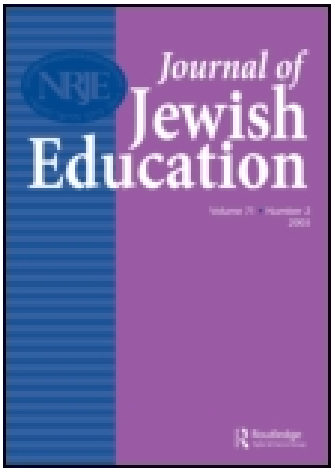
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Lights, Cameras, Action Research!—Moviemaking as a Pedagogy for Constructivist Israel Education

OFRA BACKENROTH AND ALEX SINCLAIR

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In this article we analyze moviemaking as a unique pedagogy that is used in a preservice semester in Israel program for the preparation of Israel educators: Students create their own short films about an aspect of Israeli society and/or their relationship with it. We analyze the students' movies, together with students' reflective papers about the process of making them, and show how this pedagogy exhibits the major characteristics of progressive constructivist education. We also show how the pedagogy enables students to grapple with difficult aspects of Israel in a personally compelling fashion.

INTRODUCTION: CONSTRUCTIVIST EDUCATION AND ISRAEL EDUCATION "EXPLORERS"

This article is the second in a series of practitioner-researcher studies on an Israel education academic study abroad semester of which we are the codirectors. The program, named "Kesher Hadash" (hereafter "the Program"), is designed to give preservice Jewish educators an expertise in Israel education, as part of their MA in Jewish Education at the Davidson School of Education of the Jewish Theological Seminary. In a previous article (Backenroth & Sinclair, 2014), we explored the vision of the entire Program, its translation into practice, and reflections of our students as they experienced the Program. In this article, we zoom in and explore one particular element of the Program in more detail, analyzing how its specific pedagogy functions to enable students to construct personal meaning in their own relationship with Israel.

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As we noted in that previous article (Backenroth & Sinclair, 2014), practitioner inquiry is the research method that underlies our work. We discussed there the theoretical foundations of practitioner inquiry (Carr & Kemmis, 1986; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2004; Zeichner & Noffke, 2001; see also Carroll, Featherstone, Featherstone, Feiman-Nemser, & Roosevelt, 2007) as well as some of the ways in which it has been used by Jewish educational practitioner-researchers (Epstein, 2004; Kent, 2006; Levisohn, 2012; Tanchel, 2008; Tauber, 2012; see also Sinclair, 2011).

This article, inasmuch as it follows directly from our previous one, also situates itself within contemporary discourse that recommends complexity and nuance in Israel education (Ariel, 2006, 2007; Backenroth, Bell-Kligler, & Sinclair, 2010; Beinart, 2010; Cohen, 2003; Cohen & Kelman, 2007; Grant & Kopelowitz, 2012; Gringras, 2004; Isaacs, 2011; Sinclair, 2003, 2009, 2013; Sinclair, Goldwater, & Solmsen, 2013; Zakai, 2011, 2014).

Between the publication of our first article and the writing of this one, a report commissioned by the AVI CHAI Foundation (Pomson, Wertheimer, & Hacohen-Wolf, 2014) has suggested that there are two core types of Israel educators currently active in the field: "exemplars" and "explorers." While the latter are rarer than the former (31% of educators in the study's sample), and while "the voices of Exemplars frequently drown out the Explorers" (Pomson et al., 2014, p. 32), "Explorers make a vitally important contribution to the thoughtful engagement of students" (p. 52).

We are particularly interested in the explorer mode of Israel education; it is certainly the case that we would self-define as explorers, rather than exemplars. The explorer mode is one in which learners are given space to discover things on their own, construct their own knowledge, and create their own statements and conclusions, in which there is "a greater readiness to allow students opportunities to delve into questions by themselves" (Pomson et al., 2014, p. 31). These suggestions, of course, echo the core ideas of progressive education in the modern era (Dewey, 1916, 1938; Bruner, 1960, 1961, 1962). As progressive educators ourselves, we were happy to read that this kind of approach to Israel education exists, albeit as a minority, in the field. It also stimulated our thinking to reflect on one particular component of the Program and tease out in more detail how its rather unique pedagogy is rooted in both classic constructivist educational thought and this new language of "exploring" in Israel education. What follows is the result of this analysis.

