Educational and Professional Perceptions of Identity Education

Among Educators in Israel:

The Current Situation

Research Report

Neta Polizer

M2: Institute for Experiential Jewish Education

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**[1] Introduction**

This study examined 40 educators from different sectors who work in fields relating to identity education in Israel and included 26 in-depth interviews. We set ourselves the goal of examining several key areas that could help provide a picture of the situation regarding educational and professional processes in Israel and which are common to a large number of educational frameworks and educators in the country.

Most of the educators we interviewed work in experiential (informal) and communal educational frameworks, although some work in schools. Their common denominator is their activity in identity education, that is to say – education whose goal is to structure and enhance personal and/or communal identity. In the context of the presentation and purpose of this report, the interviewees are described as educators involved in processes relating to the structuring of identity and values. However, it is important to emphasize that not all the interviewees define themselves in these terms. As we will see below, the question of professional definition is one of the issues the study examined.

**Accordingly, whenever this report refers to education and educational frameworks, the intention is to education with the goal of structuring, influencing, and researching individual and community identity and values.**

The issues addressed by the report center around five key spheres that we believe constitute the key to a profound understanding of the educational reality, with its strengths and complexities, thereby enabling us to offer an answer to the research questions that concern us: to gain an in-depth understanding of the perception of identity education in Israel and the way it is actually implemented and perceived by the educators themselves at the interface between conceptualization and practice. These spheres are:

- **Professional definition**: What delineates and defines the profession of “identity education”? What complexities and uncertainties exist regarding the perception of the profession in general and in Israel in particular?

- **Training**: What training exists within the work spaces and how can this training be characterized? What training have the educators undergone over the course of their career; which training components were relevant and which were not? What training components are missing in this type of field and should be provided?

- **Goals and motives**: Why and how of educators and educational frameworks of this type operate in the field? What do they expect to achieve through their work in the short and long term and on the narrow and broad planes?

- **Definitions of success**: What are the desired outcomes of the educational processes in which the educators participate, or which they lead? What does success look like and what are its characteristics?

- **Challenges**: What obstacles and challenges accompany the educators’ work and what are the current challenges in the educational field in Israel from their perspective?

These basic spheres, which will be discussed in greater detail in the report below, constitute a foundation on which we can construct a relatively broad picture of the field of identity education in Israel from the perspective of individuals who have been active in this field for varying periods of time. These individuals are familiar with different aspects of the field, both on the basis of their training and experience and in the framework of the positions they fill.

Two key basic assumptions guided us as we began our study:

1. Educators who have been active in the world of education in Israel for a sufficient period of time (at least eight years in the field) have the most relevant and interesting knowledge regarding processes and educational perceptions in the educational field in Israel.

2. Educational perceptions in Israel correspond with educational perceptions around the world. However, there are also differences as a result of historical, sociological, and cultural factors that in turn influence the educational language, theory, and practice that have developed in Israel over recent decades concerning values education, Jewish education, and experiential education.

Accordingly, we developed the research methodology in a manner that could help serve our goals and the above-mentioned basic assumptions. In particular, we aimed to secure a broad and credible picture of the educational field in Israel as perceived by the educators themselves.

**[2] Executive Summary**

**The Goal of the Report**

This report discusses the perception of identity education in Israel: the way it takes place in practice, and the way it is perceived by the educators involved in the field. The goal of the report is to provide a picture of the current situation regarding educational and professional processes in Israel that are common to educational frameworks and educators active in education to personal and/or community identity.

**Research Population**

The findings of this report are based on in-depth interviews with Israeli educators active in identity education. The research population was selected with the goal of encompassing diverse educational fields relating to identity processes; in addition, the aim was to create diverse and broad perspectives on the educational reality in Israel. An emphasis was placed on geographical diversity, diversity in terms of the target population sector, and diversity in terms of various characteristics, such as the type of educational institution, alongside diversity in gender and age. Most of the educators who participated in the survey and the interviewees are in the 30-45 age range.

Almost all the participants hold at least one academic degree or are at an advanced stage of acquiring a degree. Some of them, though not all, hold degrees in educational fields. Most of them did not undergo any structured training as a condition for entering the profession. A small number have participated in structured training or professional development programs during the course of their work.

**Findings**

The research findings present a complex picture of identity education in Israel. The attempt to create a clear but rich picture requires a division into sub-spheres that isolate essentially related factors.

• **Professional perception**: The professional perception of educators in the field of identity education is uneven and includes a large number of definitions. The educators generally come to the profession on the basis of their live experience or ideological perceptions, rather than after completing focused training or on the basis of a clear perception of professional development. This reality, together with the lack of standardization in the field, creates a broad basked containing different types of professional definitions. Although these definitions form part of a single sphere, they are not connected in any particular manner.

• **Training**: There is a clear lack of training meeting the educators’ educational needs. The main gap is reflected in the comprehensive need for training programs relating to the development and wellbeing of the educators and providing access to updated pedagogy capable of improving the educational experience of both the learners and the educators. This overall need highlights the need for symmetry between the investment in the identity process of students and learners and the investment in developing and deepening the identity and value-based perceptions of the educators.

• **Goals and motives**: The main findings, common to the overwhelming majority of the research participants, show that the educators are active in the field due to a value-based and ideological perception that guides their choices in the field and the manner in which they educate in practice. Their goals are clearly related to social, political, cultural, and identity-based approaches. Although there is sometimes a measure of conceptual confusion, it is notable that the educators feel that their goals are clear to themselves and relate profoundly to their personal world.

• **Perception of success**: The focus on the character of the desired graduate as a means for conceptualizing the perception of success showed that, for many educators, the criteria for success relate to value-based, identity, and complex cognitive development, alongside community and political activism of various types. Many educators present a relatively well-developed perspective regarding their definition of success.

• **Challenges**: The findings from the discussion about challenges highlight the lack of an educational language and pedagogic approaches that can help the educators present a broad and multilayered world of identity-related content in the context of Israeli and Jewish identity. The educators are also preoccupied by challenges resulting from the difficulty in developing in the field over time and the lack of a support network and broad and productive peer discourse.

**Conclusion**

The picture of reality that emerges from the study enables us to examine the challenges and opportunities that face the educational field and in particular the experienced educators themselves from their own diverse perspectives. The challenges and needs raised by the educators expose horizontal deficiencies in the processes of professionalization and productive educational discourse. They also highlight the need to deepen the educators’ professional and personal identity and to develop and enhance access to relevant and innovative pedagogies. These needs seem even more prominent given the central place attached to value-based and ideological discourse in the educators’ worlds – aspects that guide their selection of this field and shape their commitment to meaningful and profound goals.

