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RAVSAK would like to thank our associate members:



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From the Editor

■ by **BARBARA DAVIS**

ESHINANTAM levanechah, “And you shall teach your children.”

The words of Devarim proclaim the overriding importance of Jewish education. Even more critical than one’s own learning is the education of Jewish youth. “Every community is required to appoint teachers; a city without a teacher should be put under a ban until the inhabitants thereof appoint one. If they persist in not appointing a teacher, the city should be destroyed, for the world exists only through the breath of school children” (Shulchan Arukh, Yoreh Deah 245:7). But what constitutes education? These words resonate differently with us in the 21st century than they did for our ancestors.

Like fashion (though I shudder at the comparison), education has its trends. Outdoor education, service learning, cooperative learning, active learning, progressive education, critical pedagogy, youth empowerment, feminist-based education, and constructivism all have their adherents. Currently, Jewish educators are seeking to determine what aspects of the positive experiences of Jewish camp can be efficaciously applied in the more formal setting of the day school classroom.

The current issue of *HaYidion* examines the nature, impact, methods and importance of such experiential education—“informal education” in today’s parlance—which incorporates many different methodologies to provide context and frameworks for learning. Our authors address the many educational methods underway in schools (formal education) and in out-of-school (informal education) programs that constitute best practice.

At the Syracuse Hebrew Day School graduation, every 6th grader gives a speech. Most reflect on their teachers’ wonderful qualities and on what they have learned. And it has always struck me that the learning which is most memorable to them is principally experiential. They remember the electricity project, the visit from the Holocaust survivor, presenting “Are You Smarter Than a 5th Grader?,” making synagogues from Legos, the Student Council tzedakah projects, the science fair and the drug quiz, and the visits to the senior citizen home. While learning cursive in 3rd grade is a surprisingly powerful experience (a bridge to maturity perhaps?), there is rarely any other mention of

the curriculum or content to which they have been exposed for seven years.

This phenomenon informs the current exploration of informal education. As we seek to provide Jewish youth with the best possible education for their 21st century lives, be it secular or Judaic, we seek to



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incorporate those pedagogical techniques which are most meaningful and effective. Sometimes we learn these techniques from university scholars; sometimes we learn them from camp counselors, youth leaders, artists, technophiles, actors and inspired teachers. Good education takes many forms and occurs in many places, as the Torah tells us: “And ye shall teach them to your children, talking of them when thou sittest in thy house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up.”

We hope that this issue of RAVSAK’s *HaYidion* will provide you with inspiration and ideas to enhance the education—both formal and informal—in your own schools. ■

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From the Desk of Arnee Winshall, RAVSAK Chair

We all have benefited from the learning moments that have taken place in informal contexts and provided us with lasting impact. In the founding discussions that led to the creation of Boston's Jewish Community Day School, we identified Jewish camps as a model of Jewish education contexts. What made living Jewishly so much fun and so compelling for the campers? Which ingredients contributed to building tight-knit community among the staff and young people in only a few short weeks? How could we bring these elements to a day school?

As president of the RAVSAK Board of Directors, I recognize that effective boards also need those compelling community-building and Jewish experiences that resonate quickly and deeply and link the heart and the head. Our in-person board meetings provide us with this opportunity.

In September, the RAVSAK board met for a two-day retreat. Most of our members came from across the country to attend in person; those who could not attended via Skype. Our retreat was a little bit like our chance to learn and be at camp together. But the work we did was serious and vital to our organization.

As RAVSAK board members and leadership staff, we considered our impact on three levels during this meeting: 1) the future of the Jewish community, 2) the future of RAVSAK, 3) our individual journeys and roles. RAVSAK's mission and core expertise to raise the bar for Jewish literacy is often perceived as a luxury, whereas it is actually the essence of Jewish education. How will we understand and take on this challenge?

Questions we considered included: How does RAVSAK continue to support schools to effectively address the key elements of literacy, religious purposefulness and peoplehood? How do we ensure that RAVSAK provides the field with the strategic and critical support and programs that strengthen day schools? What would happen if RAVSAK were no longer in existence? As a board member: What impact does

each of us want to have by the end of his or her service? How do we leverage our roles as board members to, in fact, create such impact?



Arnee Winshall is Chair of RAVSAK's Board of Directors and Founding Chair of JCDS, Boston's Jewish Community Day School. Arnee can be reached at arnee@ravsak.org.

We immersed ourselves in business planning guided by the expertise of Wellspring Consulting, looked at our budget strategically led by our finance committee, thought about our communications strategy with our communications and marketing/development committees, strengthened our fundraising skills in exercises with CCS consultants, and took those skills to turn our commitment and passion into substantive, concrete and critical impact to assure the success of RAVSAK.

When our schools are feeling the most vulnerable they have felt in years, when investment in strengthening the Jewish core of our schools is viewed as a luxury as opposed to the essence, the leadership that emerges from the work of the Board of RAVSAK is critical to ensure the support our schools need. We take this responsibility seriously and working together with you, our partners, we know we will continue to take on the challenges and go from strength to strength. ■



RAVSAK's Board and Staff wish you a Happy Hanukkah

Letters

Paul Shaviv's article "Tuition Assistance Headaches" in the autumn issue gives information and conclusions which serve to perpetuate the dysfunctional nature of most of the financial aid systems in existence today.

