recognizable as such, and so the impression is that Israel has a vibrant music scene that might be worth getting into. And some of the songs and artists in some of the groups are already known, thanks to Shirah [song-singing sessions that all campers do at least once or twice a week] and breakfast over the years. (field-notes, July 9, 2006)

In terms of Israel education, this appeared to be a highly successful program. Certainly it is a different view of Israel from what the campers see on CNN. Certainly it led to campers getting a far broader picture of Israeli culture than the vast majority of American Jews. Certainly it responds to Barry Chazan’s (2000) mission statement cited earlier. Certainly these

7Some cutting edge curricular work has been done on using Israeli music in Israel engagement. (Salgado, 2004, n.d.).
campers look like people who are “connected.” The ecstatic singing in the
dining room, the engagement with different musical genres, the “cool”
factor, all appear to be indicators of being inside, rather than outside, of
seeing Israel as being an integral part of one’s Jewish identity, rather than
a distant object of uncertain interest. But I had a nagging suspicion that
something was missing. For example, in the hip-hop section, a counselor
introduced one song by saying “This was played a lot last year during the
disengagement,” but with no further elaboration. I was itching to see the
counselors segue even for a few minutes into a serious discussion of the
lyrics or the role of music in Israeli politics, or perhaps even talk about
their own experiences during the disengagement, but this didn’t happen.
In the few minutes available, it would not have been realistic to expect
more than a brief glimpse at some of these deeper issues; but even a
glimpse would have been quite profound. Thus, while the Israel engage-
ment that I witnessed was of a quite “connected” perspective, it remained
fairly “lo-res.” To be fair, the resolution was higher than the Israel engage-
ment of many American Jews, who are rarely exposed to these different
Israeli musical genres. But the resolution would have been much higher if
the music had served as a springboard into a discussion, however brief,
about the relationship between the song and the disengagement. (There
may even have been campers in the group who were not familiar with the
term “disengagement”).

Thus, we begin to see the utility and importance of the heuristic graph
and its double distinction between disconnected/connected and lo-res/hil-res.
The distinction helps us take a piece of Israel education, and analyze it in
more depth and with more subtlety than we might otherwise have been
able to. It seems to me that the field of Israel education is in desperate need
of developing a language, a terminology of discourse, which will enable us
to more accurately describe, analyze, and plan Israel engagement activities.
It is hoped that the reader can already see how the heuristic graph sug-
gested here can contribute to this language development; as we progress
through the article, we will see more.

THE HEURISTIC DEVICE AND THE CAMP RADIO STATION

One of Camp Ramah’s most ambitious projects over the past few years has
been its radio station. Run mostly by a different member of the mislachat
each year, with assistance from a veteran American staff member, it is a
specialty option for campers of all ages at different times of the day and
broadcasts on an FM wavelength with a signal strong enough to be picked
up anywhere in camp. This year the mislachat member in charge was
Yaron, who had been specially recruited because in his “real life” he was a
broadcaster on Galei Tzahal, the IDF radio station. Yaron brought with him
a laptop brimming with classic and recent Israeli music, which he broadcast over camp for several hours each day, along with interviews with campers and other talk segments. At the top of each hour, Yaron read out news headlines from Israel—and indeed, a couple of weeks into camp, he found a way to get Internet access piped into the radio station hut and broadcast live streaming news from Galei Tzahal direct from Israel. Thus, the effect created by the radio station, with Israeli music and an Israeli DJ, was of a real Israeli radio station playing in camp.

The radio station became a ubiquitous presence in camp. Whenever one walked past the central area of camp, one could hear Israeli music and talk being broadcast on large speakers. In the educational resource center, a small stereo was turned on and tuned in most of the time, and many bunk counselors put the radio station on in their bunks. The radio station became an elemental part of the background of camp and created a situation where the “background noise” of camp was quite literally Israel. As a programming initiative, it appeared to me to be a quite wonderful thing that other camps and institutions would do well to emulate.