The lack of clarity regarding conceptual discourse and definitions in the field of identity education highlights both sides of the educational coin in Israel, which is characterized on the one hand by creativity, committed educators, and flexible boundaries, yet which at the same time finds it difficult to create a system of concepts and shared pedagogies that can be implemented in diverse ways according to the character of the educational space and the educators’ perception.

In order to formulate an even more coherent and precise picture of identity education processes in Israel, thereby permitting the consolidation of value-based and educational processes of professionalization, it is important to continue to refine the conceptual understanding and the analysis of the existing training programs and pedagogies used in educational spaces in this field.

**[3] Background**

**[A] Methodology**

The research process was implemented on several levels that ultimately yielded the different levels of findings. The core of the research was based on in-depth qualitative interviews with educators at different stages of their professional career.

The interviewees had a **semi-structured** format. The main focus was on the interviewees’ stories of their own work, educational perceptions, and experiences from the field. Their ability to construct a personal story faithful to the experiences of people on the educational front line in Israel forms the foundation for our findings. The interviews concentrated on the basic issues we defined, as detailed in the introduction. However, the choice to give the interviewees the freedom to tell their story and conceptualize the themes enables us to listen to them and to identify key points and concepts in the educational discourse, as well as to appreciate the similarities and differences between different educators and different sub-spheres within the field.

In order to add a horizontal examination of the field of identity education in Israel, the research also included a review of 40 educators of varying ages from different sectors and geographical areas. The emphasis here was on individuals in the middle of their career, i.e. with more than eight years’ experience and aged 30-45, and who work primarily with Israelis.

In order to refine and expand our point of reference, we also reviewed a number of educators in earlier stages of their careers. This survey emphasized basic horizontal questions concerning the profession, target populations, and professional training.

In addition, we undertook a survey of educational and professional training programs in Israel that relate to identity education to varying extents, in order to obtain an accurate and representative picture of the situation regarding training and the perception of training program intended for educators in Israel.

In this study we chose to focus on educators involved in structuring, influencing, and researching personal and community identity and values, and on their experiences and perceptions concerning their work in the educational field. The goal was to understand how individuals who cope with and experience education in Israel and lead the educational activities see the field. We sought to map the common denominators and differences between the educators in order to obtain an up-to-date, in-depth, and accurate picture of the fundamental and formative processes in the educational field in Israel today, and of the main questions and issues facing those at the heart of educational activity. This approach was based on the perception that a detailed and faithful understanding of what actually happens in the field can help efforts to improve the field, and particularly to improve the successes of the educators themselves.

**[B] Education in Israel: The Use of Conceptualization**

At this stage we should note a key distinction concerning the perception of education in Israel that has an acute influence on patterns of organization in the field, professional language, and the way educators see their work.

Educational language in Israel is ordered very clearly around the distinction between formal and informal education. This distinction, which deserves separate and detailed clarification, is based on a fundamental approach that separates educational action within schools, defined as a compulsory activity, from activities that (for the most part) take place outside schools and are defined as elective. In making this distinction, many organizations and programs base themselves on the thought of Professor Reuven Kahane[[1]](#footnote-1) and his conceptualizations of informal education.

Professor Gad Yair (who is himself a student of Professor Kahane) is another thinker whose ideas are at the forefront of discourse on informal education in Israel.[[2]](#footnote-2) Yair conceptualized much of the value-based and experiential pedagogy used in educational programs in Israel. The field is also influenced by progressive approaches that have gained a foothold in various educational and academic settings.

It hardly needs to be noted that among the research participants, a clear gulf can be seen between those who are familiar with this thought, almost all of whom were or still are active in academic frameworks, and the majority of educators on the frontline of educational work with children and youth, for whom this theoretical field is unfamiliar and does not form part of their educational perception.

This dichotomous distinction between formal and informal education creates an educational reality in which, on the one side, we find the school system and all it includes, with the exception of special programs of an “informal” character that are sometimes held within the school building. On the other side, we find a broad educational field that embraces numerous spheres and pedagogies with diverse value-based perceptions, all of which are defined in the negative sense of being “informal” – i.e. not scholastic in the narrow sense and not part of the compulsory activities.

In the context of this perception, it is worth noting that most of the research participants are not teachers, while those who are involved in teaching work simultaneously in educational settings outside the school. All of them have rich experience in educational programs of various kinds, and their perspective extends over the different sides of the equation. As noted, the common denominator they all share is their involvement in processes of structuring of personal and/or community identity.

**[C] Research Participants – Demographics and Quantitative Statistics**

This study, which we undertook with the goal of mapping key conceptualizations in the educational field in Israel, surveyed 40 educators (22 women and 18 men) – hereinafter “the participants.” Of these, we interviewed 26 (14 women and 12 men) – hereinafter “the interviewees.”

In the survey itself, we sought to map different educators in diverse ways and to collect information about their perception of the profession, as well as to obtain information about the nature of their work and their professional and educational training before or during their work in the field.

We placed a strong emphasis on diversity, as reflected in various demographic aspects. The following are the survey statistics:

• **Age and seniority**: All the survey participants have at least eight years’ seniority in the educational field. Since entering the educational field in the broadest sense, very few of them have left it. The dominant group of participants were educators in the middle stages of their professional development, reflecting our understanding that they constitute a group that is particularly preoccupied with questions concerning professional development and training. However, it was also important to us to examine a wide range of perceptions, and accordingly other age and seniority groups are also represented.

**Graph labels**

**Age of Survey Participants**

• **Geography**: In geographical terms, it is important to distinguish between two key data: place of residence and area of work. The structure of education in Israel, as well as the small size of the country, permit a relatively high measure of flexibility and work in different educational frameworks. A significant number of participants are responsible for and involved in educational frameworks whose target population includes the entire country. For the purposes of the survey, and recognizing that there are various factors that influence education, we will note the two above-mentioned data items. We will also address the issue of the center and the periphery in the socioeconomic sense. Regarding the area of work, the study relates to the geographical dispersal of the population with which the participants work directly, rather than the location of the organization’s headquarters or offices or the dispersal of populations indirectly connected with the work. In this context, the survey noted the main population with which the participants work in accordance with their own description.