It is the greatest fallacy that financial aid "costs" the school anything; in fact, it is a financial *benefit* to the school and to full paying parents. School leaders should ask themselves the following question: Did you have the ability to fill all seats in your school with full paying students? If the answer is no, the school has two choices: 1) Leave the seat empty = no income + no expenses; 2) Fill the seat with a partial paying student = Partial Income + no expenses. Which make greater financial sense?

The second greatest fallacy is that full-fee paying parents subsidize others on reduced tuition. In order to cover their operating budgets, schools must generate enough enrollment to significantly reduce the cost that each student must bear. For example, in a school with an operating budget of \$5,000,000 and 500 students, the cost per student is \$10,000. If enrollment decreases to 450 students, the cost per student rises to \$11,111. Schools cannot easily re-

duce costs because they work in large-step variable-cost functions: as they add classrooms or sections, they add large cost increments which cannot be neatly reduced when enrollment is lost. Therefore, the key operating strategy is to optimize classroom capacity with as many students as our mission statements permit.

When a published article presents fallacies such as these, it promotes the policies and systems which have effectively squeezed out over 35% of the middle class from Jewish schools.

Eric Amar, Montreal, Quebec

PAUL SHAVIV REPLIES:

Eric Amar's views are only partially accurate—if at all—for elementary / middle schools, but do not apply at all to high schools. In every school, additional students generate overheads in administration, support staff, facilities and many other not-so-obvious operational costs. Their tuition may or may not cover the real costs of their presence in the school. (For example, it is clearly more expensive to run a school for, say, 550 students than a school for 400.)

In a high school, which deals with courses and not classes, the above applies, but, in addition, extra numbers of students are directly costly. No one would suggest discriminating against students on tuition assistance ("You can't exercise your choice of courses because you don't pay full fees"), so a school may well be forced to split classes, or provide uneconomic courses, to accommodate them. What does Mr. Amar suggest doing when the school minimum number of students to run a 12th grade elective is, say, ten students; eleven students choose the course, of whom six are full fee-paying, and five are on tuition assistance?

Plus, experience suggests that for well-documented reasons, students from families eligible for tuition assistance may request textbook subsidies, subsidies for school trips and many other additional costs. (In extreme cases, our school has also occasionally discreetly helped students with personal needs as well—in effect, tuition assistance of over 100%.) Tuition assistance is a real cost; I am afraid Mr. Amar's argument is simply not borne out by reality. ■

Take part in the conversation! HaYidion welcomes letters to the editor; send your thoughts to Hayidion@ravsak.org.



Covenant Foundation Names Winners of New Pomegranate Prize

RAVSAK applauds the winners of the new Pomegranate Prize, established by The Covenant Foundation to honor and nurture exceptional, emerging professionals.

Congratulations to Rabbi Marc Baker, head of the RAVSAK school Gann Academy, and to the other winners:

Robert Beiser, Campus/JConnect Repair the World Director at Hillel at the University of Washington in Seattle; Anna Hartman, Director of Early Childhood Education at Greenfield Hebrew Academy in Atlanta; Gilah Kletenik, Congregational Scholar at Congregation Kehilath Jeshurun in New York; and Rabbi Shira Koch

Epstein, Associate Rabbi at Congregation Beth Elohim in Brooklyn.

The new prize serves as a special initiative to recognize and support young leaders in Jewish education. Winners receive \$15,000 toward educational projects and their own professional development. ■

Rethinking the “School” in Day School

■ by JONATHAN WOOCHEER

What’s needed is a far-reaching reconception of the nature of school, one less aligned with the strictures of American success and more aligned with Jewish culture and values and a larger vision of educational excellence.

Each spring Jewish newspapers across the continent carry ads congratulating recent or soon-to-be day school graduates and listing the colleges and universities (and, sometimes, the gap year programs in Israel) to which they have been accepted. I am not naïve.

I know that day schools believe, with data to support them, that parents (and perhaps students as well) see admissions into top-tier institutions of higher learning as a key hallmark of a school’s “success.” Yet, I have always found it a bit disheartening that of all the achievements that day schools could display to the wider Jewish world, this list of colleges (hopefully including a good mix of Ivies among them) is what they choose to advertise.

That begs the question, of course, of what does constitute “success” for a Jewish day school. The mission statements of most day schools make clear that “academic excellence” is but one of the criteria by which success is defined. Jewish day schools routinely point to other outcomes they value: they aim to produce graduates who are proud and secure in their Jewish identities, who embrace and express Jewish ethical and social values, who contribute to the community and who are prepared to live purposeful and satisfying lives. And, to be fair, being admitted to a top college or university requires more than just a high grade point average and good scores on the SAT (or ACT), so a school that succeeds in placing its graduates in such colleges is clearly producing students with more than just strong academic records.

Still, the ads highlight the reality that the operative word in the phrase “Jewish day school” remains “school.” Day schools operate within the framework of what we understand as “schooling” in American society. And that scares me, because of what schools in the United States are pressured to be today. In the current climate and culture, academic achievement, defined operationally by test scores and grades, is virtually the sole *raison d’être* of elementary and secondary education. All of the powerful regularities of schooling—how time, space, the content of learning, work and people are organized—are focused on this goal. The vast majority of day schools share in this culture and in the regularities that embody it, even if many seek with some success to mitigate its most malicious excesses.

“Academic achievement, defined by test scores and grades, is virtually the sole *raison d’être* of elementary and secondary education today. All of the powerful regularities of schooling are focused on this goal.”