Yet, the heuristic device helps us reflect on the radio station more deeply. It was difficult to assess the extent to which the radio station integrated into most campers’ and counselors’ lives, but I certainly got data that showed that the Israelis in camp truly appreciated it. Many of them, in interviews and conversations with me, said that it was like having Galgalatz, a popular music radio station in Israel, playing in camp. This had interesting and perhaps unforeseen effects. When Eldad Regev and Ehud Goldwasser were abducted by Hezbollah, and the Lebanon war began in earnest, Yaron played only sad, melancholy songs on the radio for the whole day, as all Israeli radio stations do after terrorist attacks. This created a bizarre atmosphere in camp that was on the one hand extremely supportive for the Israeli staff members, giving them a cultural context similar to the one their friends and family were experiencing back home, but on the other hand probably intensified the feelings of worry and depression that mishlachat members were feeling; meanwhile, of course, most of the American counselors and campers were unaware of the deeper cultural signs and meaning of the playlist that day. For the Israelis and for those American staff members who had spent serious chunks of time in Israel, the meaning and cultural context behind the music was clear and powerful; Americans who were not already familiar with Israeli society on a deeper level did not appreciate the profound complexities and musical–cultural contexts of the radio station. It was “just” Israeli music. Here, then, there was a situation where the same objective situation was in fact interacted with in different segments of the graph. The Israelis in camp heard it from the top right quadrant; whereas most of the Americans in camp heard it from the bottom right
quadrant, a feeling of being “connected,” certainly, of feeling sympathy and sadness at the situation, but at a lower resolution. How might campers or counselors have been helped to increase the resolution, to move up the y axis from lo-res to hi-res, in terms of the meaning of the playlist? An important question to ask, and one that again demonstrates the utility of this new terminology; not an easy question to answer, but one that thoughtful Israel educators will see as an important question worth grappling with.

MOVING UP THE GRAPH IN REGULAR PROGRAMMING

One of the wonderful things that I observed in Camp Ramah was the way in which Israel infiltrates regular camp activities in small but powerful ways. I witnessed one such example one morning in the educational resource room, unexpecting but with my eyes and ears open. Two counselors—one Israeli mishlachat member, one American bunk counselor—came in and sat down at the table opposite me. They began working on a program that the bunk counselor was going to be running for their campers in the next day or so. My ears pricked up when I heard the Israeli counselor giving the American counselor a list of slang Hebrew terms and their translations. Some of these terms were quite ordinary, like “chaval al hazman” (meaning either “a waste of time” or “fantastic,” depending on context), but some were more edgy or rude (probably too rude to list and translate in an article of this sort!). As they were coming up with more slang terms, I interrupted and asked if they minded telling me why they were doing this. The American counselor told me that her age division’s staff were planning a “yom tamagotchi” (Tamagotchi Day). A Tamagotchi looks a bit like a small electronic game but is in fact a handheld digital “pet.” The user has a variety of options that allow him or her to “feed” or “play with” the pet, among other things. The Tamagotchi pet evolves into one of a wide range of characters three or four times in its lifetime, depending on how well the user takes care of it (Tamagotchi, n.d.). The division staff were planning activities for their campers throughout the day, in which they would roughly mimic the Tamagotchi concept, starting by giving them pacifiers and bibs at breakfast, and moving on through teenage years, college, mid-life crisis, and old age. To me this sounded like a cute activity to do with teenage campers. But I was curious as to what it had to do with Israel, and more so, Israeli slang? In the “teenage years” segment, the counselors planned to run an activity in which they would teach the kids Israeli slang and give them opportunities to use it on each other.

This, to me, seemed like an excellent example of how Israel integrates into camp life. This was a day-long activity that did not have an emphasis on Israel per se, but, whether because of the staff’s background, the
atmosphere of camp, or some kind of unwritten expectation, Israel was integrated into the program. In many ways this is an ideal model for Jewish informal educational programming: Israel and Judaism become part of the fabric of the education, and are imbibed through osmosis, while the kids are having fun. Yom Tamagotchi without Israeli slang would just be “fun.”

In Camp Ramah, it became a setting for some potentially powerful Israel education. Indeed, one could argue that this short segment of the program was an activity that moved campers into the top right-hand corner of the graph. A usable knowledge of Israeli slang is certainly hi-res; and because it is slang, rather than, say, a basic Berlitz-style vocabulary that a foreign journalist might acquire, it moves campers along the x axis too.

