

Abstract

"Jewish education" is among the subjects that continue to occupy the agenda of Israeli society. It plays an important role in public discourse and deliberations of leaders of the Jewish community, intellectuals and scholars in the pre-state and in the first decades of Israeli statehood. This topic has remained a concern for many today. Discussion of educational, ethical and philosophical aspects of this subject, has taken a variety of forms and characteristics and used different terminology, but remains relevant and controversial.

Recent years have seen an increased interest in Jewish studies among the secular public, which has initiated renewed dialogue and discussion about the subject. The growing wave of interest does not imply satisfaction with the effectiveness of its implementation or consent regarding the subject and its essence.

The topic of the research presented is to clarify the definition and content of the concept of "Jewish education" as perceived by those involved in the years 2009-2013: intellectuals and scholars, parents of high school students, supervisors from the Ministry of Education, participants and committees related to the field (for example, the Shenhar committee – 1994 and The Committee on Culture of Israel - 2010) as well as curriculum planners at The Ministry of Education.

The two main goals of this study are, first, to clarify the content and definition of the concept of "Jewish education" according to those involved in the decisions regarding its definition and to trace the common points of definition and of consensus on updated shared content. Second, it is to demonstrate a practical discussion of a controversial topic, such as definitions of Jewish education, and to present a curricular consensus between the parties involved in Jewish education.

The theory guiding the study is based on the approach of Schwab (Schwab, 1978, 1983), who views education as an action domain where there is a deliberation of its problem and seeks appropriate applicable solutions, rather than just to generate abstract and fundamental inquiries. Following in his footsteps is Fox (1985) who formulated a four-step analysis outline to demonstrate how to form a

theoretical idea in education acts ("translation", in the words of Fox). This outline reflects current research whose validity has been confirmed and made operational. In addition to Fox's analysis are two categories that were used when analyzing the views of intellectuals and the interview questions presented to interviewees in the study.

Study methodology is twofold: theoretical and qualitative research. The theoretical chapter (first), analyzes the writings of five intellectuals who have written about "Jewish education". The second and third chapter present a qualitative analysis of nineteen state high school students' parents and officials of the Ministry of Education responsible for implementing the content of Jewish subjects.

The main purpose of the study is, as stated, to trace points of agreement and "common places" between the different parties on "Jewish education". The concluding chapter of the study (Chapter Four) shows the "points of convergence" and centers of shared definition that arose in chapters a - c and form the basis of the consent of the participants in this discussion. The findings and "common places" which are presented in the fourth chapter reflect key mindsets of Israeli society in 2011-2013 regarding Jewish identity and culture and regarding the Jewish way of life in the state of Israel. The definitions of the field based on a variety factors are used as an updated platform for the concept of "Jewish education" for the years 2009-2013.

Six major "common places" arise from the discussion in Chapters a-c, and are presented in the summary section (Section D). Examples of the agreements that arose were: recognition of the complexity of the issue, problems and difficulties in teaching Jewish subjects, as well as recognition of the need to create a common cultural basis which relies on balanced and proportionate approaches to Jewish issues. In addition, a broad consensus was that teaching techniques, means and methods needed improvement and emphasizes the need to identify the meaning and relevance that the student finds in these curricula. "Common places" were classified according to both a sociological and a pedagogical approach. These approaches represent the complex and intricate discourse on Jewish education that

does not reduce the discussion to one purely of Jewish education, but also involves social and political considerations and social moods.

Points of agreement which emerged from the discussion in this study lead to practical conclusions in three areas: First, content areas – determining the basis of shared content with Jewish content as agreed on by panelists whose words were analyzed in this study (and possibly accepted by the majority of the Israeli public); secondly, teacher education – the implementation of the discourse on "Jewish education" in institutions that train teachers based on the insight that it is not an ordinary profession; and thirdly, means – recognition that techniques and teaching methods must be adapted to increase personal significance of the learning for the student, who must take part in the discourse regarding the issue and develop awareness of its complexity.

This study contributes to identifying common points of agreement on "Jewish education" that emerged from analyzing panelists' words and which may form the basis for curriculum development in Jewish subjects. In addition, this study can be used as an example of a common curricular discussion which can be adopted as a tool in other areas.