The contrast between the dominant culture of contemporary American schooling, especially in the No Child Left Behind era, and the implicit culture of Jewish learning that our day schools are also heir to is stark. The ideal of Torah *lishma* certainly has analogs in concepts like the “love of learning” that many schools (not just Jew-

ish day schools) claim to seek to instill in their students. But the fundamental ethos of Jewish learning, though valuing intellectual rigor, is one of learning for the purpose of living a good and worthy life, not for high grades and admission into elite colleges. The ideal *talmid chacham* is certainly bright and industrious, but even a cursory reading of *Pirkei Avot*—the Talmud’s guide to the virtues of the true student and teacher of Torah—makes clear that the aspirations and expectations that Jewish tradition holds for learners and for learn-



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ing far exceed in both breadth and depth those that American schooling enshrines today. Jewish learning is focused not on acing standardized tests (even AP tests), but on discovering sacred meaning as part of an ongoing conversation between text and life that is at once timeless and timely.

It is no wonder, then, that so many Jewish day schools today, seeking to honor a Jewish vision of the purposes and methods of learning alongside that which characterizes much of American schooling, are looking to “informal” Jewish education to fill the gap. And well they should. Informal Jewish education at its best is ideally suited



to address precisely those issues of identity, values, inter-personal relationships, and personal growth that contemporary American schooling has pushed largely to the side in its single-minded pursuit of academic achievement. By adding a rich menu of informal and experiential learning opportunities to its academic program, day schools can come far closer than the vast majority of American public and many private schools do to educating the “whole person” and, at the same time, provide support for the affective, behavioral and spiritual dimensions of Jewish development that a largely cognitively-oriented academic study of Jewish “subjects” is unlikely to impact.

For American Jewish day schools, blending a solid “formal” academic program that can “compete” with that of the best public and non-Jewish private schools with an expanded set of informal educational activities would seem to be a ready formula for success, both educationally

“The “factory-like” model of schooling: students come in at one end, pass through largely standardized experiences, are measured against equally standardized benchmarks, and emerge as “graduates” at the other end.

and in the marketplace. The question, though, is whether this approach does full justice to our students as 21st century learners and as 21st century Jews. Even if we succeed pedagogically to integrate the best “formal” and “informal” education in our day schools, will such integration make these schools ideal learning environments for our children and youth?

I would argue that the answer is “no.” The problem lies in the conventional paradigm of schooling itself. Incorporating informal learning into the school program is clearly a step in the right direction. But unless Jewish day schools are prepared to break

with the current paradigm of schooling and challenge the culture and regularities that are central to it they will not realize the full potential of these efforts.

Jewish day schools would hardly be alone in mounting this challenge. Much has been written in recent years critiquing not only the excesses of today’s test-focused school culture, but the fundamental “factory-like” model of schooling that reigns in the United States and that most Jewish day schools continue to embrace. In this model, students come in en masse at one end (kindergarten), pass through

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a set of largely standardized experiences at a pre-determined pace, are measured frequently against a set of equally standardized benchmarks of achievement, and—if all goes well—emerge as “graduates” at the other end. It is a model so ubiquitous that we can hardly imagine any other one. But it is a deeply flawed and increasingly dated model. It contradicts what we know about why and how people learn best, and it is ill-suited to encourage the kind of intellectual vitality, creativity, flexibility and capacity to collaborate that 21st century life and work demand. Perhaps this is the reason why so much investment in raising student “achievement” has produced such frustratingly limited results: the model itself is broken.

If this is so, then it behooves day schools not to limit their efforts to patching up the model with a layer of informal activities, but to rethink the model itself—to be a different kind of “school.” And in fact, while most public attention continues to be focused on educational developments linked to the reigning paradigm—rising or falling test scores, letter grades for schools based on “adequate yearly progress,” teacher merit pay and evaluations based on student achievement on standardized tests, “races to the top,” etc.—an educational counterculture continues to grow. This counterculture can be found in schools that

taken seriously (not merely given lip service). The institutions, programs, teachers, parents and students who are part of this counterculture believe in the power of intrinsic motivation to stimulate a student’s drive for excellence. They focus on educating the whole child—mind, body, and spirit. And, they judge achievement by real-world measures, not test scores.

Jewish day schools should be proud participants in this countercultural movement. Some already are. Pedagogically, the approaches such schools

“The institutions and people who are part of this counterculture believe in the power of intrinsic motivation to stimulate a student’s drive for excellence.”

are taking or might take will undoubtedly vary. For some, breaking with the reigning school paradigm may mean becoming a Jewish Montessori school, like Netivot, in Edison, New Jersey. For others, it may involve joining a national initiative like The Partnership for 21st Century Learning, as the Martin J. Gottlieb Day School in Jacksonville, Florida, has done (<http://www.mjgds.org>). It may include a complete curricular redesign using an approach like Richard Solomon’s Jewish Integrated Experiential Education that aims to thoroughly integrate so-called “formal” and “informal” learning (see his article in this issue). Or

that they implicitly or explicitly redefine both the purposes of school and what good learning looks like and how it can be identified and supported.

Does this mean that day schools have to give up classes in traditional academic subjects, organizing students by grade levels, daily homework assignments and administering standardized tests? Not necessarily, though there are good reasons why they might wish to consider all of these. The key is thinking about the education we offer not as a march to-

ward some predetermined destination, but as a process of ongoing discovery with room for stops, and detours, and surprises along the way. Teaching is an aid to learning—just as the Hebrew has it—and learning that endures is ultimately highly personal, driven by a desire to understand, not a need to pass a test.