EXCURSUS: THE NEWS ISSUE

During my research, I became increasingly aware of an issue often discussed from the perspective of Israel advocacy but seldom from that of education: the role of the American media. Camp arranges delivery subscriptions to *The New York Times* for staff members, and many people take advantage of this arrangement; as a result, newspapers float around camp (on windy days, sometimes literally!) and in areas where counselors congregate, like the educational resource room and the staff lounge, there is usually a paper from the past day or two sitting on a table somewhere. Some bunk counselors in the older age divisions order daily subscriptions for their bunks. As the situation in Israel escalated, the front page of the *Times* became increasingly dedicated to it. In many of my interviews and conversations with American staff, when I asked them how they got their information about Israel in camp, they told me that it was through the *Times*. Then, one morning I walked into the staff lounge and saw two American counselors sitting there, watching the crisis unfold on MSNBC on television. As I reflected on this, I began to realize that there is a serious educational conversation to be had, not just in camp, but in the American Jewish community as a whole, about where we get our information on Israel from. In terms of the graph suggested in this article, I would argue that sole exposure to American journalistic media may potentially move the young Jew up the y axis, but is highly unlikely to move them rightwards on the x axis, and in fact may potentially move the person to the left on the x axis.

In order to address this problem with camp staff, I put together a hand-out in which I set out three different sets of information sources, one from the *Times*, one from a local weekly Jewish newspaper’s Web site, and one from haaretz.com, and analyzed the pros and cons of each. I then asked the head of camp if he and I could have some formal conversations with counselors about the handout.
The first prism through which we get our information about Israel is that of the American print and television media. *The New York Times* or equivalent newspapers throughout the country, CNN, MSNBC, and the like, are ubiquitous, in every store, every airport, every living room. They are the easiest news source to obtain, available by home delivery, by a click of the mouse or remote control, by a glance at the newsstand. If my research in camp is in any way indicative of the broader American Jewish community, then it is safe to assume that vast numbers of American Jews use these kinds of media as their primary sources of information about what goes on in Israel. This finding is deeply disturbing, but not from the perspective that is usually brought up. Usually, these media are criticized by the organized Jewish community for being biased against Israel. Organizations like CAMERA, Honest Reporting, and the ADL, spend hundreds of thousands of dollars each year responding to American media and raising the awareness of American Jews to their “biases.” However, the issue of media bias is not what I find most disturbing. Quite frankly, as an educator, I find the issue somewhat uninteresting: It’s a dirty job, I guess someone has to do it, and I’m glad it’s not me. As an educator, I am more interested in the cultural conversations into which American Jews are inducted, and how these affect the quadrant of the heuristic graph in which they find themselves. I have written elsewhere (Sinclair, 2003, 2006) that the metaphor of conversation and dialogue is one that could be particularly crucial in Israel education, and it is from this perspective that the phenomenon of American Jews getting their information about Israel from *The New York Times* concerns me.

What are the essential questions that the American media ask when they view the Middle East conflict? They are questions like: What are the global geopolitical ramifications of what is going on? How do these events affect American interests, usually economic or diplomatic (e.g., the price of oil or the stock market)? Who is in the right and who is in the wrong? And, of course, is there an underdog in this story? These are the kinds of questions that most print and television news media in America seek to answer, and the problem from a Jewish educational perspective is that the Jewish consumer immersed in those questions becomes part of a conversation with non-Jewish Americans about Israel. In this conversation, Israel is regarded as something separate, something “out there.” It is always refracted through the prism of non-Jewish, impartial (at best) bystanders, for whom Israel is an object of interest, rather than an elemental part of their identity. The Jewish consumer’s knowledge about Israel, even if it is broader than the average American’s, is seldom deeper. Even if the consumer’s emotions feel the need for an “I-thou” relationship with Israel, in the cognitive informational realm it is an “I-it” relationship that is developed. In other words, exposure to these media may move the consumer from the bottom left quadrant up the y axis, but not along the x axis. The consumer remains stuck in a “disconnected” perspective.
Many affiliated Jews react to this situation, sometimes consciously, sometimes not, by seeking their information about Israel from weekly Jewish newspapers such as the *Jewish Week*, the *New Jersey Jewish News*, and other similar publications from around the United States. These papers, given their weekly nature, are imperfect news sources, especially when events change fast. They usually have a different set of “essential questions” that they ask. For example, their basic starting point is an a priori commitment to Israel; thus they seek to help their readers understand questions like “What does this mean for Israel?”; “How can we understand Israel’s motivations?”; and, in addition, “How does this affect us as American Jews?” Readers of these sources are inducted into a conversation with other American Jews, a conversation that tries to understand things from Israel’s perspective and that empathizes with Israel. From a Jewish educational perspective, that is a positive outcome. However, there are hidden drawbacks in these media. First, they sometimes function as advocacy mouthpieces; that is, they seldom criticize Israeli government policy and they sometimes quite explicitly seek to “balance” the perceived anti-Israel tenor of the secular press. This “balance” can be very confusing for those not familiar with the details, and there is the risk that the reader, faced with two competing narratives about Israel, will choose the one that comes from the more respectable source: the secular media. This is especially so when it comes to young Jews, who are more likely to view the organized Jewish community, including its publications, with suspicion and disdain (Luntz, 2003). Even the Jewish reader who does choose to accept the narrative of the Jewish newspaper will have a somewhat one-dimensional view of Israel. Again, to put this in terms of the heuristic graph, exposure to these media sources may, in the best case scenario, move students rightward along the x axis, into the bottom right quadrant, may perhaps move them slightly up the y axis, but is unlikely to move them “all the way” up the y axis.