**Graph labels**

**Area of Residence: Participants**

Greater Jerusalem including Judea and Samaria   
Tel Aviv Metropolis   
Coastal Plain and Southern Israel   
Northern Israel (Greater Haifa and North)

• **Type of work**

The educational field in Israel is broad, with ambiguous and flexible boundaries. In many cases, educational frameworks other than schools occupy a borderline position or combine educational activities with culture, therapy, social entrepreneurship, and politics. Accordingly, the educational space also includes a diverse range of sub-spheres and languages that are not solely or necessarily related to what is traditionally referred to as “education.” In our schematic division of the research participants by field of work, we focused on the populations they work with and on a division based on the usual parameters applied in the educational and social field in Israel. In order to provide as clear and broad a picture as possible, divisions are presented both according to the population type and according to the sub-sphere of the educational field.

• Educators’ target population

**Graph labels**

**Geographical Dispersion: Target Population**

Greater Jerusalem including Judea and Samaria   
Tel Aviv Metropolis   
Coastal Plain and Southern Israel   
Northern Israel (Greater Haifa and North)   
National dispersion in multiple centers

**Graph labels**

**Target Population: Key Demographics**

Population defined as mixed Jewish-Arab   
Special needs   
New immigrants   
Mixed population not defined along religious lines   
Mixed population in religious terms   
Secular stream   
Orthodox or Conservative religious stream

• Educational framework in which the educators work

**Graph labels**

Population defined as mixed Jewish-Arab   
Special needs   
New immigrants   
Mixed population not defined along religious lines   
Mixed population in religious terms   
Secular stream   
Orthodox or Conservative religious stream

• **Training**

The perception of training and the connection between official and unofficial training and the field of identity education and intricate and complex issues. We will present below a limited mapping of the training undergone by the survey participants during the course of their professional career. All the participants, without exception, hold an academic degree or are at an advanced stage of academic studies. However, only a relatively small proportion of them have completed training relating directly to their field of work.

The main training the participants underwent did not constitute a threshold requirement for their work (with the exception of school teachers) and did not necessarily relate directly to the position they fill. Moreover, most of the participants did not participate in the training by virtue of their work and are not in any process of official or semi-official professionalization within the organizations in which they operate or funded thereby.

Additional findings concerning the issue of training will be presented in the findings for the interviews.

**Graph labels**

**Training**

Graduates of various Jewish and educational leadership programs (Maoz, ROI, Kollot, Gevanim, etc.)   
Graduates of group facilitation training   
Graduates of the SEC program of the Institute for Experiential Jewish Education   
Graduates of the educational leadership program at the Mandel Institute   
Graduates of academic programs focusing on Jewish education   
Holders of a teaching certificate   
BA or MA in an educational field   
Holders of an academic degree or in the course of studies toward an academic degree

**[4] The Research Findings: In-Depth Interviews and the Survey of Educators**

The qualitative interview emphasized several basic issues in educational work. However, with the aim of enabling the interviewees to tell a story and present a personal and professional narrative, the interviews had a semi-structured format. The questions presented created a framework for discuss relating to different educational perceptions, goals, and processes and to professional and value-based issues rooted in a conceptual world, but no less importantly in practical and everyday action and experience. At the same time, the interviews left ample space for the interviewees to present their educational worldview and their personal experience, to share examples, and to attempt to conceptualize by themselves their world of content, without subjecting it to overly restrictive theories or approaches.

On the basis of the extensive information and material raised in the interviewees, we have collated here some key points and insights that were raised prominently during the various interviews. The decision to omit or emphasize certain points is based both on the comparative analysis of the interviews and on the centrality of these points from the perspective of each individual interviewee.

**[A] Perception of the Profession**

The question of the perception of the profession constitutes an important foundation in understanding the current situation in the educational field in Israel. The information about this issue was gathered both in the in-depth interviews and in the general survey, and accordingly the analysis contains integrated information. As noted above, education in Israel is based on perceptions and traditions relating to the country’s social structure and to specific historical and cultural processes that are present to this day in the structure of the education systems and in training perceptions in the educational field. Accordingly, the attempt to formulate a definition of the profession is also, to an extent, a reflection of the horizontal processes in education in Israel, and may constitute a key to understanding various complexities. We will present below a number of key definitions presented by the interviewees and participants. We should note at this point that most of the respondents found it difficult to answer this question in a broad and clear manner. Of the total number of respondents, approximately half did not offer an unequivocal answer to this question, or prevaricated between different answers.

**Definition A: Informal education**

Some formal educators (teachers) and informal teachers meet with their students in a flexible space:

*“As in Kahane’s definition, I am involved in informal education, that is to say – voluntary education outside the boundaries of the school.”*

**Definition B: Educators**

“Education” is a professional definition that encompasses all those involved in processes relating to the shaping and development of the human, regardless of the means used to this end:

*“I can’t find a precise and less general definition. When I was a principal, that was a position, but the professional is education, definitely education.”*

**Definition C: Teachers**

In contrast to other educators, teachers have a clear professional definition, a clear certificate, and clear professional demands.

*“I’m a teacher. That’s what I studied and that’s what I do. I educate through the profession of teaching.”*

**Definition D: Activists and sociopolitical activists**

The inherent essence of educational functions is to secure social and political change. Education is their tool.

*“I’m not an educator by profession, I’m a social entrepreneur and an activist, and as of today I see education as a good arena for creating change. Maybe tomorrow I’ll turn to politics or the media if I see them as good tools.”*

**Definition E: Jewish educators / professional Jews**

Education is perceived as relating to the primary involvement in Jewish content and values, and the profession revolves around personal and collective processes of identity.

*“Based on a clarified perception of identity, I choose to engage in Jewish education, and I’ve been doing so on a professional basis for almost 20 years.”*

**Perceptions of the Profession: Discussion**

Following on from our discussion at the beginning of the report, and elsewhere in it, we must note the substantial gulf between the everyday reality of many educators and the conceptualizations and definitions of the educational and professional activities. The question of the professional definition presents a complex obstacle for many educators, who unlike many other professions often did not come to the field after completing their studies or following focused professional training. On the contrary: many of the respondents state that it was actually the absence of a narrow definition that eventually led them to the field of education from different directions and with different orientations – spiritual, cultural, value-based, philosophical or political. Accordingly, it is worth reflecting on the complex relations between the advantages of flexibility and blurred boundaries in the field of education, which allow educators to find numerous difference niches within the field, and the need to professionalize the field and create clear conceptualizations in the world of education in general, and in the field of value-based education, relating to processes of identities and values, in particular.