So, in the end, the issue is not, I believe, bringing more informal education into day schools or doing a better job integrating the multiple modalities and contexts for learning that exist. Both of these are desiderata, but not as ends in themselves, nor as the core of the change that is called for today. The central question is whether Jewish day schools are ready to advocate for and implement a different philosophy of learning than the one that dominates public educational discourse today. Because they are private and because they are Jewish, day schools have a unique opportunity to go down a different path, one that defines, pursues, and measures excellence in ways more compatible with the interests of both students and society—and with the values of Jewish tradition. We can still celebrate the success of our students in the great American college sweepstakes. But we’ll do so knowing they’re prepared not only for success on the academic playing field, but in life. ■

“Jewish day schools have a unique opportunity to go down a different path, one that defines, pursues, and measures excellence in ways more compatible with the interests of both students and society.”

defiantly embrace ostensibly outmoded “progressive” educational philosophies, in cutting-edge classrooms like those portrayed in Milton Chen’s *Education Nation* that empower students through technology, among dedicated, creative teachers like Ron Berger (see *An Ethic of Excellence*), and in settings where concepts like multiple intelligences and approaches like project-based learning are

it may involve a structural reorganization to redefine the role of teachers as multifaceted “learning agents” catalyzing, facilitating, and guiding student learning, as a paper published by the KnowledgeWorks Foundation has suggested (http://andreasaveri.com/wp-content/uploads/2009/03/sr-1160kwf_learning_agents.pdf). What all of these approaches, and others, have in common is

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Deepening the Conversation About What Schools Can Learn From Camps

■ by **MARC BAKER** and **BECCA SHIMSHAK**

The authors describe four core principles for integrating the best aspects of camp culture into day schools.

CORE PRINCIPLES

We suggest four common principles or commitments that schools infused with a camp state of mind would share.

We believe that there is a growing need to ground our work in theory and to develop a shared language about what it means to bring the best of the Jewish camp experience to our schools.

The conversation needs to start at a deep level that touches the heart of the mission and culture of our schools and our overarching goals for our students' learning and Jewish identity. A starting place for developing this shared language is by exploring what we're calling a "camp state of mind" and how this state of mind can infuse our schools.

During Becca's time at the Foundation for Jewish Camp, she and her colleague Rabbi Avi Katz Orlow explored the notion that the core tenets of camp

moment and staying present with themselves. Being away from the structures of home, children need to be independent, and with independence comes the need to take risks. Children can feel confident taking risks knowing that their peers and counselors are there to support them and that everyone is focused on taking healthy risks.

These components of camp—taking risks, feeling supported, focusing on personal identity and gaining confidence—do not need to be limited to time of year or geographic location. People can live by a camp mentality throughout the year if they understand life to be about being present, reflective and supportive of



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Rigorous classes, holiday celebrations, sports, arts, boyfriends, breakups, SATs, bus rides, trips, shabbatonim, tefillah, Talmud Torah, Hebrew, English, Chinese, Israel, America...

do not have to be bound by time or space. *Camp can be a way of life.* Camp allows you to explore your identity by experimenting with new ways of approaching social situations and doing what you love. In a place where the goal of each day is to learn by doing, children can focus on living in the

themselves and others around them. Our homes, our synagogues and our schools can become camp-like and embody that same spirit felt when you walk through the gates of camp and children are expanding their understanding of themselves, of Judaism and of life.

A holistic view of the child and of the child's intellectual, moral, and spiritual development.

In some schools, experiential learning, advisory, down time, even arts and athletics are seen as distractions to students' academic work. At camp, these "other" aspects of the educational experience *are* the educational experience, without the "distraction" of academics.

Day schools have the opportunity to take an integrated and holistic stance toward our students and toward our educational programs. We need to view our educational value-added as what we call the "all-sys-

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Tell us something about yourself.

When I met my husband David, we were both destined for Jewish community involvement. We were set up through a connection my husband made with my uncle on a Cincinnati solidarity mission to Israel, and both of our families had a long history of leadership in our respective communities of Atlanta and Cincinnati.

Why do you believe that Jewish day school education is important?

Upon moving to Cincinnati, the Jewish Federation reached out to me to get involved, and I immediately expressed an interest in the local Jewish community day school, Yavneh, now called Rockwern Academy. I joined the Yavneh board before I had children and was immediately tapped for the finance committee, which was happy to welcome a CPA from a public accounting firm. My passion for Jewish education grew with my involvement and through the rewarding experience each of my four children have had at Yavneh.

My dedication to day school education grew from my own background. I am the product of Jewish day school, and I often say that it was the best gift my parents ever gave me. I grew up in a nurturing environment that gave me a strong Jewish identity, and I have carried that knowledge and sense of self throughout my life. While I was fortunate enough to also attend Jewish summer camp and enjoy multiple Israel experiences, I believe that my years at Jewish day school contributed the most to my identity and desire to give back to the Jewish community.

What strengths do you bring to the RAVSAK board?

Qualities I bring to the RAVSAK board are passion, enthusiasm and commitment. Having gone through strategic

planning and substantial fundraising on the local level, I am excited to continue that work on a national scale. I have developed an ability to tackle challenging situations and navigate politically difficult waters, while retaining the big picture. It is always invigorating to be around lay leaders and professionals

pay that forward. I believe we are all doing holy work in the time we spend strengthening our Jewish day schools.