MAKING MOVIES AS PART OF AN ISRAEL EDUCATION PROGRAM

One of the most interesting components of the Program's curriculum over the past three years has been an institutional collaboration with the Ma'aleh School of Television, Film and the Arts. This film school, in the heart of

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downtown Jerusalem, was founded in 1989 with the express purpose of providing an outlet for religious filmmakers to create movies that deal with issues of Jewish identity, Israeli society, religious questions, and the dilemmas of contemporary Israeli life. The establishment and subsequent success of Ma'aleh has been an important milestone in the development of the relationship of religious Zionism to modernity in general and to secular majority culture in Israel in particular, and represented the first attempt to arrive at a synthesis between traditional Jewish values and the field of visually orientated media production. In a way the school was a response to Zionism's assertion that it was possible to synthesize Israeli identity with the observance of Jewish tradition, and encouraged observant and religious artists to create and exercise their artistic freedom with themes that emerged from their own world (Jacobson, 2004). It was this aspect of Ma'aleh—its self-image not just as a technical film school, but as one that explicitly wanted its students to deal with questions of Jewish identity and contemporary Israel—that made it a very attractive partner for the Program.

Our students were trained by a Ma'aleh instructor, with the help of two Ma'aleh student interns, in the barebones skills of moviemaking. In our internal description of this program component, we wrote:

> Students will take a practical film-making workshop . . . in which they will learn basic moviemaking skills, including sound, editing, scripting, directing, etc. Students will collect footage during the semester, and edit it to create a 5–8 minute movie that grapples with some of the questions they are thinking about during the semester: perhaps on their own personal Jewish journey while in Israel, perhaps on an aspect of Israeli society, perhaps on a question of Israeli identity, perhaps on an issue they want to explore, etc. These movies will offer students the opportunity to synthesize their learning together, and create a personal "performance assessment" of their semester in Israel. (Internal document, November 2012)

In this way we hoped to empower our students to make their own statement about Israel's complexity and their relationship with it.

Our study in this article focuses on the following areas:

1. Content/themes of the movies—what kinds of subjects did our students choose to make movies about, what themes emerged from the movies as a whole, and what might this say about our students as Israel-engaged Jewish preprofessionals?
   The analysis of content and themes, though, is only a preface to what we consider to be the more significant findings of this study—namely, what this particular pedagogy offers us as Israel educators:
2. Moviemaking as constructivist Israel education—how does this particular pedagogy of moviemaking enable students to express themselves about

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Israel and make meaning with regard to their relationship with Israel? How does the pedagogy manifest the characteristics of constructivist education? In what way does this pedagogy belong to the "explorer" school of thought?

3. Moviemaking and complex Israel education—how does moviemaking enable students to grapple with the most complex and difficult aspects of Israel in a productive manner? Why might this pedagogy be useful to those who are interested in this kind of Israel education?

DATA SOURCES

As we noted at the start of this article, our research method is an action research mode of practitioner inquiry. In this mode of research, practitioners reflect on broader educational questions that emerge from careful study of their own practice and their students' artifacts. In most practitioner inquiry, student artifacts include written assignments, homework, videos of classroom discussions, etc. For this study, we analyzed two sources of data: first, of course, the movies themselves. There are 17 movies in all that were made by the first three cohorts of the Program. A second data source for this study were papers that students wrote in which they reflected on their movies: As part of their academic requirements for the Program, students had to put together a portfolio of writing, one piece of which was a short reflective commentary on their movie, in which students were asked to address such questions as:

- How are the notions of complexity and conversation reflected in your video?
- How does the video explore the challenges of Israeli society?
- What conversations about Israel does your video raise?
- What issues from the course readings or other Kesher Hadash experiences manifest themselves in your video?
- How did making your video help you synthesize and construct your knowledge?
- How does your video give voice to questions about Jewish identity and/or connection to Israel that you have thought about during the semester?
- How does the video make a statement about your experiences on Kesher Hadash?

A NOTE OF CLARIFICATION

Before going on to discuss the movies and our analysis of them, it is important to clarify the precise nature of this analysis. We are educators, not cinematographers, and therefore it is not our purpose to evaluate the

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cinematic or aesthetic quality of the movies. The Ma'aleh School team did, of course, push the students to make movies of a high aesthetic quality, and they expressed their professional satisfaction with the level of the students' final products; however, this is not the focus of our research. Our analysis solely focuses on the content of the movies, the messages that the students try to get across, and the students' personal journeys and reflections that are embedded in the movies.

THE STUDENTS' MOVIES

The following is a list of the movies that were made over the first three cohorts of the program, together with brief descriptions of each movie. We have also included, in the footnotes, links to online copies of the movies where these exist. (Since these videos are nearly all available online in the public domain, we have used the students' real initials and not pseudonyms.)

Cohort 1, 2012

EB—*We Haven't Reached Our Hope*[1] [hereafter *Biking*]: the lack of public transport options in Israel and the nascent biking movement as a protest against that problem.

SS—*Facing the Kotel*[2] [hereafter *Kotel*]: the film-maker's conflicted feelings about the *Kotel* as a female liberal egalitarian American Jew.