Ten or even five years ago, these were the only two options available to the American Jewish community. Today, though, with the explosion of access to the Internet and in particular broadband access, things are different, and there is an array of other options that Jewish educators and leaders need to take seriously when we think about how we want our communities to engage with Israel. Sites like haaretz.com, ynetnews.com, and jerusalemonline.com offer the English-speaking surfer the chance to read indigenous Israeli news in English and watch Israel television news in dubbed translation. The American Jew can get the exact same news as the Israeli, virtually simultaneously.

What are the main educational advantages of these Web sites? Again, it is not, to my mind, a question of media bias. It is that the American Jew—and Jews around the world—can be initiated into the *same conversations* as Israelis. The essential questions that indigenous media ask are different from all those mentioned above. They are questions like: What does this mean for Israel in all its layers? What are the pros and cons of the government’s
policies? What's funny, ironic, beautiful, absurd, tragic, or corrupt in this story? What do different elements of Israeli society think about this? How does this affect Israelis as individuals, families, and communities? These are questions which do not always have simple answers, questions which invite sophisticated thought, reflection, dialogue, and critical thinking. They are questions that invite the media consumer into a conversation with Israelis and with the Jewish people across the world. The consumer exposed to these translated indigenous media becomes part of a conversation with the Jewish people, about the Jewish people. Not only are events seen through the eyes of Israelis, thus adding human interest (e.g., interviews with people whose houses were hit by *katyusha* rockets), but also the events are drawn with more sophistication and depth (e.g., op-eds that criticize the government for being either too soft or too hard). Constant exposure to these sources on a daily basis leads to an appreciation of the nuances of political situations, a richer understanding of the Israeli psyche, and ultimately to the consumer feeling able to be part of the same conversation as Israelis. This depth certainly allows consumers, if they desire, to become more effective at advocacy for Israel with non-Jews in America; but it also enables them to enter the conversation about Israel as an equal, through an I–thou rather than an I–it relationship. The depth allows consumers to see Israel from a connected perspective, and at hi-res, not lo-res. Only by engaging with translated indigenous media are students likely to move from the bottom left to the top right quadrant.

As noted above, the head of camp allowed me to share these ideas with the counselors from the higher age divisions. This was one of those moments when the flexibility of my methodology, combining participant-observation, interviews, and practitioner-researcher insights, led to tremendous results that would not have been available without that flexibility. The head of camp and I sat with a small group of counselors and took them through the handout that I had produced. The claims that I made in the handout rang true. One counselor immediately “confessed” that she used *The New York Times* for information, and now didn’t feel right about that. Another counselor said that he realized the need to offer the campers in his bunk, who read his *Times* when he was done with it, different prisms through which to engage in the situation in Israel.