Do you have a favorite Jewish teaching?

I love to involve myself in Jewish study. I can't say that I have one favorite Jewish



“My dedication to day school education grew from my own background. I am the product of Jewish day school, and I often say that it was the best gift my parents ever gave me.

who share my commitment and dedication to a cause, and the people involved in RAVSAK are some of the best and brightest I have ever been around. RAVSAK and Marc Kramer played such an important role to me in my role as board president that I feel indebted to

teaching; however, I do love the quote from Anne Frank: “How wonderful it is that nobody need wait a single moment before starting to improve the world.” We are all making a difference today, and I sincerely hope and believe that we will move from strength to strength. ■

[CONTINUED FROM PAGE 12]

tems-go experience.” Rigorous academic classes, holiday celebrations, sports, arts, boyfriends, breakups, SATs, final exams, long bus rides, long days, trips, shabbatonim, tefillah, Talmud Torah, Hebrew, English, Chinese, Israel, America—all of these factor into the educational experience that shapes our students’ hearts, minds and Jewish identities, and all occur under one roof, all part of one year, one week, one day. Day school educators need to be explicit about the belief that these do not *take away* from the academic experience, but rather all of these *are* the “curriculum.” When we do this, we can be more proactive and intentional about how we construct all elements of our school’s explicit and implicit curricula, and about our overarching learning and Jewish identity goals for our students.

Educators and administrators as role models who see their relationships with students, both in and out of the classroom, as essential to their roles.

When our alumni talk about what they love most about Gann or what aspects of our program had the most powerful impact on their learning and growth, they inevitably begin with their teachers, who they know “care about them not just as students, but as people.” Great boarding schools understand the educational power of informal teacher-student relationships and therefore embrace the “triple threat” model in which all teachers also coach sports and advise students. How much more critical it is in our schools, where Jewish identity development is such a central educational goal, that all teachers, administrators, coaches, rabbis, and other educators embrace the multiple roles in the lives of our students.

Educators must take seriously their responsibilities as both formal and informal educators. At Gann, one of the core responsibilities of all educators, across disciplines, Jewish and non-Jewish alike, includes the role of “Jewish identity or Jewish journey facilitator.” This comes more and less naturally to different educators. Often, “camp people” do this

intuitively or have an easier time with roles beyond the classroom. But we cannot settle for a faculty of those who “get it” and those who don’t. This must drive hiring and professional development, and must be incorporated into supervision and evaluation as well.

An avirah (environment, ambiance) of informality, relaxedness, freedom, positive energy and joy.


One of the most important pieces of feedback we hear about families’ experiences of Gann is simply based on how they feel when they step in the door and walk through the halls. “There is something about this place,” people often say; “it has an energy, a neshamah.” We identify this indescribable feeling with the camp state of mind. These elements of the school avirah can make school feel “not like a school.” Rugs instead of tile floors, large open areas full of light and intentionally designed spaces for students to congregate and to collaborate, for academic, extracurricular or social purposes, create a tangible sense of community. Seeing students and teachers sitting on the floor to review an assignment, students doing homework in the dining hall, or jugglers practicing

these questions make a significant impact on our students’ learning and on the overall avirah in our schools.

It starts from the top, with the vision, values and commitment of the lay and professional leadership of the school.

If the camp state of mind is going to become part of our schools’ mission, vision and culture, we need boards and heads who speak this language, share this vision, and are prepared to dedicate resources to the programming and personnel. We also need to promote and clarify this aspect of our schools to various stakeholders, especially parents and teachers. Many parents worry more about how many AP classes their children are taking than about their social and spiritual development. We as leaders play a vital role in educating parents about their whole children and the educational importance of the camp state of mind.

It is also our responsibility as leaders to clarify for our teachers and administrators what it means to be an educator in our schools. When Marc arrived at Gann five years ago one of the most common questions he heard from teachers was, “What do you expect of me?” The implementa-

 Rugs instead of tile floors, large open areas full of light and intentionally designed spaces for students to congregate and to collaborate, for academic, extracurricular or social purposes, create a tangible sense of community.

ing in the hallway, not to mention impromptu Jewish a capella performances, creates a palpable energy.

When adults address students, how and what do they say? Are they able to connect with the students “on their level,” and are they speaking about matters of values, of purpose, of Judaism and of life, or are they sharing technical information such as procedures and rules? How frequent and vibrant are students’ voices heard in the school and to what extent do students, through their leadership and creativity, help to shape the school’s culture and programs? The answers to

tion of these four principles begins with leaders who make them explicit and who are willing to hold themselves and their schools accountable to them.

CONCLUSION

These principles are foundations upon which our work at Gann rests. Our goal is to link these critical silos in our students’ development in deep and meaningful ways. We believe it is essential for leaders and schools to articulate these or similar principles in order to harness the success of Jewish camps for a sustained influence in day school education. ■



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Head and Heart

■ by **SKIP VICHNESS**

A prominent, longtime camp advocate and administrator discusses a new program designed to foster productive interchange between camps and day schools.

We were convinced that this environment would inculcate our children against an increasingly accessible and often attractive path of assimilation while still preparing them for college.