DL—*Digging In: An Exploration of Israeli Identity Through Food* [hereafter *Food*]: what and how does Israeli food signify in Israeli culture?

NY—*Multiculturalism in Israel* [hereafter *Multiculturalism*]: issues and concerns around multiculturalism in Israeli society as seen in an Israeli College where the filmmaker studied during the Program.

AS—*Balancing on the Flame*[3] [hereafter *Identity*]: reflections on the secular-religious divide in Israel and how the film-maker relates as someone "in the middle."

Cohort 2, 2013

AW—*The Magic of Jerusalem*[4] [hereafter *Monk*]: character study of a Christian Monk living in Abu Ghosh.

[1] http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UzXp3OlWOOc
[2] http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CQdALFLHEic
[3] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vm4vqL0XKeQ
[4] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LuFqUf3piu0

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MM—*Somehow Sometime*[5] [hereafter *Sister*]: character study of the filmmaker's sister, a recent *olah*, and her religious journey in Israel.
JJ/MA—*Beyond the Wall*[6] [hereafter *Wall*]: short fictional drama about the political misunderstandings between a secular and religious Jew in Israel.
IS—*Mommy's Sheitl*[7] [hereafter *Wig*]: interview with a young ultra-Orthodox couple about why the wife wears a *sheitl*.
AC—*Nava Tehilah Beyond the Words*[8] [hereafter *Song*]: a New Age Friday night singing prayer community in Jerusalem.
FG—*I Feel Like Sushi*[9] [hereafter *Sushi*]: the filmmaker's experience of a local Jerusalem sushi bar.
JG—*Jesus Can't Play Rugby*[10] [hereafter *Rugby*]: portrait of a group of young Israeli women rugby players.

Cohort 3, 2014

BN/AS—*A Jewish State of Mine*[11] [hereafter *Women*]: an exploration of the place of women in Israeli religious life, as seen through the retold experience of one of the filmmakers.
DF/HG—*It's a Community Thing*[12] [hereafter *Mifgash*]: study of an Israeli tour guide and his educational vision about Israel-Diaspora relations.
ED—*The Awesome Yaniv*[13] [hereafter *Blind*]: a local blind Jerusalemite and his story.
EC—*Identity Under Question*[14] [hereafter *Conversion*]: non-Orthodox conversions in Israel.
MS – *Express Yourself*[15] [hereafter *Artist*]: an American-Israeli artist whom the filmmaker met and who had a great impact on her.

THEMES OF THE MOVIES

Five broad themes emerge from analysis of the content of the movies: (a) religious issues between the United States and Israel, (b) study of a fascinating person/people, (c) broad issues in Israeli society, (d) professional issues in Israel education, and (e) the student's own journey.

[5] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T49sbO_Ides
[6] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fE-0o_fMCX4
[7] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W_PI_p3g7yM
[8] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qFeiM-l7c9w
[9] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X9Jx4dM9luk
[10] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d8-7V48KwzE
[11] http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OyhGIonEdeQ
[12] http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gn0S831Tf-A
[13] http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UXtszE0KgLU
[14] http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5igK8hZcOm4
[15] http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=444oaTu_Oh0

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Religious Issues Between the United States and Israel

Many of the movies explored religious issues—usually differences—between American approaches to Judaism, which the students knew from their lives back home; and Israeli approaches to Judaism, which they were encountering while on the Program. Perhaps the most explicit about this tension are the movies *Identity, Kotel*, and *Women*; but the theme also emerges strongly in *Conversion, Sister, Song*, and *Wig*. For many of our students, this topic brought out a key tension in their own Jewish relationship with Israel. They connected with Israel as Jews, and as Jews with strong religious identities, and yet found that religion ironically became something that separated them from Israelis, rather than united them. As AS wrote in her reflective commentary on her movie *Women*:

> The topic of our film, the lack of space for pluralistic religious expression in the army, is a large challenge of Israeli society. To me, the inability for Jews to practice their religion as they see fit in the Jewish state is very problematic. (AS, 2014)

The issue of religious differences between American Judaism and Israeli Judaism is, of course, not a new one. Our colleague Dr. Elan Ezrachi once summarized this phenomenon to us as "the more, the less"—in other words, for many young American Jews, while their initial contact with Israel creates a strong attraction to the country, the more they get to know the country, and especially its approach to Judaism, the *less*, ironically, they become attached to it. The fact that so many of our students chose to make movies that touch in some way upon this issue indicates that this issue remains a major concern for young Israel-engaged Jews today, and one that, as Israel educators, we ignore at our peril.