**[B] Training**

The sphere of training includes diverse fields of knowledge, from practical and everyday knowhow through abstract and broad-based ideas. In order to map the information about training effectively, we created a distinction between the part concerning existing training programs, for which we provide selected and relatively exhaustive quotes from the interviewees, and the part concerning gaps and needs in the field of training, which is divided into key categories.

The perception of professional and academic training is based largely on the distinction between formal and informal education. Dedicated training programs for formal education are almost entirely concentrated in academic teacher training programs providing a teaching certificate, as well as a number of programs for principals and other functionaries in the school environment. Among the wide range of programs for teachers, prominent examples include the Revivim program at the Hebrew University and Ofakim at Tel Aviv University. In addition to teaching and theoretical training, these programs also apply a value-based perception concerning teachers’ responsibility for teaching identity-structuring subjects in the fields of Judaism and Hebrew culture.

In the informal sphere, there is a growing wave of dedicated training tracks at colleges. These relate mainly to educational theory and its connection to the key worlds of practical content in the field, i.e. work with youth at risk and social-community education. These tracks are still in their infancy, are not defined as a threshold requirement for work in the field, and in practice many of those active in the field have not undergone relevant academic training.

In addition to the academic programs, there are also key programs focusing mainly on creating a value-based core and on developing educational identity and educational leadership. Prominent examples of such programs include the Mandel Institute and the Maoz programs, which provide a profound examination of the connection between professional identity and the educators’ cognitive approaches and the programs they lead and create.

On the basis of the existing programs, the in-depth interviews, and various reviews in the research literature, it can be stated that most workers in the educational fields undergo training in a less structured and formal manner, and do so mainly within the organizations and programs to which they are affiliated. In some cases this takes the form of a structured toolbox, while in others it involves localized responses to the specific area of work. Another body that offers training programs on a certain scale is the Society and Youth Authority, which in recent years has attempted to create a standardized level of professionalism among educational workers in the public sector and in the various authorities through training programs and by requiring position holders to undergo certification providing them with an education worker’s certificate, which is supposed to be conceptually equivalent to a teaching certificate.

**The Perception of the Existing Training – Selected Quotes**

• *The prevalent perception among us is that it’s impossible to teach the facilitators how to facilitate. The approach relies on the assumption that they have acquired enough meaningful experiences as participants themselves, and that we merely teach them about our organizational identity.*

• *The basic idea behind the training of facilitators in the movement is that every facilitator is also a participant. This is true at all the age groups and this is basically what feeds the facilitating structure, both conceptually and methodologically.*

• *All the training we provide for staff members is ideological and value-based. It’s obvious that there’s no point discussing practical tools when time is so limited. It’s much more important for us to develop the educator’s ideological and social approach as a political person.*

• *All our educators receive dynamic supervision and tools for coping emotionally and psychologically with the young people we work with. The idea that educational work includes therapeutic elements forms the foundation of this institution.*

• *The significant thing that the Mandel program provides is the time and possibility to transform vague and scattered thoughts into a practical and feasible educational vision, and to root it in research.*

• *The most important tool we teach and train with is the study of practice. A complex and uncompromising observation of daily actions, together with a group of peers bringing diverse perspectives, and learning through educational experiences, with the help of various theories.*

• *The most important thing I learned at the Institute for Experiential Education was that there is a distinct definition of the field of experiential Jewish education, and that it has its own key and unique characteristics and perceptions.*

**Gaps in the Field of Training: Educational Perception**

• There is a gap between the educational and identity-based process the students are required to undergo and the lack of attention to the educators’ own educational and value-based perception and identity.

*“The training at Revivim doesn’t serious address the teacher’s Jewish and Israeli identity, despite the fact that the program relates to subjects that structure identity.”*

• There is lack of a sufficiently accessible space where it is possible to learn a clear, profound, and non-intuitive educational language.

*“The profound lack of training and of a professional language is all too clear from the many times over recent days when I guided the staff or took an educational decision solely on the basis of intuition.”*

**Gaps in the Field of Training: Professionalism**

• Lack of threshold demands for work in the field and lack of standardization:

*“I didn’t have any educational training, and the truth is that no-one has ever asked me about this in any job.”*

• There is no definition of the tools and knowledge needed to define who is an educator.

*“Everyone on our team comes with different experience and a different approach, and there’s no common base.”*

• There is a need to make the field of value-based and experiential education more accessible and to include the inculcation of basic tools.

*“Today everyone here already recognizes that experiential education is something significant and important, but there still isn’t any serious discourse or training in the field.”*

• There is a lack of tools for emotional guiding and supervision, as well as tools for working with short- and long-term groups.

*“How do you work with a group when its whole process has to be completed in three days? When exactly will each stage in the process – that usually takes at least a month – come?*

• There is a lack of distinctions and conceptualizations relating to the connection between education and therapy and the nature of the relationship between the two.

*“Everything we do in the framework of our work is therapeutic. Education is a therapeutic tool as I see it, despite the fact that my qualification is an academic one.”*

• There is a lack of distinctions and conceptualizations regarding work with different target populations.

*“How can it be that when I want to work with an adult population, the only pool of methods available to me is from the youth movements?”*

**Training: Discussion**

The main insights concerning training relate primarily to the desire and need to professionalize and deepen educational work, on the basis of a profound commitment and connection to the educational activity. This aspect is evident in the comments of most of the participants and interviewees. Moreover, the existing training programs themselves highlight the need for additional and broader training – accessible and in-depth – enabling educators from various fields to professionalize and to explore profound aspects of diverse educational and personal processes. The lack of uniformity between the training programs offered by different organizations, and the relatively small proportion of educators who underwent adequate training before beginning to work in the field (or even during the course of their work) suggests that the attitude to the profession is still problematic, as is its position in the broader social context. A key finding that emerges from the examination of the existing training programs and from the needs raised by the interviewees suggests that there are several areas that have yet to be addressed in a comprehensive and broad-based manner:

• Educational supervision for educational organizations as a whole – addressing the organization or program as a target population that requires individual and collective work, both in the context of training and in the development of an educational identity and unique educational language for the organization.

• Value-based discourse feeding the processes of educational development among educators and offering a clear and broad identity-based perception that goes beyond the confines of the program or the organization.