These findings and suggestions are a microcosm of the disconnected/connected and hi-res/lo-res tension. Only by entering into the media world that Israelis themselves are immersed in can an American Jew truly engage with Israel; reading *The New York Times* and moaning about its biases is, from an educational perspective, a much less desirable outcome. Again, the heuristic device suggested in this article offers us powerful and accessible analytical tools to understand and evaluate diverse contexts of Israel engagement.
There were several times that I did observe activities that seemed to move learners into the top right quadrant. On one occasion I observed a formal shiur-discussion led by the camp’s rabbi-in-residence. The shiur was given to a mixed audience of Israelis and Americans, about twenty people in all. The rabbi started by handing out a photocopied sheet of Mishnah (Gittin 4:6), which discusses the issue of “pidyon sh’vuyim” (ransoming of captives). In ancient times, so it appears, bandits would kidnap people and hold them to ransom for payment by their relatives or the community, and the Mishnah discusses various questions about whether they should be ransomed, why, why not, and under what circumstances. This shiur, which took place after the kidnapping of Gilad Shalit but before the deterioration in Lebanon, was one in which Jewish text study, Israeli-American connection (see more on this below), a connected perspective, and hi-res all came together. The Americans in the group were witnesses to some searing and moving expressions of opinion by different members of the mishlachat, and eventually began coming out with their own opinions too. The Mishnaic text remained in the background as both trigger and frame, and so the discussion really brought Israelis and Americans together in a Jewish conversation about real questions faced by Israel.

Other activities in camp also created moments for this kind of engagement. In one interview, an American counselor told me about a “harga’ah” (a pre-lights-out calming conversation) with her bunk in which a mishlachat member spoke about his experiences in the army. A different mishlachat member told me about a similarharga’ah that he did in which he spoke about his experience making aliya with his family at age 10. A counselor from the eleventh-grade age division told me about a Shabbat program in which counselors spoke with campers about their experiences on the six-week Israel tour that campers are encouraged to go on after their final year of camp. These three examples all move campers into the top right quadrant. The common denominator in these three examples is that they all relate to the same basic concept: “kesher.”

“KESHER” AND ISRAEL

I heard the term “kesher” (connection) used many times in my interviews with both Israeli and American staff. Indeed, if we return to the signs with which I began this article, the idea for this activity was Maiya’s, the head of the mishlachat. Maiya stressed again and again, in both the formal interview that I conducted with her, and in informal conversations throughout my time at camp, that she saw kesher as her primary goal in preparing her team. The programs with Israel as a subject can be as excellent as you like,
she argued, but the main goal is *kesher*. Success is when American and Israeli counselors stay in touch with each other after the end of camp; whenever she hears about an American staff member or camper who is going to be in Israel in the months ahead, she attempts to put that person in touch with a *mishlachat* member for home hospitality during the trip. During camp itself, the camp director makes efforts to encourage American staff to invite Israelis out with them to their homes on days off. During staff week, the leadership of the camp encourages Israelis and Americans to sit at mixed tables, and in general, during the running of the camp, *mishlachat* are integrated as much as possible (on different models of *mishlachat* integration, see Wolf & Kopelowitz, 2003). If a division head asks *mishlachat* members to run some Israel programming for them, Maiya agrees only on condition that the planning and running of the activity will be done jointly by Israelis and Americans.

*Kesher* also happens in myriad small ways. I observed another formal *shiur*-discussion for a mixed Israeli-American group of staff, again led by the rabbi-in-residence of the camp, in which he asked the Israelis and Americans what they had learned from each other. One Israeli said that much of her work happened in the small conversations that she had with American staff and campers. A camper would ask her what was going on in Israel, or what it was like to be in the army, or what she studied at university, and a conversation would ensue. I myself witnessed several of these kinds of conversations in various different settings, sometimes while I was formally observing an activity, and sometimes when I was walking past two people talking and stood close by them, eavesdropping.

These informal dialogues seemed to be a primary vehicle for moving campers into the top right quadrant, but only when handled in certain ways by the Israeli or knowledgeable American conversation partner. One American counselor, Simon, told me that he had been playing a softball game the other day, sitting on the side waiting to bat, when he got talking with an eleventh-grade camper. They started off talking about the soccer World Cup; the camper asked if Israel had ever made the finals; the counselor told the camper a bit about Israel’s history in the World Cup (they’ve been to the finals once; this time round they had been extremely close); and from then, the conversation slid to Israeli politics, what the government was planning to do, and so on. Other counselors told me of similar kinds of conversations, and several recalled to me moments of *kesher* that had stayed in their memories from when they were campers and had become engaged in powerful conversations with Israeli counselors. There is no way of establishing precisely how many of these conversations take place, how often they take place, and what the contents of them are, but it seems clear that some take place, sometimes, with varying lengths and degrees of depth. What does seem clear to me from an educational perspective is that these kinds of conversations are a profound educational success. They go beyond the idea of
kesher for kesher's sake and prove that kesher can really lead to deep engagement with Israel.