Study of a Fascinating Person/People

Many of the students chose to make movies about a particular person or group of people that they met and found interesting. The subjects of these "people-focused" movies were enormously diverse—including a Christian Monk, a blind Jerusalemite, the filmmaker's recent *olah* sister, a local American-Israeli Artist, a group of Israeli women rugby players, the leaders of a New Age Friday night prayer service, and a tour guide.

One reason that many movies focused on a person or people was that the course teacher—Yakov Friedland, a Ma'aleh faculty member—suggested to students that this is a good cinematic technique for a short movie. It's a way of getting at bigger, more complex issues, but using one character as a focus or window into that larger issue. This gave students the opportunity to go "inch wide, mile deep" and spend a lot of time investigating a person or people who really piqued their interest. The movies are, as a result, very

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personal; in every case, a deep personal connection between the student and the subject(s) either instigated, was strengthened by, or emerged from the movie. We'll return to this theme of personal connection below.

Broad Issues in Israeli Society

Some of the students chose to make movies about broader issues in Israeli society. One student explored the nascent biking movement in Jerusalem and its protests against the lack of public transportation; another explored how students at an Israeli academic institution saw the multi-cultural challenges therein; and one movie, the only fictional, nondocumentary piece, created an amusing but compelling ministory about a secular and religious Jew who don't see eye to eye about politics. Even though these movies are on the surface about larger issues, the theme of personal connection is clearly seen in each of them. EB, the director of *Biking*, was an environmentalist back in the United States, and the public transport issue was one that enabled him to bring that important part of his identity into his relationship with Israel. JJ and MA, the codirectors of *Wall*, were also both deeply personally involved in the issue that the movie raised.

Professional Issues in Israel Education

Relatively few of the movies dealt with professional issues in Israel education. Really, the only one that did so explicitly was *Mifgash*; yet here, too, the students who made the movie did so not out of dispassionate professional reasons, but out of a feeling of personal interest in and connection to the subject as it manifested itself in their own relationships with Israel. HG begins her reflection paper on this movie as follows:

> Throughout the *mifgash* between [the Program] and a select group of Jewish Israeli students at the Hebrew University Hillel I became attracted to the conversation on the ideal relationship between American and Israeli Jews. As [DF] and I considered what topic to focus on in our Ma'aleh film this discussion kept reappearing in our minds and so we chose to explore it further through a documentary film. (HG, 2014)

The movie explored the idea that Israelis can learn from dialogue with American Jews just as much as American Jews can from Israelis, and HG ended her essay thus:

> It is important to me that the Jewish people around the world—not only in America, but in India, Europe and elsewhere—contribute to the richness of Judaism [in] Israel which we can all share. (HG, 2014)

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We see, then, that even professional questions of Israel education are wrapped in deeply personal language.

The Student's Own Journey

Many of the movies explicitly dealt with the students' own journeys as they wended their way through their time in Israel. EC, in *Conversion,* grappled with an issue that was of intense personal importance to her, as someone whose mother underwent Conservative conversion in the United States and who felt on several occasions threatened and attacked by Israeli governmental policy and public/social attitudes regarding this issue; her movie was a way to channel her feelings in a positive and productive manner. The filmmaker's own voice is clearly apparent in SS's *Kotel*, in MM's *Sister*, in FG's *Sushi*; indeed, and here we come to one of our primary insights about this work, it is probably no exaggeration to say that the students' personal voices and their personal reflections emerge clearly and powerfully *in every single one of these movies*. These reflections are about myriad aspects of the students' relationships with Israel: spiritual, religious, cultural, political, environmental, gender, and more; but it is clear that this pedagogy afforded the students a liberating and personal medium with which to make *their own statement* about "Israel and me."

We saw multiple examples of our students explicitly stating this in their reflection papers:

> My film . . . documents my process as I explored my own personal religious identity while also exploring the more general concept of religious identity in Israel. (AS, 2012)

> I began to think about what Jewish choices I would make if I lived in Israel. Where would I daven? At which restaurants would I eat? I thought about the symbols I would adopt that would externally demonstrate who I am to the world (or at least to the Jewish world). . . . The film reflects my hopes for my Jewish identity and evolving relationship with Israel. (IS, 2013)

> Creating the movie not only allowed me to call attention to this facet of Israeli society, but it also forced me to have important conversations on this subject with someone who has been through such a journey and who happens to know me better than anyone. (MM, 2013)

> Living in Israel was the first time I felt as though I needed to justify my Jewish upbringing. [*Conversion*] helped me along my Jewish journey to feel comfortable again with my Jewish identity. (EC, 2014)

Even when students were making movies about content that they had known and explored in great depth previously (for example, AS on

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egalitarianism, or EB on environmentalism), the movies gave them the opportunity to make renewed personal statements about the material, and its place in their relationship with Israel.