• Creating a clear professional threshold that distinguishes and enriches the educational field and is not confined to school teaching.

• Creating new conceptualizations that can provide useful alternatives to the distinction between formal and informal education, encouraging profound educational work in different arenas.

• Multidisciplinary training helping to provide the field of education and educators with numerous tools using diverse languages that are not separated in a crude manner and permit the creation of profound, complex, and meaningful processes.

• Development of pedagogies and of theoretical and practical discourse concerning experiential and community education, or identity education, as a distinct field forming the foundation for value-based and identity-based processes, without restricting itself to a specific niche within the educational field.

**[C] Motives and Goals**

The comments of the various interviewees about their motives (why they became educators in the field) and goals (what they are trying to achieve) encompass diverse aspects from the fields of culture, values, identity, and politics. The role of education as a tool for change and development of different types is reflected in the ways they define educators and educational organizations. For many educators, the motive that brought them to the field was not a clear and well-structured decision. In most cases, it was a gradual process relating to their background and meaningful educational and social activities in which they had participated, such as youth movements, counseling, or volunteering. The entry of educators into the field is uneven and is not based on an orderly process. Accordingly, it is accompanied by different perceptions and aspirations regarding personal and educational goals. Most of the interviewees did not make a clear distinction between motives and goals, and as noted it is difficult to identify uniform characteristics or a uniform language concerning the conceptualization of goals and motives. This reflects both the difficult nature of conceptualization and the broad plane across which the educators are dispersed. In addition, it is interesting to examine the connection between motives and goals, which largely reflects the development of the educators’ educational perspectives, in a manner that is often based on formative identity-related experiences in their own lives. The following are the main findings regarding the motives and educational goals raised in the interviews:

**Goals of Educational Activity**

Several central themes can be identified regarding goals, around which educational perceptions are ordered. There is a relatively clear distinction between social goals, cultural goals, and value-based and personal goals. Although the division is not hermetic, there are differences between goals according to the character of the organization or educational program in which the educators work.

**Goal A: Development of complex and critical thought**

• An ability to examine reality independently and from different perspectives, and to understand ideological, social, and cultural processes in a way that cannot be taken for granted given the existing social environment.

*“What interests me in my work in education is to develop complex and critical thought processes and an inability to rise above the obvious.”*

• Development of a political and ideological perception relating profoundly to society.

*“For me, education to good citizenship is political education. It’s important that every person have an understanding of the perceptions that shape society, that they care, and that they have something to say about what’s going on in this place.”*

**Goal B: Creating a profound connection to and ownership of the individual over society and Jewish and Israeli tradition**

• Transforming the learners and students into cultural agents and partners in multigenerational discourse on ideas and values in culture, and connecting the individual to major cultural questions.

*“As a teacher, my goal is to connect the processes of individual identity with the formative stories of Jewish culture and to create something that is relevant to contemporary life.”*

• Clarification of individual and collective identity – i.e. a profound examination of the question who am I and who are we, addressing the ramifications of the answers to these questions.

*“In our educational process, I focus on an examination of identity – who am I and who are we, and how we can answer these questions over time without giving up on complexity and without submitting to populism.”*

**Goal C: Profound involvement in the community and creating positive activism**

• Creating social repair and empowering the weak – i.e. providing tools, nurturing individual and community strengths among weaker members of society, whether this involves people with special needs or a socioeconomic or geographical periphery.

*“Although this may sound pretentious, our goal is to reform the society that brought these children to a point where they have no support or tools and no place where they feel safe.”*

• To create a connection between the individual and the community through action and cultural activities.

*“The foundation and support for all our movement work comes from the community. Our educational work is a central part of the community, and in essence education is a tool for strengthening the community and the young people as those who lead the community.”*

**Goal D: Creating meaningful dialogue between adults and children**

• A fruitful encounter between the educator and the child adding meaning to the worlds of the child and the adult.

*“I always want to be paying deep attention to the place where the learner is, and to engage in dialogue with them from that point. This is my chance to take part in meaningful dialogue that touches them and me.”*

**Goal E: Developing an autonomous and independent identity**

• Turning the child or youth into a person who is not dependent and has a sense of capacity and conceptual and psychological autonomy.

*“The prevalent perception here is that we are creating an extreme form of independence through the work in nature, and this is the most important value we inculcate. This enables development and a profound ability to cope with the unknown aspects of life.”*

• Personal realization and realizing the individual potential of each person.

*“Personally, and despite the real challenge, I see educating a class mainly as a tool to develop the human spirit and make the most of its inherent potential.”*

**Motives for Working in the Field**

The wording of the motives is inevitably less clearly defined, since it relates among other factors to personal feelings and experiences that have not always been fully clarified and conceptualized. A number of key patterns were evident in the discourse about motives.

**Motive A: A longing for meaning**

• Psychological leanings and a love of the field, together with a desire to be part of a profound and complex human and ideological encounter.

*“Education is what I’m good at and what’s good for me. I want to stand in front of young people and with young people. I’ve tried other things and I also studied industrial design, but I came back to education, because it’s only here that I can feel myself blooming and expressing my strengths and my love for others.”*

**Motive B: Ideological and value-based approach**

• A deep concern for society, and an understanding that education is a place that enables change, clarification, and profundity, as well as criticism and ongoing learning.

*“I’m working to change and improve society, and I see education as a good and serious tool for this purpose – it’s not the only tool, but it’s a good one.”*

• A religious and moral commitment that sees the educational arena as one of its profound manifestations.

*“It’s important for me to be in an arena where people are grappling with shaping Jewish identity and culture. It’s a mission to engage in discourse about prayer and the essence of Judaism with girls who are asking themselves profound questions about their connection to all this.”*

• A cultural and national agency. An understanding that there is a function that needs to be filled within the cultural and values system, and that this is the right arena for this.

*“I’m a teacher and I see myself as an agent for culture and nationhood. This is my motive to act and this is my function, through discourse about identity and belonging.”*

• A love of humans and belief in the human, the good they contain, and the potential to imbue life with meaning.

*“I want to create small zones of love in the world, so far a room or classroom of young people is the place where I feel a great and growing love.”*

**Motive and Goals: Discussion**

The main definitions that accompany discourse relating to motives and goals among the interviewees are profoundly connected to their personal values, ideological perceptions, and tendencies. One of the questions these definitions raise relates to their meaning within changing contexts.

