You may already know why to teach Israel – because Israel is a vital organ in the Jewish body, integral to Jewish memory, Jewish identity and Jewish destiny. Once we have agreement that teaching Israel is vital, the central question is what to teach and how to teach. All of us engaged in Jewish education are often bewildered by what “we should” teach about Israel, whether our setting be the classroom, camp, a youth movement, etc.
What Is “Curriculum”?
The word “curriculum” is a central term in contemporary American and Jewish education. In the words of the American educator Elliot Eisner, “the field of curriculum resides at the very core of education.” However, it is an elusive field whose parameters we need to define before we enter it generally and the field of Israel education particularly.

Our operating assumptions include:

1. A “curriculum” is a document predicated upon subjective values that represent world views and make claims about what is worth knowing. Therefore, it is critical to understand and state the presuppositions and guiding perspectives that animate the curriculum.

2. A “curriculum” is not just a document. It encompasses the totality of ideas, topics, themes and values presented to learners in an educational setting.

3. The “hidden” or unstated messages, values, and ideas that a teacher, a classroom, a setting, and an environment convey are also parts of the curriculum.

If you see a student who finds it as hard as iron to study, it is because his studies are without system.
- Talmud, Ta’anit
In attempting to “curricularize,” one needs to be sensitive to books, maps, websites, and smart boards and also to teacher moods and modes, aesthetics of the learning space, group dynamics, body language, and many other intangible, yet palpable factors.

Like a vector, a curriculum has both magnitude and direction or, in educational terms, scope and sequence. Scope determines curricular bandwidth, and sequence articulates the curricular trajectory. Together, scope and sequence define a course of study.

These perspectives inform any attempt to develop a curriculum, especially an Israel curriculum. Our curricular aim is to nurture subjectivity, passion and connection: a lifelong, meaningful relationship between a learner and a place that is both timely and timeless.

Curricularizing Israel

There are many ways to look at Israel; small as it is, there are diverse “Israels.” Even a simple thing like a map of Israel lends itself to different perspectives. Therefore, every Israel curriculum is partial, in both senses of the word: it reflects the biases and perspectives of the authors, and tells only part of the mosaic-like narrative. This complexity makes “curricularizing” Israel one of the most challenging (yet exciting) of Jewish educational tasks!

In this spirit, we propose to 1) present the core components of an Israel curriculum, 2) propose values and themes we regard as essential in teaching about Israel, and 3) make suggestions about sequencing the subject matter over diverse developmental stages and settings.

The starting point of our curriculum is the framing of Israel as a part of our long Jewish legacy and an historic political, social and military achievement whose potential is not yet fulfilled. We choose to begin what will hopefully be a lifelong romance with Israel. We hope this curricular process will lead to respecting different, even divergent perspectives on Israel. There will be time for thinking, debating, reflecting, challenging, and criticizing Israel. Nevertheless, our Israel curricular point of departure is shehecheyanu, and we hope you will join us in that pursuit.

The Israel curriculum should encompass:

- The core values about Israel that we want young people initially to internalize
- Israel themes that we regard as essential to conveying those values
- Experiences related to Israel that we see as integral to making these values real
- Educational resources that are effective in conveying the values we believe students should internalize
- Behaviors we hope will emerge as a result of this curricular process
- Opportunities for learners to interact with role models (ancient, medieval and modern) that exemplify the values worth preserving and growing
- Texts that are foundational to appreciating the evolving, dynamic relationship of Jews and Judaism to Israel
The overall purpose of any scope or sequence is to nurture a personal, emotional and reflective relationship with Israel, a connection that is affective as much as cognitive, and psychological as much as logical.

The Israel curriculum should be a combination of education and experience, addressing the mind and the heart. We strive to connect learners to Israel through intimate knowledge, deep feeling, and active, responsible behavior. The Israel curriculum should be part of each of the years of the young person’s Jewish education so that a connection to Israel can grow over time with the learner’s increasingly nuanced understanding. The Israel curriculum should permeate the totality of the institution, i.e., its aesthetics, its ethics, its staff, and its budget. The Israel curriculum should be intentionally embedded in the context of the larger Jewish educational experience of our learners of all ages and stages.

The road to that actual education moment has several steps. It encompasses: core values; framing questions; over-arching rubrics; specific topics; and lesson plans. Curricular values are necessary, but they are not sufficient. They justify a curriculum, but they do not articulate it. They provide the foundation upon which the curriculum will be built. The curricular design must take into account the overall experience we want people to have of Israel. We are challenged to achieve a dynamic, lifelong relationship to Israel. In order to create, sustain and grow a relationship between a Jew and Israel, i.e., to achieve our overarching curricular aim, the following questions and themes constitute an essential element.