The fascinating thing about this pedagogy is that even though the impetus for the movies was individual, and the subject matters that the students explored were often deeply personal, these personal explorations happened in deep relationship with Israel and are embedded in issues that concern Israeli society. The moviemaking pedagogy provided a way for students to link their personal feelings, self-reflection, and self-exploration with what they saw around them in Israel. *The movies enabled students to embed their personal reflection within the tapestry of Israeli society*.

MOVIEMAKING AS CONSTRUCTIVIST PEDAGOGY

In the introduction to this article, we noted that both classic progressive educational theory and a recent study on the field of Israel education argue for the importance of education being a space where the learner is given freedom to construct knowledge independently and create his/her own personal meaning with regard to the subject matter. We now return to this theme, and reflect on how moviemaking functions as a pedagogy that is characterized by many of the tenets of constructivist education.

Let us begin by breaking down what the steps are that students go through in this process:

1. Identifying a subject for the movie
2. Reflecting on and learning about the subject of the movie
3. Collecting footage
4. Editing

Identifying a Subject

One of the first questions that students are asked, even before they start learning the technical skills of moviemaking, is: "do you have an idea of what you want to make your movie about?" Students return to this question again and again, as their ideas begin to take shape. It's a question in a classic constructivist mode: asking the learners to begin with personal reflections about what they want to say about Israel, what they want to explore, what a subject of importance might be for them, and then creating the scaffolding for them to learn more about that problem or issue. Brooks and Brooks (1999) speak about "the need to find one's own problem" (p. 29) as one of the tenets of constructivist education. Sometimes these subjects involve a personal dilemma that the student is going through (for example, MM's dilemma about her religious journey compared to her sister's; AS and BN's

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dilemma about how their own egalitarianism fits in with Israeli society); but sometimes the subjects of the students' movies are just fascinating people, phenomena, or issues that they want to explore in more depth.

In setting out the problem of formal education, John Dewey (1916) sets up a tension between the learner as "pupil" and the learner as "human being":

> As a consequence of the absence of the materials and occupations which generate real problems, the pupil's problems are not his; or, rather, they are his only as a pupil, not as a human being. (p. 156)

Dewey (1916) argued that when people experienced things that were meaningful for them as *human beings*, that they felt a direct and personal desire to explore, true education emerged:

> Only by wrestling with the conditions of the problem at first hand, seeking and finding his own way out, does he think. (p. 160)

This core requirement—viz., to have the learner in some way feel direct personal, unmediated motivation as a human being to learn about the subject matter at hand—is a major refrain in over a century of writing on experiential and constructivist education, and is also at the heart of the initial phase of making a movie.

This pedagogy is not a free-for-all, though. Both we as the Program directors and the Ma'aleh film staff have certain standards about what kinds of subjects are "worthwhile" (Dewey, 1938) for exploration with regard to Israel. One student, for example, began by saying that he wanted to make a movie about the stray cats of Jerusalem streets; we quickly steered him away from this idea. As Dewey (1902) writes in "The Child and the Curriculum," good education does not mean simply going with whatever the learner wants, but metaphorically providing the learner with a map that will eventually lead to a range of possible worthy ending points:

> Now, the value of the formulated wealth of knowledge that makes up the course of study is that it may *enable the educator to determine the environment of the child, and thus by indirection to direct* [emphasis added]. Its primary value, its primary indication, is for the teacher, not for the child. It says to the teacher: Such and such are the capacities, the fulfilments, in truth and beauty and behavior, open to these children. Now see to it that day by day the conditions are such that their own activities move inevitably in this direction, toward such culmination of themselves. Let the child's nature fulfil its own destiny, revealed to you in whatever of science and art and industry the world now holds as its own. (p. 31)

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Dewey's ideas were manifested in his Laboratory School, where, according to Tanner, there were four criteria for what made a worthwhile "educational project"—criteria which emerged from Dewey's writings—primarily *How We Think*: (a) the project must be of interest, (b) the project must involve thought, (c) the project must awaken new curiosity and lead the students' minds into new fields, and (d) the project must involve a considerable span of time for its execution (Tanner, 1997, p. 86).

Another way to understand this opening phase of the pedagogy of moviemaking is through the approach of Bruner (1960, 1961, 1962), who identifies two modes of teaching: first, the "expository" mode in which the decisions are primarily made by the teacher and the student is merely a listener unaware of the process of education. The second one is the "hypothetical" mode (which later became more widely known as the "discovery" mode) in which "the teacher and the student are in a more cooperative position" (Bruner, 1961, p. 22). Bruner lists the benefits of the hypothetical mode as: (a) increased intellectual potency, (b) the shift from extrinsic to intrinsic rewards, (c) learning the heuristics of discovering, and (d) the aid to memory processing. This approach promotes learning as an active process in which learners construct new ideas or concepts based upon their current and past knowledge; they select and transform information, construct hypotheses, and make decisions. We would suggest that by asking students to create a movie about a topic to do with Israel, Israeli society, and their relationship with it, we are functioning squarely within the hypothetical or discovery mode of education.

