**Jewish Education in the Wake of October 7th: Insights from UnitEd France Desk**

Eliezer Schilt

A year following the Yom Kippur War, a symposium convened by French Jewish intellectuals deliberated upon the theme of "Israel's Solitude" in response to the spontaneous discourse that emerged in November 1973. In 2024, philosopher Bernard Henri-Lévy is poised to release an essay bearing the same title. Six months post-October 7th, this subject once again surfaces prominently, prompting reflection on its implications within Jewish educational institutions.

At UnitEd, we occupy a vantage point for observing the tumults impacting the Jewish educational landscape in the Diaspora. Within Jewish schools in France and French-speaking regions, the initial shock has yielded to a desired return to normalcy, albeit against a backdrop of persistent vigilance toward Israel and local security apprehensions. The surge in anti-Semitic incidents in France, quadrupling between 2022 and 2023, coupled with the protracted duration and ramifications of the conflict, compounds the sense of unease.

In a global survey conducted by M² in collaboration with UnitEd, over 70 French-speaking educators responded in November 2023, identifying the dilemma between “loneliness and belonging” as one of the foremost challenges of the moment.

Interrogating the aftermath of October 7th, numerous school principals, heads of Jewish and Hebrew studies, and teachers observed a palpable questioning of Jewish identity among students of all ages, and at times, their parents. These inquiries range from simple ponderings such as "What does it mean to be Jewish?" to more profound doubts encapsulated in queries like "Do I wish to retain my Jewish identity?"—doubts often stoked by surrounding manifestations of hostility.

Confronted with escalating apprehension and uncertainty among students, exacerbated by a shaken conviction that Israel yet serves as the safe haven of the Jewish people, the imperative of the hour is to engage actively with young Jews. Collective mobilization is imperative, encompassing school principals, teachers, educators, and parents alike. It is incumbent upon us to recognize that throughout its history, the Jewish people has derived resilience from one central tenet: education—"And you shall tell your son" (*Shemot* 13:8).

In this vein, it falls upon our shoulders, particularly at Lamorim-UnitEd, to equip schools with the necessary resources. A historic challenge demands a commensurate response. Our mission entails harnessing innovative tools and forging effective partnerships to facilitate an understanding of current events at all levels—factual, spiritual, communal, and beyond. This includes elucidating the contemporary plight through the prism of our tradition and history, drawing upon the insights of scholars and thinkers, devising innovative pedagogical approaches to captivate student interest, fostering dialogue, furnishing rebuttals to attacks, and proffering tangible acts of solidarity and mutual support. The ongoing pilot program, conducted in six high schools, is grounded in comprehensive data analysis. It involves various initiatives such as deploying youth ambassadors to address inquiries from high school students, broadcasting an interactive card game, engaging specialists (psychologist, historian…) for intervention, and developing educational materials pertinent to recent events.

More than ever, to foster a sense of belonging within the global Jewish community, the most effective medium is learning Hebrew. It is imperative to utilize all available resources and strategies to enhance the acquisition and proficiency of this language.

Our endeavor is to exhaust all avenues to fortify the identity of students and their families, nurturing within them a sense of pride in their Jewish heritage.

Dr Eliezer Schilt – Director of French-speaking countries at UnitEd-Lamorim