Thus, for example, the clarification of identity within the school framework may have a different character to the clarification of identity in youth movements and organizations, both because of the structure and character of the framework and because of the different educational and ideological language. Moreover, the concept of identity in general needs to be deconstructed and examined from different angles in the context of distinct philosophical and value-based systems.

Moreover, there are many concepts that require not just study but also reflection on educational practices that can in turn concretive their inherent meaning. An example of this is critical thinking, which was mentioned in most of the interviews and precisely because of that demands an examination of the everyday processes associated with its development. Another example is the discussion of the concept of values, which forms the basis for many of the educational goals but in practice serves as a catch-all term for diffuse goals and criteria relating to morality, culture, and political perceptions.

It is interesting to note that the discourse about values is broader and more extensive than that about personal motives. In particular, the interviews lacked any serious mention of the personal development of the educator as a human and lacked a focus on the educator’s personal, financial, or spiritual wellbeing. Across all the interviews, we must note the admirable richness and depth of the perception of the educational goals, based as noted on a broad value-based and ideological commitment.

**[D] Perceptions of Success**

The question of success manifests the complexity of the educational field and the need to define objectives and develop understandable and clear processes. Discourse about success is not separated from discourse about values, and naturally is interested mainly by the broad goals that were defined. Accordingly, this discourses relates both to concrete issues and to abstract and delicate spheres. For the sake of precision, and in order to guide the discourse, there is a focus on the definition and description of a successful process, as well as on a description of the successful graduates of the educational process. These can be extrapolated onto the educational process, the educational language, and the existing conceptualizations.

The question of criteria for success in an educational process that is not usually measured in a quantitative manner, or at least is not mainly measured in this manner, presents a complex challenge in the conceptualization of success. As a result, many different definitions can be found. These can be divided into some key categories. The following sections present the main findings regarding the definition of educational success as raised in the interviews.

**Definition A: The learner’s commitment to the process of personal and collective clarification and thought**

• Active and ongoing participation in the educational activities and the practical expression of the process. A commitment to the core personal or collective values.

*“Success is measured firstly in terms of ongoing commitment. It’s very difficult to create commitment to an engagement with identity and values, and it’s only possible to extract meaningful insights from the perspective of time.”*

• Active participation in the broad Jewish-Israeli discourse.

*“The young people who come to us of their own free will and create original theater here after a few months of studying issues in the Gemara thereby realized our main goal as I see it. They become part of cultural discourse in the profound sense.”*

**Definition B: Realizing the educational values in different arenas during and after the process**

• An ability to participate actively and profoundly in society and in the core issues of the public domain.

*“The educator’s role is to create political awareness and to promote conscious and complex political discourse stemming from his world of values.”*

• Being an agent for a particular ideology and worldview.

*“Our graduates on the starting line have experienced a long period since their adolescence in this hothouse, and they take this with them wherever they go in their lives. It’s present in language, perception, and actions.”*

• Creating change in consciousness or politics on the local or public level.

*“Our success is ultimately measured in the creation of social activists who create change that influences society.”*

• The implementation of the conceptualizations and ideological and value-based discoursed in practical arenas and the pursuit of fruitful dialogue between the everyday level and the theoretical questions.

*“What matters to me is that the educator be capable of reading Plato and then of thinking again about what they’re doing – and vice-versa. If they tell me that they’re building a program on the basis of Plato’s thought, I want them to be able to show me exactly where this is present and what the practical meaning is of each philosophical idea they present.”*

**Definition C: A graduate with profound identity, independence, and a complex world of knowledge**

• An ability to conceptualize the identity and its characteristics.

*“Someone who’s completed the process is capable of understanding their identity on the personal and educational level and knows how to define it.”*

• Coping with life independently.

*“The idea is to separate from home and from my dependence on it in terms of identity and functioning, so that I can cope with the difficulties of life.”*

• To acquire a meaningful body of knowledge in the cultural, civic, and spiritual spheres.

*“For us, success can be seen when serious questions and ideas become part of identity. In other words, when Nietzsche or a text become a best friend, and the encounter with them is intimate and meaningful.”*

• To develop a passion and a connection to life or to particular aspects of life.

*“Failure occurs when something in the child fails to open and they don’t have the space that yields joy. You don’t know what will hold them together after they leave school.”*

**The Perception of Success: Discussion**

Many of the criteria for success and the experiences of success are intrinsically related to the educational goals, the educational value system, and the developmental and identity-based processes. A broad perspective of the perception of both the goals and the definitions of success shows that the approach of many of the educators is firmly rooted in their world of values, their cultural and political perceptions, and sometimes even in a relatively clear vision, all of which guide their educational activity. As noted, it is important to emphasize that there is no uniformity between the different educational organizations in terms of the perception of success. Nevertheless, the interviews suggest that the variance is mainly due to a difference of values, rather than one of pedagogy. The emphasis on a discourse of realization, critical thinking, and social or political involvement corresponds on a broad level with the connection between the field of community and identity education in Israel and the field of social activism, which many people believe plays a significant role in the Israeli educational world (as can also be seen in the section on the perception of the profession). It should also be noted that it is precisely the impressive picture painted by the educators’ perception of educational success that is responsible for their extensive and complex discussion of challenges, as presented in the next section.

**[E] Challenges**

The challenges educators face are many, and although they are changing, they do not seem to be becoming any fewer. Of all the many challenges in the social and cultural spheres, we chose to focus on those that are directly related to education and value-based processes, and which can be understood and discerned within the educational encounter. In order to simplify the conceptualization of the challenges, we grouped them in separate categories that distinguish between language, educational tools, the education system, and the target population.

**Challenge A: An unclear and loose educational and professional language**

• The difficulty in formulating basic values and a long-term educational vision.

*“Although it’s fundamental to all our work, and although I can say that being in nature is something basic and important, even today I can’t put in words why this is so, and that makes things hard for me.”*

• The lack of a clear language that can help mediate educational ideas and conceptualize complex processes.

*“I feel that it’s very difficult to clearly put into words what we do here, and the excuse is always that it’s complex. But complexity isn’t an excuse for a lack of clarity.”*

• The difficulty in phrasing and clearly understanding the field of education and its central and formative processes.