Reflecting on and Learning About the Subject of the Movie

Once students have decided upon a subject, they have to do a great deal of independent research on that subject. While they are learning the technical skills of moviemaking in the first few classes (sound, lighting, framing, shots, etc.), they are also in constant thought about what they already know about their chosen subject; what they need to learn about the subject; and how to go about finding that new information. In other words, the moviemaking process is a classic manifestation of problem-based learning (PBL). PBL is:

> [A] curriculum model designed around real-life problems that are ill-structured, open-ended, or ambiguous . . . [it] engages students in intriguing, real, and relevant intellectual inquiry and allows them to learn from these life situations (Barell, 1995). Students become stakeholders, broaching problems as their own. In fact, one of the most distinctive elements of true problem-based learning is the students' ownership of the problem and the natural, student-directed way the problem unfolds. (Fogarty, 1997, p. 2)

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Eisner (1998) suggests that the process of problem-solving "yields its own intrinsically valuable rewards and these rewards are as important as outcomes" (p. 68). Greene (1995) notes that when teachers recognize and honor their students' human need to research their own interests, and empower them to be proactive, to choose and investigate their own topic of learning, the learners "discover the self as someone with a sense of agency, not merely a passive observer or an accidental tourist or a member of a crowd" (p. 177). Greene suggests that through this kind of learning students may "find themselves unexpectedly able to deal with the forces that seem to determine and condition, that make them feel powerless" (p. 177).

These motifs of self-empowerment, intrinsic value, and personal sense of agency or stakeholding, are all important and in-built aspects of the moviemaking pedagogy. We have previously written about the importance of students "finding their voices" with regard to their relationship with Israel, feeling able to speak up about and take a stance on issues that bother them (Backenroth & Sinclair, 2014). By making the student the creative force behind an entire piece of art—as writer, chief cameraperson, editor, and director—we empower students to create their own world and have their audience look at Israel through this world.

Many of our students, in their reflective papers about their moviemaking experience, noted how this particular project gave them the opportunity to become self-empowered, to view their learning as having intrinsic meaning, and to take ownership of their learning experience:

> The video I made helped give me a voice to vocalize the complex thoughts circulating in my head over my own personal religious identity and how the American perspective that I bring fits in with the religious spectrum in Israel. (AS, 2012)

> The film is also a labor of love and highly reflective of my own connection and struggle with Israel. (MM, 2013)

> Creating [the film] with [BN] was a tremendously powerful and empowering experience for me as part of my personal journey and professional path as an Israel educator. (AS, 2014)

Footage

Once students have developed their idea and begun to explore it and learn about it, the next step is for them to collect footage: to interview their subjects, to find interesting visual scenes that flesh out the movie's subject for the viewer, to think about where they want to insert their own voice, if at all . . . it is a data collection mode. Students immerse themselves in multiple aspects of their subject matter, collecting information and knowledge, networking and talking with relevant experts or interested parties. Because of the nature

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of the footage/editing ratio, much of what they learn here does not make it into the final product, the actual movie. The pedagogy of footage collection is utterly constructivist: there is no "outsider" telling you what the curriculum is; you, and only you, decide whom to interview, where to go, what footage to collect, where you need to go to do it, etc. This kind of learning is, then, deeply constructivist, and all the literature previously noted is relevant here too.

Footage collection, however, is not merely data collection in the typical academic sense. It is a highly *visual* form of data collection and of making meaning about the subject at hand. Students are explicitly told to look for visual elements that will capture their insights about their topic, and steer clear of filming too many "talking heads." As a result, the ways in which students begin to think about their problems are expanded beyond the verbal-linguistic intelligences (Gardner, 1983) into a variety of other intelligences.

Berger (1972), a British art critic, novelist, and thinker about the visual arts, claims that:

> Seeing comes before words. The child looks and recognizes before it can speak. But there is also another sense in which seeing comes before words. It is seeing which establishes our place in the surrounding world; we explain that world with words, but words can never undo the fact that we are surrounded by it. (p. 7)

Footage collection is an exercise which uses "seeing" and observing as a powerful tool for students' meaning-making: as one of our students put it, "Seeing Israel through a lens was a good exercise in actually *seeing* Israel" (IS, 2013, her italics).