The Educational Road Has Several Steps:
1. Core Values
2. Framing Questions
3. Overarching Rubrics & Specific Topics
4. Lesson Plans

Core Values & Ideas of Teaching Israel

We regard the following list of core values as suggestive rather than exhaustive:

- The Land of Israel is the birthplace of Jewish people. It is the site and setting of many core Jewish texts and values.
- The Land and the idea of Israel have been an enduring sacred shared value and a centripetal force for Jews throughout Jewish history in the many lands and eras in which Jews have lived.
- The Zionist Movement and the establishment of the modern State of Israel reflect the great commitment of the Jewish people to renew the connection with an ancient birthplace, create a home for Jews after the Holocaust, and create a center for Jewish creativity and innovation.
- The State of Israel is a modern society and a democratic state which at the same time has deep links to a long, varied religious and cultural past. It is a physical home to more than seven million Jews, making Israel the one country in which Jews constitute a majority and thereby
presenting the challenge of being both powerful and moral. Contemporary Israel is an exciting laboratory for an ancient religious civilization learning to live in a modern world and culture.

The physical existence of the contemporary State has been threatened since its creation, causing profound challenges.

The Land of Israel is a spiritual and cultural home for all Jews. A link with contemporary Israel can enrich the lives of all Jews.

Ultimately, the most exciting and fruitful way to know Israel is through multiple experiences in Israel. One of the centerpieces of such Israel educational experiences should be the *mifgash* – the encounter with Israeli peers.

### Framing Questions

Here are a few framing questions that we believe, over the years, should be the backdrop of the curriculum:

- What does Israel mean to me?
- Why is Israel so important to Jews, Judaism, and Jewish life?
- How can knowledge of Israel enrich my Jewish beliefs and behavior?
- What is the nature of the relationships with Israel I can have and will have as I grow?

«Our curricular aim is to nurture subjectivity, passion and connection: a lifelong, meaningful relationship between a learner and a place that is both timely and timeless.»
Our recommended strategy is interdisciplinary – a weave of geography, history, and literature in an attempt to develop a personal, biographical narrative of Israel as a basic element of a Jewish self.

3 Overarching Rubrics & Specific Topics

We suggest the following six overarching rubrics, which together, encompass a series of topics that seem important for a meaningful core Israel education:

- Roots
- Rebirth
- The New Land
- A Contemporary Society
- Issues,
- My Israel.

Please refer to Addendum 1: Overarching Rubrics and Specific Topics (page 8) to see topics for each category.

Don't be frightened! We are not suggesting you need to “cover” all these topics or to do so in this order. We are suggesting that these are specific topics of relevance and interest that you should consider. The list of topics may be related to the “nuts and bolts” of education; how you put them together is the core of the wonderful act of creative teaching!

4 Scope & Sequence

Finally comes the actual task of teaching Israel! There are various ways to create actual “lessons” out of this evolving process of Israel education. We have found value in a curricular design described as “understanding by design” in the book of the same name by Grant P. Wiggins and Jay McTighe, which aims to go beyond specific classroom activities or lessons as the goal and instead focuses on enduring understanding – which will then be the basis for later learning and living. Rather than proffer a formula for Israel education, we are advocating an intentional strategy: teachers and students should work together to develop appropriate “modularized” units woven from the values and topics we have suggested.

Our recommended strategy is interdisciplinary – a weave of geography, history, and literature in an attempt to develop a personal, biographical narrative of Israel as a basic element of a Jewish self.

There are numerous possible permutations, and you will determine which trajectory will be most effective in your community. To give a point of departure, Addendum 2 is one possible sequence.
Summing Up

The overall purpose of any scope or sequence is to nurture a personal, emotional and reflective relationship with Israel, a connection that is affective as much as cognitive, and psychological as much as logical. There is only one theme that we urge be repeated in all settings, at all ages and stages: finding the “I” in Israel, i.e., seeing oneself in direct relationship to Israel, since that is the constant rationale for Israel education. Disciplines such as geography, history, literature, music, theology and politics are added in consonance with secular education in order to be age-appropriate and to support and complement the general education curriculum. This scope and sequence is intended to integrate multiple settings: home, school, and camp, as well as visits to Israel with family and peers.

This is a pamphlet on “curricularizing” Israel; but as you have seen, it is not your usual “curriculum.”

Our approach to curriculum differs from the classic “if it’s Tuesday, teach Chapter 3” approach. We regard curriculum as a gateway rather than a rubric, an adventure rather than a sealed box. Educators ultimately need and deserve “curricula” – but they deserve something greater – the courage and joy of teaching!