*“Through the confusion and complexity of work in school, some serious confusion emerges regarding the question of the balance between emotional and dynamic support and educational processes for the transfer of knowledge. To what extent is the educator’s function to provide psychological or therapeutic help, and what is the difference between the two fields?”*

**Challenge B: Lack of available and professional educational tools**

• The lack of professional standards and guidance relating to the structuring of educational programs and the creation of substantiated educational models.

*“In the movement we don’t have any supervision or any standardization of the educational process. It all comes from the grassroots. What matters to the person leading the process in each council is what happens. In some councils the educational processes are on an appalling level.”*

• The lack of a professional horizon and an understanding of the professionalization processes.

*“The longest a coordinator lasts with us is two years, or in extreme cases three. There’s no perception of continuity or progress, and for many people this is just a stage along the way, while they’re students or before they begin their studies.”*

• The lack of supervision of educators and of actions to deepen their identity.

*“It’s hard, if not impossible, for educators to move beyond the everyday level. Every educator needs space to deal with their own identity and understand who they are as a person and as an educator, and how this connects with the work they do – and vice versa.”*

• The lack of tools for creating a meaningful educational experience that is not based on intuition.

*“How can we manage to create experience that have profound meaning and are not superficial or simply variations on teaching methods.”*

• The low standard of counseling and supervision.

*“One of our most serious problems is the low standard of counseling and the old-fashioned perception of the role of the charismatic counselor who always talks with pathos and whom everyone listens to.”*

• The lack of direction relating to the encounter and meaningful work with the parents.

*“It’s interesting that no-one talks about this seriously. The parents are such an important component, and sometimes they can be the biggest obstacle to our work.”*

• Work in the field entails loneliness. There is no infrastructure for productive peer discourse.

*“Everything I bring to work, I bring by myself. I don’t have anyone to discuss the essence of it all with or to think about things from a fresh angle – despite the fact that I am a member of several forums with people at my level.”*

**Challenge C: The difficulty in structuring identity processes in a diverse society and in the context of variance**

• The system and the community are not ready to promote different models and educational or value-based perceptions.

*“As you work with educators and teachers, you realize just how hard it is to break down the old-fashioned perceptions of education and the teaching of knowledge without the support and trust of the system. It’s really a case of tilting at windmills.”*

• Social division and the difficulty of functioning in a space with multiple views, conflicts, and cultures.

*“Our society is in a state of rift, so that even pluralistic content takes a political stance, and it’s hard to create an autonomous and open workspace.”*

• Profound resistance to any content that comes under the definition of “Judaism.”

*“We usually spend the first six months here at the pre-army program simply overcoming the objections to any Jewish content. Only after a long struggle do the learners begin to see some interesting cracks below the surface.”*

• The difficulty in finding a balance between value-based and serious content and aspects that are relevant to young people.

*“An attempt is made to connect the content of the lessons and the students’ real needs, but there’s nothing you can do about it – the Bible doesn’t meet any concrete need of a secular kid on the moshav.”*

• Finding a balance between an open and autonomous process and direction and boundaries.

*“This is a question I grapple with all the time. How can we balance the desire to create a completely autonomous and almost anarchic space for the learners with the need to protect them and keep them grounded in reality, within the boundaries of society and the values that are important to us?”*

**Challenges: Discussion**

The numerous challenges raised by the interviewees reflect to an extent the difficulty of the educational field in contemporary social and identity-related contexts that are constantly changing, demanding complex and profound responses. As can be seen, the educators focus strongly on aspects relating to processes of professionalization and the need to obtain tools and a language to serve them in their work. There is no evidence that the educators are losing their way in terms of values and reflection, but the main issue is the difficult need to cope with the lack of relevant training, possibilities for individual and professional development, and precise and relevant educational responses for confronting the social, emotional, and cultural problems facing the populations they work with. Regarding the challenges section, and with reference to the other sections, we can conclude that the educators in one way or another why they are in the field, and even to a certain extent where they want to get to. However, they do not have enough tools or pathways they can use to realize their aspirations in the field.

**[5] Conclusion**

The conclusion of this report leaves us with numerous questions relating to professional definitions, training, and profound processes in the field of identity education in Israel. Each of the areas we examined and researched presents an interesting but complex picture in terms of the experiences and perceptions of educators as they engage in their work. On the basis of the analysis of the findings, it is important to emphasize some key points that reflect the current situation as identified by the report.

Firstly, a conclusion regarding the issues of educational conceptualizations, and even more clearly the definition of the various aspects of the professional field that influences and shapes patterns of thought and action among the educators and the educational organizations, and that also determines the nature of the influence secured by educational processes. In this context we identified a lack of clarity and uniformity, as well as a lack of access to sources of knowledge and to an educational and value-based language regarding identity, Jewish and Israeli aspects, and the field in general. These lacks are reflected in the serious difficulty encountered by the educators in defining their profession and the processes they lead and in expressing these, as well as in the context of their professional development tracks. It is also clear that the existing conceptualizations in the field are not accessible to most of the educators, and are often imprecise and outmoded relative to the current complex reality in Israel.

However, and as already noted in the analysis of the educational perceptions, almost all the veteran educators have strong motivation and determination to act to secure profound goals in the fields of values, social issues, and identity. This same characteristic determination also fuels their ability to spark processes and explains their strong desire to professionalize and deepen their activities.

Regarding the issue of professional training, which was presented through the in-depth interviews, the survey of educators, and the review of key training programs in Israel, we identified a dearth of opportunities for professionalization and for the development of access for most educators who have been active in the field for years. With the exception of the training programs at the academic colleges, which focus on the stage before educators enter the profession, most of the programs on offer concentrate on the senior echelon in the educational institutions, alongside internal training programs in the organizations that are uneven in terms of their frequency and generally unstable in terms of their standard. Moreover, the report reveals a horizontal and conceptual challenge in terms of professionalization in education, both among the educators and on the systemic level. The question of professionalization is clearly not a top priority for educational organizations, and there is a profound shortage of investment in the professional, personal, and educational development of educators as part of their work. Many of the educators lack a language and tools that could help them create profound processes and improve their work on the horizontal plane, and they do not have sufficient sources for accessing knowledge. It is important to emphasize this point, particularly since the educators who have undergone serious training reported that this was very valuable and contributed greatly to their work.

It is worth noting that many educators emphasized challenges relating to complex questions of values and identity that arise during educational processes in a diverse and sometimes divided society, as well as the lack of a professional and personal support network or any other form of peer discourse. They also raised the lack of access and opportunities to delve deeper into Jewish content in a way that does not automatically spark opposition or political expropriation.