Another interesting aspect of the footage collection phase is the need to empathize with the issue or people at hand. Yakov Friedland, the Ma'aleh faculty member who has taught this class for the past three years, and who has made several documentary movies of his own, told us as follows:

> Each of the movies I have made brought me face-to-face with the subject I was dealing with in a way that nothing else could have. I lived the conflict portrayed in the movie while making it, in ways both comprehensible and mystical. . . . (YF, personal communication, August 12, 2014)

Making a movie, then, is a way of getting to understand the subject matter in a much more meaning-oriented way than just reading an article about the issue. The pedagogy itself puts the learner in a position where s/he naturally empathizes with the people s/he is studying. This issue of empathy is critical if we wish our students to grapple with the toughest aspects of Israel while still remaining engaged. We will return to this issue below.

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Editing

The final stage of making a movie is to edit: to sift through all that you have learned, all the footage you have collected, and to make choices about what's going to go in the movie, and in which order. The order is not necessarily chronological, but is determined by how the student wants to make meaning, and how the student wants the audience to make meaning, what messages the student wants to transfer to the audience, and so on.

Of course, many of the tenets of constructivist educational thought apply to this stage too: this activity requires students to be self-directed, to construct their own knowledge and understanding about the subject matter, and so on. But what is perhaps most interesting about the editing phase as learning is that it requires students *to tell the story of what they have learned*. "Learning is mostly telling," as Deborah Meier (2002, p. xiii) has famously taught us. Educators of all kinds have come to understand that giving students the opportunity to tell others, to "perform" or demonstrate their knowledge, is not an endeavor that belongs only to the realm of assessment, but also to learning itself. Wiggins (2003) argues that assessment must contain the opportunity for students to construct their knowledge, including "student organization of information (higher order skills)" and "student consideration of alternatives." The idea of "assessment for learning," found in contemporary educational literature, also has its roots in Dewey (Kucey & Parsons, 2012).

In telling their stories, students are constructing and synthesizing their knowledge, and formatting it in such a way as to communicate a certain narrative or message to another audience:

> Not only is social life identical with communication, but all communication (and hence all genuine social life) is educative. . . . Try the experiment of communicating, with fullness and accuracy, some experience to another, especially if it be somewhat complicated, and you will find your own attitude toward your experience changing. . . . The experience has to be formulated in order to be communicated. To formulate requires getting outside of it, seeing it as another would see it, considering what points of contact it has with the life of another so that it may be got into such form that he can appreciate its meaning. (Dewey, 1916, p. 6)

Even though the students do not presume to be making works of art *per se*, they are still involved in a similar process of making aesthetic choices and decisions as artists. Eisner (1998) writes that:

> The aesthetic is not only motivated by our need for stimulation; it is also motivated by our own need to give order to our world. To form is to confer order. To confer aesthetic order upon our world is to make that world hang together, to fit, to feel right, to put things in balance, to create harmony. Such harmonies are sought in all aspects of life. (p. 38)

For Kesher Hadash students who are struggling with certain issues and often are confused or ambivalent about aspects of Israeli life and society, creating the short videos is an opportunity to shape their own experiences and give some order to them (although, *pace* Eisner, we would suggest that some satisfying degree of aesthetic order is often achieved without full harmony).

MOVIEMAKING AS A PEDAGOGY FOR GRAPPLING WITH TOUGH ISSUES IN ISRAEL

One of the concerns that is often raised about having young American Jews grapple with the tough and more frustrating aspects of Israel is that it will negatively affect their relationship with Israel; that it will close them off to further learning, or be "mis-educative," in Dewey's terms (1938, p. 13).

One thing we have learned from observing our students go through this moviemaking process over the past 3 years is that this is a truly "educative" pedagogy: a powerful way to give students the space to process tough issues in Israel. Israel educators are always asking themselves how to do this: how to expose learners to the tough issues without it becoming debilitating, how to have them explore frustrating parts of Israeli society and politics while remaining positive, and so on (Backenroth et al., 2010; Grant & Kopelowitz, 2012; Gringras, 2004; Isaacs, 2011; Sinclair, 2009, 2013; Zakai, 2014).

This is what moviemaking as a pedagogy does. It enables learners to really attack the issue, to really grapple with the full difficulties and complexities of the issue, but in a way that is very personally meaningful, and that doesn't detract from their relationship with Israel, but actually intensifies it. While it is true that film as a medium can be and has been used for more simplistic "advocacy"-oriented goals, whether about Israel or any other topic, our guidance of the students, together with the impact of the Kesher Hadash program as a whole, steered the students toward a notion of moviemaking as a vehicle for engaging with Israel's complexity. Our students' movies have grappled with almost every major contentious issue in Israeli society today—including the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, particularist and tribal barriers to multi-culturalism in Israeli society, orthodox hegemony over religious practice, negation of the Diaspora, relations with the ultra-Orthodox, and more. In many contexts of Israel education today, topics such as these are often skated over, misrepresented, or left until students are older or more committed to Israel (Sinclair, 2013). Putting learners in the position where they can choose to make movies about these kinds of issues allows them to grapple with troubling and sometime frustrating aspects of Israeli society while remaining deeply connected to Israel *qua* Israel.

