

Research Questions Surfaced through CASJE Convenings and Conversations

CASJE (Consortium for Applied Studies in Jewish Education) is a joint effort of funders, researchers, and practitioners to stimulate applied research in critical areas of Jewish education. CASJE's mission is to initiate and support research that ultimately changes how Jewish education is experienced. Since starting in 2013, CASJE has helped launch research in a series of critical areas, including Jewish educational leadership, Jewish early childhood education, and Hebrew language education.

During the last six months, we have worked to better understand the core challenges in the field of Global Jewish Peoplehood (GJP) Education. We seek to identify how the field's challenges can be addressed by implementing a robust and systematic program of applied research.

We present here the fruits of those efforts—the outlines of a research program. If pursued (in part or in full), this program will enable Jewish education policymakers (funders, central agencies personnel, administrators, Federation planners, etc.), practitioners, educational leaders, and program participants to make more informed decisions about GJP Education.

We recognize that different individuals in this field have different programmatic priorities. To achieve greatest impact, we have strategically narrowed our focus to two “core practices” of GJP Education: 1) **travel experiences** and 2) ***mifgash*, encounters between young Jews from different national contexts**. We have learned that these practices—addressing places and people—are keys to unlocking concern with and commitment to the Jewish people.

Following is a distillation of the central issues and questions regarding these two practices. These questions—on **the field as a whole, the people and places involved, and the money being spent**—provide the basis for a program of research that will tangibly improve GJP travel and encounter experiences.

The intellectual foundations for this effort were established as follows: In late 2015, CASJE convened more than twenty front-line practitioners, program providers, researchers, and foundations that support Jewish education for a day-long Problem Formulation Convening to discuss major questions facing the field. We followed this convening with a public discussion “blogcast” hosted on our [website](#). The blogcast—spanning three countries and four days—was read by more than 1,000 unique individuals. Select quotations from that discussion are included below.

I. Mapping the Field

To date, in the world of Jewish Peoplehood experiences, no systematic effort has mapped the field of Jewish encounter and travel programs. There is no comprehensive picture of the programs that currently exist, their relationships to one another, and the content areas into which they can be categorized. Developing such a picture will make explicit the wisdom embedded in how these experiences are built. It also will provide an important first step for those seeking to study and improve the work of GJP Education.

II. Understanding and Measuring the Outcomes of Experiences

While there is widespread agreement among practitioners that *mifgash* and travel experiences build a sense of Global Jewish Peoplehood, the field lacks a more precise understanding of exactly what kinds of measurable outcomes are linked to these experiences.

How and in what ways do young Jews experience these moments and what changes do they undergo as a result of their participation, both in the short and longer term? Are there noticeable differences in outcomes across different age groups or across individuals with varying levels of previous Jewish education?

The blogcast participants began to develop a framework for these outcomes that if more fully fleshed out in an applied, real-world, research effort, could be helpful in making sense of outcomes for GJP:



Clare Goldwater One thing we don't understand enough is what participants/students/learners really experience from their visits to different sites and their listening to the different narratives. I think our theories are basically correct but I don't think we know enough about what really goes on during immersive travel/Peoplehood experiences. Is there indeed curiosity to start with? What do they find most compelling? What is the difference (if any) in impact/learning when people travel far away or stay closer to home?



Ezra Kopelowitz The heritage travel trip or a *mifgash* are educational experiences during which we ask the participants to engage with their connection to the Jewish People. The ceremonies, conversations and the objects evoked, structure that educational experience and give it content. They enable or encourage participants to intensify their curiosity, connection and commitment.

		Peoplehood Outcomes		
		Curiosity	Connection	Commitment
Peoplehood Stimuli	Ceremony			
	Conversation			
	Objects			

III. Correlating GJP Program Experiences with Outcomes:

It is not currently known what specific GJP Education practices contribute to the outcomes produced. How do the characteristics of the travel and *mifgash* experiences (such as place, space, pedagogy, and curriculum), and the characteristics of the participants involved, contribute to the outcomes desired? Researchers and practitioners agree that defining the elements in these programs, and connecting them to a set of well-delineated outcomes, will provide important knowledge about their impact. This knowledge will help guide optimal development and structure of these experiences, what is deemed successful, and what can reasonably be expected as a result of participation.

Promising questions for research include:

PLACES

- What are the specific impacts of different travel locations (with their distinct physical and human landscape) on program participants?
- How do the travel abroad GJP experiences differ from those focused on domestic travel and encounters?



Jeremy Leigh Jewish travel in your own backyard– is it possible to use local stories to promote global identity? Most realistically, honestly and indeed ethically, local comes first but how can one build it outwards.

PEOPLE

- What is the different or added value of travel and *mifgash* programs that connect Jews from around the world with Jewish Israelis compared to programs that connect different groups of Jews with each other (but not to Jewish Israelis)?
- What are the differential effects of the different geographic and cultural heritages of the Jews who participate in these programs?

BIGGER PICTURE

- Given that there are many different ways of doing GJP Education, what do we know about which programs work and for whom? What relative roles do various factors (such as size of group, location of encounter, duration of program, etc.) play in a program's success?
- What can we learn from evidence of failure in the field? What can programs that did not succeed tell us about those that did?

IV. What Can We Know About the Economics of Global Jewish Peoplehood Education

Global Jewish Peoplehood Education is expensive. We currently know very little about the economics, broadly defined, of travel and *mifgash* programs: Who pays? How much? Who benefits? What is the elasticity of demand and supply, in relation to price?

Research questions in this area would include:

- What is the cost to an organization or a community to do this work? How does that investment ultimately benefit the communities from which participants come? What does it cost to engage participants afterwards?
- Does price and opportunity-cost make a difference in the decision to participate in programs or to fund them? If so, to what extent?
- What best creates demand and interest in program enrollment—a person? An incentive? The type of trip? And how much money is invested in recruiting and enrollment efforts?
- Are there examples of more cost-effective GJPE experiences that could be considered for further development, adaptation, or scaling?
- Who is investing and why? What is their return on investment for Jewish peoplehood work?
- Ultimately, how much money does it take to achieve desired outcomes in GJP education?



Shaul Kelner We need to translate what we do know into practical systems for expanding the field. For that, we could benefit from some case studies of successful field-building in Jewish education. For instance, how did Jewish Family Education establish and institutionalize itself, and what lessons can we take for building Jewish Travel Education as a field in its own right?