Far too often, though, we forgot that most day school children do not grow up in a vacuum. They are not isolated from the world around them, a world which includes extracurricular activities, television, and of course the omnipresent Internet. Suburbia provides our children with a panoply of attractive options that conflict with the intensive Jewish world provided during the school day.

How many times do we hear from parents “He needs a break from praying” or “I can’t make her go to synagogue on Shabbat.” This is increasingly true as the day school movement broadens its reach to families who may not be observant, Jewishly well-educated, or particularly committed to creating a strong Jewish home life.

Unfortunately, this results in a day school “product” that is knowledgeable, but unengaged in the practice of living Judaism outside of the school day. Day schools may thus be successful in creating a Jewish “head,” but fail at instilling the Jewish “heart.”

This apparent disconnect is beginning to receive increased attention from both Jewish educators and lay leaders. To find the answer, many are looking at institutions that over the past decade have been increasingly recognized as identity

builders for those who have often not received an intensive Jewish education. The “three legged stool” of day school, Israel and Jewish summer camp has become increasingly normative. No longer do we hear the parental lament, “My children are in day school all year, so they need a break in the summer.”

More and more parents have come to realize that the best way to maximize their investment is to intensify it. Summer camp and Israel travel provide a 24/7 Jewish environment that gives “heart” to the day school student’s Jewish learning. In these immersive experiences, education is fun and hands-on, kids can explore their own connections to what they are learning, and they often teach each other. For these and many more reasons, over the past decade more and more parents are sending their children to Jewish summer camp and participating in school and movement trips to Israel.

While content may remain distinct—basketball cannot replace reading—innovative educators are looking to inculcate the joy of informal learning into the school environment.

However, an increasing number of innovative Jewish educators, foundations, and academic institutions are beginning to realize that the stool with three “siloes” legs may well not be the only—or even the best—solution to creating the “Jewish head, Jewish heart.” Many of us have come to believe that the answer to this issue lies in integration rather than seg-

regation. While content may remain distinct—no one is suggesting that basketball replace reading—they are looking at a methodological approach that inculcates the joy of informal or experiential learning, of camp and trips to Israel, into the formalized school environment.

I believe that our role as lay leaders is to assess and prioritize strategic initiatives and



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to empower the professional staff to define and execute tactics to address these priorities. The strong partnership between the Board of the Foundation for Jewish Camp (FJC) and its very capable professional staff embodies this approach. The board had watched these integration trends over time and recommended to our staff that it investigate opportunities to collaborate with others to bring “head and heart” together.

As a result, an example in creative collaboration is a new program of FJC called Nadiv, about which we are very excited. This innovative initiative, created collaboratively with the Union for Reform Judaism and funded generously by the Jim Joseph Foundation and AVI CHAI Foundation, will create senior experiential Jewish educator positions to be shared by

nonprofit Jewish overnight camps and Jewish day or synagogue schools.

The Nadiv program model developed with the benefit of learning from related efforts in North America, including the 2009 Legacy Heritage Foundation's camp-synagogue partnership program and the recent collaboration between URJ Camp George and the Leo Baeck Day School in Toronto. The learning from all of these pilot programs may inform and inspire others seeking to share Jewish educational resources more effectively and efficiently.

One of the intended outcomes of the Nadiv program is to model a new way to foster deeper collaboration between different kinds of institutions in the Jewish educational world. It aspires to build synergy and collaboration in Jewish education and strategically bring fresh and relevant content to future generations. This educator will help the camp work with more intension over the summer and bring more experiential components to the school. Ultimately, it will be more sustainable to retain the best talent in the field. Ideally these educators will break

through the silos and help our students develop their "Jewish heads, Jewish hearts."

Now is the time not only to teach our children about Judaism but also to teach them to love it and live it. I hope that the Nadiv model will be one we look to expand in the future. By working together, formal and informal educational institutions can provide this wonderful opportunity for our children, creating future generations of committed, educated, and excited Jews. ■



Distinguished Writers and Editors Convene to Strengthen *HaYidion*

RAVSAK invited prominent leaders in journalism and magazine editing to share their insights on *HaYidion*. An outstanding cadre of professionals accepted our invitation to join a new Advisory Panel:

Sandee Brawarsky, editor and writer, *Jewish Week*

Jeremy Dauber, professor of Yiddish literature, Columbia, co-editor, *Prooftexts*

Ari Goldman, journalist, author and Columbia Journalism School faculty

Aron Hirt-Manheimer, editor, *Reform Judaism* magazine

Mark Joffe, former editor, Jewish Telegraphic Agency

Dan Lazar, agent, Writers House

Alana Newhouse, editor, *Tablet* magazine

Ellen Rosenbush, editor, *Harper's*

Daniel Septimus, CEO, myjewishlearning.com

Judith Shulevitz, writer and editor, *Lingua Franca*, *Slate*, *New York Times Book Review*

The panelists gathered at a roundtable hosted by RAVSAK. They generously shared their time and abundant thoughts; the expression "two Jews, three opinions" would have to be revised substantially upwards for Jewish

suggestions have already been incorporated into the design and planning of the current issue. These include:

- The release of an article online simultaneous with the issue (go to www.ravsak.org)
- Highlighting some of the contents on the cover
- Moving the table of contents to give it more prominence
- A letters-to-the-editor section
- A new personal essay to close the issue (submissions encouraged for future issues!)
- Concise article summaries, to help our busy readers decide whether to read on



journalists. Their suggestions aimed to improve everything from readability and quality to design, usefulness and heimishness. RAVSAK is grateful for their contribution to Jewish education and honored at their willingness to support our journal.