Our evidence for these assertions comes from our students' voices in their reflective papers about their own moviemaking experience:

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> [Making *Conversion*] helped me along my Jewish journey to feel comfortable again with my Jewish identity. (EC, 2014)

> The journey of making this film, both because I found my voice and because I found a counterpart with a similar story, has made me feel even more confidant [sic] about having nuanced conversations about Israel with peers and utilizing complexity as an Israel educator. It embodies my newfound ability to stare complexities in the face and to challenge them. (AS, 2014)

> The film does not seek to answer the question that it raises. It leaves the viewer feeling as though we have shed light on a complex issue with no easy resolution, but one that is likely to become more and more challenging if ignored. It was a powerful learning process to find our diaspora voices through making this film. I concluded the project with a true sense that we had something important to say, and had managed to say it in a compelling way. I look forward to sharing this film, both as a teaching tool about some of the challenges in Israeli society, as well as a way to share with others about my experience with Kesher Hadash, plumbing the depths of Israel's many complexities. (BN, 2014)

> Truly I feel this film allows me to display what a critical but loving perspective on Israel education could be. (EB, 2012)

When you make a movie, you can leave the question open, you don't have to offer a solution, you leave the audience to come to its own solutions, and this is a very powerful thing from a pedagogic perspective. It is as if we are saying to our students that their role as Israel educators is not to offer answers about Israel, but to ask their audiences—their own students—the right questions. We are asking our students to be "explorers" of Israel, and through their movies, to recreate that experience of exploring for their own future learners.

QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER THOUGHT

Before concluding this essay, we wish to pose two separate but related questions for further thought. First, while we have described this pedagogy as being part of a training program for Israel educators, it seems to us that it could be a very compelling pedagogy to use in Israel education in general, even for those who are new to the country and/or have no intention of becoming Israel educators themselves. In this essay we hope that we have demonstrated that the pedagogy itself gives considerable benefits to the learner *qua* learner, and exhibits the best of what progressive educators have taught us over the past century. How, then, might this kind of

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pedagogy be scaled up and made available for all kinds of other students who are spending time in Israel?

Second, the pedagogy of moviemaking is very time-intensive. Aside from the 20–25 hours of formal instruction in which students learn the skills of moviemaking, the actual process of filming and editing requires an incredible time commitment, also of perhaps 20–25 hours total (and in some cases more) for a 5-minute video. In theory it would be possible to make the time commitment smaller by reducing the quality of final product; but part of the magic of this pedagogy is that the students ultimately see that their final product is of a really professional level. The pedagogy is high cost, high benefit. How, then, might other long-term Israel programs find time within their schedules to enable students to embark on this kind of time-intensive endeavor?

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CONCLUSION

Israel is often seen and used educationally as a place where people go to explore their spirituality and personal growth. What we have found is that our students are, on a certain level, no different. Israel, for them, is an environment in which they embark on a journey of personal exploration. However, the pedagogy of moviemaking creates a different kind of personal experience. In conventional Israel education, American Jews go to a site, where their experience is often carefully mediated by a tour guide or educator (Kelner, 2010, pp. 92–96), and where they are expected to (and often indeed do) have powerful personal moments. Heilman (1999) has warned us to be cautious in ascribing these wow-moments to Israel itself, rather than the social aspects of the group experience; but regardless of the reason or origin of these wow-moments, the making of meaning happens through Israel "impacting" the students, or, in Kelner's terms, Israel being consumed: "Diaspora Jewish tourists engage Israel primarily as consumers of a themed environment whose overarching motif is Jewish culture" (Kelner, 2010, p. 103; cf. Copeland, 2011).

The moviemaking pedagogy offers learners a very different kind of relationship with Israel. Rather than consumption of a mediated Israel, it gives learners the unmediated freedom to explore their relationship with Israel and be in empowered, constructivist dialogue with it. Israel does not wash over the students and pour its blessings over them—rather, the students are empowered to think about their personal growth and development; to validate their own feelings, thoughts, and ideas; and to develop their spiritual, personal, or political journey in dialogue with what they see around them in Israel. It also enables students to explore subjects that would otherwise never be explored. It's a much more mature, informed, respectful way of enabling personal growth, learning, and meaning-making to happen through Israel. We would suggest that our students' experience

of this moviemaking pedagogy not only suggests the particular pedagogy itself as worthy of consideration in other contexts, but also highlights the importance of constructivist education in Israel education in general.

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