One interesting finding that emerged from my data was the extent to which kesher can affect the Israelis as well as the Americans. For example, in one of my interviews with a member of the mishlachat, Yuval told me that he had been surprised by how much the campers knew about Israel. I asked him for an example. He told me that he was in a conversation with some campers the other day, and they had asked him how Ariel Sharon's health was. Yuval told me that he was surprised and impressed that the campers knew who Ariel Sharon was and knew that he was extremely sick. I was struck—astonished actually—by Yuval's incredibly low prior expectations of the knowledge of his American campers and by his new-found rethinking of stereotypes he had perhaps held. One could readily imagine that the heuristic device I have proposed in this article could also be applied in the opposite direction, to describe the connection that Israelis have with Diaspora Jews; such rumination, however, must be left for further investigation at another time.

MOVING UP THE GRAPH AWAY FROM POLITICS

Moving into the top right quadrant of the graph can often happen when the topic of Israel education goes beyond politics and the peace process. I observed one such example during a program on a Shabbat afternoon for the ninth-grade age division. The program, run by the mishlachat, involved, as usual, a series of "stations" between which campers shuttled. The five stations on this occasion were "food," "the army," "school," "aliyah," and "culture." The usefulness and significance of the heuristic graph here proposed can be illustrated by analysis of what took place in three of the different stations that I observed. The "food" station was a rather shallow overview of some of the different types of food Israelis eat: pita bread, hummus, kuba, cigarot, techina, and matboucha (all of which were available in abundance for the campers—and, in the spirit of full participant-observer disclosure, me—to eat). But the mishlachat member who ran the station did so in a rather unimaginative way. For each food, she waved it in front of the group of campers and asked if anyone knew what it was and where it came from. A few campers shouted out suggestions, and eventually someone got it right. Then the counselor moved on to the next food item. At the end of the station, she summed up by simply saying, "Ok, so Israeli food comes from a lot of different parts of the world!" That was it. This was an activity that even the casual observer would have been moved to criticize. However, thinking about this activity through the prism of the heuristic device helps us move our critique from merely relating to the staff member's poor pedagogy, or shallow planning, or whatever, into a critique that is more
deeply rooted in careful thinking about the philosophy of Israel education at work. This activity perhaps moved campers up the y axis, into a slightly more hi-res view of what Israeli food looks like. However, by asking campers how the food they eat affects their Jewish identity, or discussing how Israel’s “appropriation” of food from other cultures relates to the strengths and weakness of its identity, or thinking about why pizza and burgers are now overtaking some of these traditional foods, or a dozen other ways in which the cute food-based trigger could lead into a brief glimpse at something deeper, the staff member could perhaps have moved them further up the y axis and also along the x axis.

In two of the other stations, though, I saw Israel in camp in a most wonderful way. The first was the “army” station, in which one of the mishlachat members spoke about her experience as an army commander in basic training for Russian immigrants. I saw campers mesmerized as the counselor spoke about the difficult home environments some of the immigrants come from, the problems that arise from the halachic status of some of the soldiers, the cultural and educational goals and activities of the army, and the pride she felt in the successes she has witnessed. For these campers, a whole range of issues suddenly became real. Few Diaspora Jews (myself included) have any real idea of what it is like to be in the Israel Defense Forces (IDF). And for sure, very few Diaspora Jews associate the IDF with issues like enculturation for immigrants, halachic status, and so on. These campers got just a small insight into the incredibly important cultural, non-military, aspects of the IDF, but one that I would bet will stay with them whenever the army comes up in their future conversations, with both Jews and non-Jews. The greater clarity about what the IDF is in Israeli society was certainly hi-res, and the passion and charisma of the staff member brought them that hi-res view in a thoroughly “connected” mode: the top right quadrant.