Readers will notice that several of their

- A list of further resources at the end of each article, as appropriate

In upcoming issues, look out for other innovative features that our panelists recommended.

Do you have an idea for HaYidion? Please share it with us at Hayidion@ravsak.org. ■

Getting Beyond “Formal vs. Informal”: Good Education is Good Education

■ by **JACOB CYTRYN**

The author argues that we should put aside labels such as “informal” and “formal” and focus on elements that comprise good education in any setting.

I ncreasingly, it seems that educators in so-called “formal” settings (i.e., schools) are turning to the “magic” of so-called “informal” settings (summer camps, Israel trips, youth groups, etc.) to bolster and re-energize their institutions. This trend is as misguided as it is well intentioned. Instead of looking to the outside, Jewish day schools should look within themselves to enhance what, quite often, already exists in their faculty, classrooms, and school culture.

An educational mentor of mine once dismissed my interest in programs focusing on educating “gifted and talented” students. “Good education is good education,” she opined, suggesting that if we truly realize a shared vision of progressive, student-centered pedagogy in our classrooms, then all students will benefit. When it comes to the formal vs. informal question, though the settings may differ (in important ways), the same is true about our students’ intellectual growth as Jews and as partners in intellectual discourse. Good education is good education.

The ephemeral experience so many children experience in informal settings has nothing to do with education. Rather, it is a result of intensive, peer-based social experiences. These experiences are heightened when the setting is a metaphoric “bubble”; this is why Jewish residential summer camps and Israel trips have such powerful impact. Of course, it is also why the college campus as a whole and service-learning opportunities like the Peace Corps have such impact as well. Ultimate-

ly, the power of the experience is not really about learning; it is, circularly, about the experience itself.

Jewish day schools already can (and often do) provide relatively strong versions of this impact in the tight-knit communities they foster. But most schools cannot aspire to be bubbles, and they must live with that reality as much as summer camps must embrace the strict limits on their length of session. (Although we can all dream about ten-month summers, never-ending school-days with most parents a hundred miles away or more, or the superhuman energy we would need to survive the grueling days and nights of a teen trip to Israel for the rest of our lives.)

The language of “formal” and “informal” education is not helpful, nor is our discussion aided by side-steps into “experiential” education or other appended adjectives. Rather, let us leave ethnographic documentation of settings to social scientists and allow ourselves to have a shared conversation about our passion: education. Many sites for so-called “informal” education are less interested in contributing to children’s minds than in reaping the benefits that the immutable characteristics of their setting provide. No school should long to recreate such experiences for their children. To paraphrase Seymour Fox: Enjoying purple Kool-Aid should not be confused for the appreciation of a fine cognac.

Ambitious educational programming, however, is not confined to setting. Educationally committed Jewish summer camps (and other institutions that operate in informal settings) are a great partner to day schools in providing a year-round forum for engagement with Jewish content and ideas, mastery of religious and academic skills, and the development



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of intellectual dispositions. Schools need not hire “informal” educators to provide programming for shabbatonim and holidays. Rather, schools should encourage their existing faculty members with a knack for cooperative, deep, interpretive and innovative learning to expand their vision for what is possible. When a Hebrew class adapts the story of Megilat Esther into a hilarious, off-color, and profoundly relevant performance that they perform for their fellow students on Purim, that intense learning experience feels a lot to the class like camp. Debates, historical reenactments, and the creation of participatory ritual resonate as well and already occur in day schools throughout the country.

In a similar vein, schools should come to appreciate and model the profound learning that happens in those informal settings which commit themselves to that learning. It is not merely that we have a tremendous amount to learn from each other; we are engaged in the same exact

endeavor. And by allowing the differences in setting to come between us, to tempt us with “grass is always greener” pining, we do ourselves, the Jewish future that our students/campers/participants represent, and the shaping of a new generation of Jewish and general knowledge a huge disservice.

Commitment to transformative Jewish education in the informal setting embraces inherent flexibilities. The first blessing before the Shema takes on a different resonance when pronounced in a beautiful natural settings overlooking a rising or setting sun; choreographing and learning a dance to modern Israeli music to introduce Megilat Eichah can be a religiously, intellectually, and artistically challenging task for an adolescent dancer; the historical fact of Yitzhak Rabin’s Burma Road strategy takes on a different relevance when employed strategically as part of a Capture-the-Flag game at 1 am.

These examples highlight why some are

tempted to call such settings “experiential.” Yet the same principles can and should be applied to the experiential life of schools. The holiday cycle is more intense throughout an academic year, as are the resonances of Jewish history. The weekly Torah reading arc is richly diverse, as are the opportunities for building some-

unit cannot be completed without the student giving of herself and creating output. It ought to convey the vibrancy and possibility of contemporary Judaism empowering every person to respond to the great legacy of our tradition in his or her own idiom. It ought to embrace collaboration between students and the development of

“Setting differences aside, Jewish education today ought to focus as much on a child’s heart, soul and hands as it does on his mind.

thing programmatically profound out of integrated curricula between multiple disciplines. And of course, the amount of time spent in school is a bonus, a real opportunity for students to simmer in and build on topics and themes.