Lastly, we must also emphasize a gap that emerges directly and indirectly from the findings and that constitutes the focal point of the tensions and challenges as we see them. This is the gap between the aspirations and perceptions of the educators, who set a high and meaningful bar for their educational and value-based actions and seek to create profound processes, and the lack of tools and pathways for professional development and for deepening identity and values. This gap constitutes a common thread evident in the different findings and a common story presented by many of the educators.

It is important and feasible to continue to acquire knowledge and data relating to the field of identity-based education in Israel. However, even at this stage it is important to address the picture that emerges from this report seriously and to consider the numerous questions and needs it raises. These questions and needs relate to the standard of education and to the reflection and action needs in order to raise this standard and improve the status and position of educators active in the field. Additional data and broader conceptualizations will provide a more precise understanding of the needs and of the steps required in order to improve educational processes in Israel and to help the educators in their work.

**Appendix**

**Analysis of the Findings of the Report and Proposed Strategy for Action**

**What is the challenge?**

• Education to Jewish identity in Israel is regarded with apathy, suspicion, and distaste. It is perceived as belonging to specific groups in the population and as serving narrow political and ideological goals.

• Educators lack the tools and capabilities to enhance the relevance of the field and increase the impact of education to Jewish identity.

**The current situation in the field as it emerges from the report**

• Who are we talking about – which educators did we focus on?

\* Programs for youth and youth at risk, youth movements and organizations

\* Pre-army programs, Midrashot, year of service, and national service

\* Public urban education programs

\* Schools

\* Various associations (Jewish-Arab, organizations on the religious spectrum, social and environmental organizations)

• How do they perceive themselves?

\* As noted, there is a large degree of confusion concerning the definition of the field and the professional and educational ramifications of this definition. There is uniformity in terms of the educators’ devotion to their work in the field and their desire to secure extremely important goals. However, the educators’ perception of their field of work oscillates between vague definitions with insufficiently clear boundaries and unclear tools and language accompanying the different definitions.

\* The two dominant perceptions concerning the definition of the field, both of which require considerable refining and clarification, are:

🢞 **The perception of education as social activism**, i.e. an action that has sociopolitical meaning, so that the required training for its implementation and its accompanying language consist mainly of ideological elaboration, while neglecting or sidelining the pedagogic language. As noted, the second perception is

🢞 **The dichotomous division between school teaching and everything else**, i.e. the creation of a very broad field that includes all educational actions other than school teaching in its narrow sense, regardless of the target populations, value-based goals, pedagogic perceptions, perceptions of identity, and organizational structures.

• The following are the main characteristics we identified among the educators on the basis of the report:

\* While the educators regard themselves as professionals after a certain number of years of experience in the field, they receive very little – if any – relevant training.

\* A profound confusion regarding the essence of the work in terms of values and identity in the Jewish and educational context.

\* The educators come to the field due to their interest in specific social issues.

• Key characteristics of the existing training programs in the field:

\* Specific training for sub-spheres in the educational field (youth movements and organizations, pre-army programs, urban educational frameworks, dialogue groups).

\* Most of the training programs are pre-service rather than in-service.

\* The training focuses mainly on leadership development, and primarily on questions about “how” rather than “what” or “why.”

\* Most of the programs do not address the world of Jewish content in a profound manner.

**Reasons for the Problem**

• Reasons in the field:

\* The field is divided into numerous sub-spheres defined by key social issues, each of which has its own vision and language.

\* The field is responsive and does not emerge and improve through a proactive approach.

\* The field is full of diverse and passionate educators who do not have the capacity to remain in it for their entire career.

• Reasons among the educators:

\* There is no structured and clear development track for the educators.

\* The educators begin their work from zero, in most cases without tools or cumulated knowledge.

\* The lack of a professional language across different sectors and shared by all those working in the field.

\* The lack of proper remuneration for educators, both on the personal and professional level and on the general level.

\* The lack of accessible spaces for learning, gaining depth, and professionalization during the course of their work in the field.

\* The lack of a basis for creating a network of educators capable of providing support and mutual development.

\* The lack of a professional standard and threshold requirements for work and development in the field.

**What Does M2** **Do?**

• A structured and designed approach to education to values and a profound educational vision.

• Creating a high and profound professional standard and an educational and professional cross-sector language, including research-based pedagogies and methods and extensive and diverse experience among different target populations.

• Building cross-sector communities of educators based on common practice and professional elaboration.

• Full access to the entire population in Israel.

• An emphasis on a rich and universally accessible world of Jewish content.

**Impressions and successes among Israeli graduates of our programs in the US (to date, 23 Israeli graduates of the educators training program – SEC)**

• The training is perceived as necessary and relevant

• The educators make a more meaningful mark and secure broader success in educational arenas relating to the development of Jewish identity.

• The success is seen across the entire spectrum of Jewish education in Israel and in diverse sectors.

• An ability to preserve and migrate skills and professionalization between different arenas in the educational field and different workplaces.

• A stable and strong perception of professional identity and support from a network of peers and partners encouraging personal and professional growth.

**Action Plan (Outputs)**

• Two classes of educators over the next two years, each comprising 20 leading educators on the regional and national level, representing diverse target populations and personal and professional identities. The emphasis is on ensuring diversity, based on a perception of mutual fertilization and the creation of a cross-sector educational and value-based language.

• A one-year training program including three five-day seminars (with the possibility to engage in in-depth teaching and peer learning between the seminars).

• A mentoring and individual coaching program for all participants over the year, during and between the seminars.

**Adaptation to the Israeli Market**

• Emphasis on Jewish language and values using Israeli concepts.

• A work approach based on activating processes from a community and grassroots direction, with the goal of creating local and broad impact on the field.

• An open work system led by Israeli graduates of M2 and by partners on the local and international level.

• Creating clear and transparent standards based on our vision and values.

• Building a dedicated staff focusing on the participants and their personal and professional processes.

1. On the basis of the interviewees’ comments, Kahane’s thought enjoys an extremely strong presence in informal education circles in the various colleges, including Beit Berl and David Yellin, as well as in the educational programs at the Mandel Institute and elsewhere. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. In addition to the use of Yair’s thought in educational circles in the colleges, we should also mention his intensive work with educational organizations active in the field of Israeli-Jewish identity, particularly the “Israeli Journey from Genesis,” which Yair has studied and whose pedagogic perception he described in a book. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)