

3 Things the U.S. Could Learn from Israel's Education System

It's no secret that the U.S. has a mediocre education system. When ranked against other first-world nations, it's not hard to see that a continuation of such trends will eventually leave America flailing in business, industry, and innovation.

But is there a way to remedy this problem of labor force ingenuity – even without improving test scores by leaps and bounds? The experience of Israel suggests there is.

Now when it comes to [international education rankings](#), Israel's scores aren't all that much to write home about. Although a first-world country, they score the same as the U.S. in math, and even lower in reading and science.

Yet despite these low scores – and despite having more than 300 million fewer citizens than the U.S. – Israel is consistently ranked as a leading country in innovation and tech industry. According to [Business Insider](#), “The Middle Eastern country is sometimes referred to as ‘Startup Nation’ thanks to the sheer number of entrepreneurs building businesses there.”

In a [recent article](#) for *Wall Street Journal*, Naftali Bennett, Israel's minister of education, explains his theory on how Israel achieves this success:

“During my two years as minister of education I have come to understand that although Israel's schools are good, our secret weapon is a parallel education system that operates alongside the formal one. This is where our children learn to become entrepreneurs.”

Bennett goes on to lay out the three elements of this “covert” education system in Israel:

1. They Embrace Debate

According to Bennett, the prevalence of Jewish religious law in Israel encourages hearty and thought-provoking discussion:

“Students engage in debate for the sake of debate. They analyze issues from all directions, finding different solutions. Multiple answers to a single question are common. Like the Talmud itself—which isn’t the written law but a gathering of protocols—the learning process, not the result, is valued.”

Compare this to the U.S. While students certainly know how to [throw back their heads and howl in dissent](#), they often are unable to form a logical and cohesive argument. Rather than listen to the other side and try to learn from their opinions, they shout them down on the basis of race, class, or gender, never pausing to consider that their own argument may be flawed.

2. They Enable Responsibility

Bennett goes on to say:

“The second component of our shadow education system is the peer-teaches-peer model of Jewish youth organizations, membership-based groups that we call “movements.” Teenagers work closely with younger children; they lead groups on excursions and hikes, develop informal curricula, and are responsible for those in their care. As an 11th-grade student, I took fifth-graders on an overnight hike in the mountains. Being given responsibilities at a young age helped shape me into who I am today.”

Such an age-integrated mentality seems to have disappeared from the U.S. with the [one-room school house](#), where the mixed-age classroom enabled older students to be role models and assistants to the younger. Today's schools – and families, churches, and other venues – seem to operate on the flawed belief that children can only succeed when they are with individuals of their own age.

3. They Require Early Adulthood

Israel's "adulthood" course takes place a little sooner than [the ones popping up in the U.S.](#), and it also involves more intense activities than simple household management:

"The third component is the army. Because we are constantly defending ourselves from Islamic terror, 18-year-old boys and girls are drafted into the military for stints of two or three years. Young Israeli adults must literally make life-or-death decisions every day."

According to the Israel Defense Force's [code of ethics](#), Israeli soldiers are expected to responsibly "carry out their duties," exhibit perseverance, and demonstrate courage in the face of difficult situations, characteristics which are a far cry from those exhibited by the trophy generation in America.

If the U.S. reintroduced these elements into both school and society, is it possible that we would see America continue its course of leadership, particularly in innovative and entrepreneurial enterprises?

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