The other fascinating station that I observed was the one on “school.” This was led by a counselor, Nili, who was born in the United States and whose family made aliyah when she was a young girl. She began by talking about the differences and similarities between the Israeli and American school systems, in terms of culture, curriculum, length of day, national test requirements, and other areas. But then, in response to questions from campers, the discussion digressed to a broader issue: how, in Nili’s opinion, Israeli kids are more independent than American kids. I heard Nili say, for example: “My sisters are in first and third grades and they go to school on the bus every day”; and “we can go where we like and our parents don’t worry” (the latter statement being followed by an extended description of how Nili and her friends, while in high school, would go camping on the beach by the Kinneret with parental approval but not supervision). As I scanned the campers’ faces, I found it hard to discern the impact Nili’s statements were having. These messages were certainly vastly different from the
ones they usually received about Israel. Israeli buses, for these ninth-grade American Jews, were probably associated with suicide bomb attacks, not evidence for the nonchalant independence of Israeli first graders. The Kinneret may have been known to them from maps of Israel, or from its “Sea of Galilee” nomenclature and consequent associations with Jesus, but it is unlikely that they had ever thought of it as a location where Israeli kids of their own age kicked back without their parents. Whatever they ultimately got from this station, I would guess that they came away with some notion that “real life” goes on in Israel, away from the headlines, and that that real life was in some ways a far more relaxed and carefree existence than they might have imagined. This was a hi-res picture, which also moved campers along the x axis; as with the army station, in large part because of the way in which the staff member connected with the campers.

THE TENSION BETWEEN FUN AND PAIN

If we are to strive for the top right quadrant in camp life, and indeed in all contexts of Jewish education, a profound educational tension is raised. Camp is meant to be a fun place. On the home page of Camp Ramah’s Web site, every picture shows campers smiling, laughing, playing, and having the time of their lives—And why not? It’s summer camp! The primary goal of any summer camp (and of any educational institution) must always be that the kids will have a terrific time. Israel in camp certainly contributes to the “fun factor.” Recall the earlier vignette about teenagers singing Israeli songs in the dining hall at the ecstatic tops of their voices; I could add many more vignettes that, due to space constraints, can’t be described in full, like the whole phenomenon of Hebrew-language plays that each age division performs during the summer, or the Israeli dance festival that is one of the highlights of the summer, prepared assiduously and also celebrated in semi-pop-concert fashion. These and scores of other moments infuse the camp with Israel in fun ways. Again, I must stress that I am certainly not criticizing this: I was continually impressed, astonished, bowled over, and humbled, by the intensity and power of these moments, and by the way in which they seem to have a profound effect on campers’ identities and experiences. Many of these moments didn’t just move campers along the x axis. They propelled them along it at high speed.

Israel, though, is not always fun; sometimes it can be painful. This tension between fun and pain was brought home to me the day after Ehud Goldwasser and Eldad Regev were kidnapped by Hezbollah. Almost immediately it became clear that the situation in Gaza was now going to escalate into something much worse, something qualitatively different. The Gaza situation had been, in hindsight, and painful though it is to say, “normal.” Desperately sad, for sure, but not qualitatively different from much that had
been going on there in recent months and years. It hadn’t really affected the mishlachat’s basic mood. But this Lebanon deterioration, everyone seemed to feel, was new, and portended ominously bad developments (in hindsight, of course, those feelings were sadly accurate). As I walked around camp on the day after the kidnapping, I was struck by the faces and demeanors of the Israeli counselors. I saw faces etched with worry, shoulders tense, and few smiles. And, in full disclosure, I too, as someone who had lived in Israel for five years, whose wife is Israeli, and who has many friends living in Israel, felt this pain. I felt cut up inside, almost unable to function, desperate to talk about what was going on, to be glued to the internet and the radio.

So, a strange, intangible separation was somehow discernible in camp, between on the one hand the Israelis and those more involved Americans who had spent serious amounts of time in Israel, and on the other hand the majority of campers and staff who, while their lives were filled with Israel, while they clearly cared a great deal about Israel, while they clearly wanted to sympathize with and support the Israelis in camp, were not quite able to feel the same thing that the Israelis were feeling: Hence, the educational tension.