Jan Katzew serves as a lead specialist at the Union for Reform Judaism, where his primary focus is Jewish learning. Jan is a rabbi and he earned his doctorate at Hebrew University in Jewish Thought and Education. His relationship to Israel is more personal than professional and more emotional than intellectual. Nevertheless, he has a deep and longstanding commitment to Israel engagement for Jews at all ages, stages, and settings.
Addendum 1 - Overarching Rubrics & Specific Topics

ROOTS
- Discovering the Jewish People’s Relationships to Israel through Texts (Sacred and Secular)
- The Promise of the Land: The Biblical Covenant
- Appreciating Israel’s Spiritual Inheritance
- Israel in Prayer – Then and Now

REBIRTH
- Renewing the Promise: Zionism
- Yehudi Daber Ivrit! – Reviving the Hebrew Language
- A New Megilla: Megillat HaAtzmaut – The Israeli Declaration of Independence
- Eretz Yisrael and Medinat Yisrael – The Land and the State of Israel – Where the Real and the Ideal Meet

THE NEW LAND
- Yama v’Keidma, Tzafona v’Negba – Learning about Israel’s Borders: Making the Maps Ours – What Do I Want to Know about the Land and Landscape of Israel?
- Israel in the Middle East – A Challenging Neighborhood
- Adama Adama – Land, Water, Nature and Returning to the Soil
- Go to the Desert: The Desert in Eretz Yisrael Then and Now
- Jerusalem and Tel Aviv – A Tale of Two Cities and Two Israeli Personalities

A CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY
- Kibbutz Galuyot: Ingathering from Around the World – The Many Faces that Make Up Israel
- Living with a Jewish Calendar and a Jewish Clock: Holidays, Shabbat, and New Occasions in Israel
- Israeli Sights and Sounds – The Art and Music of Israel and Its People
- Inventing Israel – High-Tech Israel
- Israel – Jewish and Democratic – Inspiration, Aspiration, and Perspiration
- Israel Through the Eyes of Its Poets – From Yehuda (Halevi) to Yehuda (Amichai)
- Israel in the News
- Giburim – Israeli Heroes

ISSUES
- Arabs and Jews: Two Peoples, One Land
- Ameich Ami – Jewish Peoplehood
- Elohaiyikh Elohai – Jewish Religion in a Jewish State: Issues and Challenges
- Israel Advocacy – Defending Israel
- Tzedek, Tzedek Tirdof – The Israeli System of Justice
- The Knesset – In Pursuit of Democracy
- Learning in Israel

MY ISRAEL
- Israel and Jewish Identity – There and Here
- Finding the “I” in Israel
- Going to Israel
### Addendum 2: Scope & Sequence - Ages 3-6

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ROOTS</th>
<th>▪ Israel in Prayer</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>▪ Finding the “I” in Israel</td>
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## Addendum 2: Scope & Sequence - Ages 7-10

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<td><strong>MY ISRAEL</strong></td>
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### Notes:

1. Discovering the Jewish People’s Relationships to Israel through Texts (Sacred & Secular)
2. The Promise of the Land: The Biblical Covenant
3. Israel in Prayer
4. Yehudi Daber Ivrit! – Reviving the Hebrew Language
5. Yama v’Keidma, Tzafona v’Negba – Learning about Israel’s Borders: Making the Maps Ours – What Do I Want to Know about the Land & Landscape of Israel?
7. Go to the Desert: The Desert in Eretz Yisrael Then and Now
9. Living with a Jewish Calendar and a Jewish Clock – Holidays, Shabbat, and New Occasions in Israel
10. Israeli Sights and Sounds– The Art & Music of Israel and Its People
11. Israel in the News
12. Giburim: Israeli Heroes
13. Ameich Ami – Jewish Peoplehood
14. The Knesset – In Pursuit of Democracy
15. Finding the “I” in Israel
### Addendum 2: Scope & Sequence - Ages 11-14

| ROOTS | ■ Discovering the Jewish People’s Relationships to Israel through Texts (Sacred & Secular)  
■ Appreciating Israel's Spiritual Inheritance  
■ Israel in Prayer: Then & Now |
| --- | --- |
| REBIRTH | ■ Renewing the Promise: Zionism  
■ A New Megilla: Megillat HaAtzmaut: The Israeli Declaration of Independence |
| THE NEW LAND | ■ Yama v’Keidma, Tzafona v’Negba – Learning about Israel’s Borders: Making the Maps Ours – What Do I Want to Know about the Land & Landscape of Israel?  
■ Israel in the Middle East – A Challenging Neighborhood  
■ Jerusalem & Tel Aviv – A Tale of Two Cities & Two Israeli Personalities |
| CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY | ■ Kibbutz Galuyot: Ingathering from Around the World – The Many Faces that Make Up Israel  
■ Israeli Sights and Sounds – The Art & Music of Israel and Its People  
■ Israel – Jewish & Democratic: Inspiration, Aspiration, & Perspiration  
■ Israel through the Eyes of Its Poets – From Yehuda (Halevi) to Yehuda (Amichai)  
■ Giburim: Israeli Heroes |
| ISSUES | ■ Ameich Ami – Jewish Peoplehood  
■ Elohaiyikh Elohai – Jewish Rina Jewish State: Issues & Challenges  
■ Israel Advocacy: Defending Israel  
■ Learning in Israel |
| MY ISRAEL | ■ Israel and Jewish Identity – There and Here  
■ Finding the “I” in Israel |
Addendum 2: Scope & Sequence - Ages 15-18

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