If we want campers to experience Israel in the top right quadrant, then there are times when our educational goal must change. If campers are having fun, we have failed; if campers feel cut up inside, we have succeeded. And to state that our measure of success is that the camper feels cut up inside, feels affectively bad, is not just an odd educational goal, but a profoundly difficult and complex one. It’s a different goal from a one-off Yom HaShoah program or a Tisha B’Av ceremony, when the feeling of pain that we seek to engender is a more commemorative sense of responsibility to the past. No, this is different, it’s more real. It’s less “commemoration” and more “anxiety.” I raised this question in one of my interviews with an Israeli madrichah, Talya. She was a bunk counselor for the seventh-grade age division. She told me that she saw camp as a kind of bubble, disconnected from the real world. Furthermore, the kids in her age division were young, and “most of the kids who know about Israel, it’s from family vacations. They don’t have anything negative.” I then asked her to think about whether this was, from an educational perspective, the correct approach. She responded: “Israeli kids of that age do talk about the depressing stuff. I think 12-year-olds in Israel are more mature. Israel is presented [in camp] as this beautiful amazing place. I live there and I love it but you have to tell the truth. How can you do that?” Talya thought about her own question for a while and eventually said that she didn’t know. She didn’t want to depress the kids. “They’re at summer camp, it’s meant to be fun” (personal interview, July 7, 2006).

In this article, I also do not have an answer to this profound and complex educational question. It is another of those questions that highlights how far the field of Israel education is behind the field of Bible education,
because in Bible education, we do have certain responses, albeit imperfect ones, to similar questions. However, the heuristic graph does help. Clearly, in a situation like this, being hi-res and connected leads to feelings of pain. The top left quadrant doesn’t feel the pain, and the bottom right quadrant, the Jew who feels “connected” but with a lo-res view of things, certainly feels sadness at what is going on, certainly feels sympathy, certainly checks the newspapers more regularly for updates, but doesn’t, I would suggest, feel the pain in the same visceral way that someone in the top right quadrant does. Compare my earlier comments about the radio station playing sad music: to really understand that visceral pain that the music represents, you had to be in the top right quadrant. Do we really want campers to be in the top right quadrant when it hurts to be there? I don’t know the answer, but I do believe that every Jewish educator must grapple with the question.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

I begin this final section by repeating what I have said in other places in this article: Israel education that doesn’t get at the top right quadrant is not necessarily “bad.” If a Jewish summer camp does not organize an Israeli dance festival like the one I witnessed at Camp Ramah, it should. If a Jewish summer camp does not play Israeli pop music at breakfast, it should. If a Jewish summer camp does not have Israeli sports and bunk counselors, it should. The notion of camp as a Jewish plausibility structure is one that has received attention elsewhere (Aviad, 1988; S. M. Cohen, 1999; Fox, 1997; Gottfried, 1995; Shulman, 1989), and it is clear, to me at least, that this plausibility structure should also be infused with and immersed in Israel, regardless of its resolution.

However, the findings and theoretical framework suggested by this article greatly expand our horizons in thinking about what precisely we mean by “Israel engagement.” Returning to the comparison with Bible education, we can now be more sophisticated and (thanks to the work of Barry Holtz, Gail Dorph and others) we can talk about different goals in teaching Bible, different orientations, and different philosophical approaches that have direct implications for classroom pedagogy. So too in Israel education the analysis and new theoretical framework suggested in this article represents a step, albeit a small one, in that same sort of direction. Our challenge is to move beyond “that was good” and “that was bad” or “I liked it” and “I didn’t like it” in Israel education, both in summer camps and in every communal context of Israel education. With the heuristic graph at hand, we are able to do that. For example, we might ask: How does one take Israel moments that seem to be in the bottom right quadrant and ratchet them up, give them more value, more depth, and move them into the top right quadrant? Do we even want to take students into the top right quadrant? Perhaps camp and
other informal institutions should have as their goals the movement into the bottom right quadrant, and other, more formal educational contexts, like day schools or synagogue sermons, should be taking learners from the bottom right into the top right? Can you move learners from the bottom left quadrant directly into the top right one, or does it have to be a longer process, going via the bottom right quadrant (or, conceivably, via the top left quadrant)? When we see Israel engagement activities going on, how can we use the heuristic device to help us be more specific and reflective about what we like and what we don’t like in them? These questions, and others like them, are ones that could be engaged with during staff training seminars, cross-communal leadership training, and in further research.

We have a long way to go as a field before we have the same sophisticated tools that Bible education has. But it is my hope that this article has made a small contribution to the continuing development of those tools.

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