Setting differences aside, Jewish education today ought to embody certain characteristics. It ought to center on students not just in the planning stages and initial lessons but retain that focus throughout, so that a

problem-solving and thinking skills that will benefit not just the Jewish community but the citizens we graduate and the world into which we send them. Finally, it ought to focus as much on a child’s heart, soul and hands as it does on his mind.

Jewish children adore the time they spend in informal settings, for good reason. Occasionally, at their very best, the powerful education that transpires in

[CONTINUED ON PAGE 57]



RAVSAK Enrollment Data Survey

For the third year in a row, RAVSAK has undertaken a study of enrollment trends in Jewish community day schools across North America to clarify the impact the economy and demographic changes have had on our individual and collective rosters. With 109 RAVSAK schools in the US and Canada now reporting, this survey captures an accurate snapshot of enrollment figures, and more importantly, changes in enrollment from last year.

Last year (2010-2011) the field of community day schools was down only .7%, a net loss of approximately 178 students from the 2009-2010 school year. While these losses were significant and worrisome, they were far less than had been predicted. Schools all over North America tightened their belts and their

focus and weathered what we had all hoped would be a brief economic storm.

Although the exact state of the economy is still the subject of much debate, there seemed to be a broad consensus this past spring that Jewish day schools would again experience a major downturn in enrollment. We are pleased to share, however, that the net change in enrollment this year from last is just over 1%, an average of 3 students per school.

The following figures summarize trends among RAVSAK schools (giving percentages of total schools surveyed):

- Loss in enrollment of 10% or greater: 16%

- Loss under 10%: 28%
- Flat enrollment of +/- 1%: 14%
- Growth in enrollment up to 10%: 28%
- Grow in excess of 10%: 16%

While 44% of Jewish community day schools experienced a drop in enrollment, a full 58% of our schools had stable enrollments or experienced growth. These data suggest a split between schools that have sustained or regained stability and those continuing to face notable enrollment challenges. Keep in mind that these statistics offer comparisons but not answers. Through creativity and collaboration, we will get through this rough spot together. RAVSAK is committed to the success of all our schools. ■

Balancing Skills and Knowledge with Meaningful Experiences

■ by **KAREN GAZITH**

Teachers should create lessons and assessments that enable students to engage with the material in ways that are relevant to their lives outside the classroom.

Students spend anywhere from 17,000 to 19,000 hours in elementary, middle and high school. Considering the amount of knowledge to which a student is exposed over all that time, if educators do not think about and plan toward relevance, authenticity and applicability of that knowledge to students' life post school, their schooling has little purpose.

In *Understanding by Design*, Grant Wiggins and Jay McTighe recount a learning unit that most students, especially in the Northeast, engage in during the first few months of grade 1—a unit on apples. Students read apple books, do apple math problems, draw pictures of apples, and sometimes bake apple pies. I often ask teachers what they hope their students will understand and be able to do by the end of the apple unit. I often get responses such as “I’ve never thought about that before” or “I teach it because it’s in the curriculum.” Unless we think about what we are teaching, why we are teaching it and the usefulness of the learning to our students’ current and future lives, we leave them with a lot of knowledge but little understanding.

More problematic is the failure to make connections. There are many reasons why teachers might want to teach about apples, but there also must be a larger context. The context must be explained and connections made to other disciplines, including Judaic studies. One possible reason for teaching an apple unit is that we want our students to understand that where they live has a great impact on how they live, what they wear and what they eat. With a more meaningful and expanded view, students can learn about their place in the world.

Brain research, and in particular the information processing system as described by David Sousa in *How the Brain Learns*, has helped educators think about what they should be teaching and how they should be teaching it. Students are inundated with massive amounts of stimuli at any given time. We would like to believe that our instruction takes top priority but this is often not the case. Students are distracted by external stimuli such as noises in the classroom, conversations with other students, visuals around the classroom and outside scenery or internal stimuli such as personal issues. In actuality, students process and retain only 1% of all incoming stimuli.

Of the enormous amount of stimuli that enters the brain through the senses, the brain must decide what to hold onto and what to filter out. The information that is retained and ultimately processed in long term memory both holds meaning and makes sense—with information that is meaningful often taking precedence over information that is understood. The student may not fully understand the content, but if the brain perceives it as meaningful or relevant, that information will take top priority and will most likely move to working memory and eventually long term storage. In order for information to hold meaning, it must have context. Stu-



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dents should be able to explain why and how the information is relevant: how it relates to what they already know, and how the information can be applied in everyday life.

In Judaic studies, this is especially pertinent because if students learn language, text, customs and Jewish values through the lens of knowledge and pure skill acquisition, the knowledge has little value. If all students can do is conjugate verbs, parse sentences, relay how many soldiers went to battle or recite a brachah, but lack understanding of the meaning and relevance of what they are learning, what is the purpose? Students must gain a deep understanding of the biblical and rabbinic sources that they study in relation to how the learning will continue to guide their own practice and lifelong decision making.

In discussion with teachers about what they hope children will learn and understand through their teaching units, they often articulate lofty goals such as, "I want my students to understand that Joseph's character developed over time and that one's behaviors influences the way he is treated by others. These are behaviors that help children develop a Jewish moral code." Yet in practice, the learning is at times at the level of rote recall: What did he do? Where did he go? What happened when he got there? Of course there are many exceptions, and many teaching and learning situations that are far more meaningful, rich and valuable. We need to learn from those outstanding situations and ensure that every Jewish learning experience for children is equally enriching.

Assessment drives learning. If we want to change the focus of instruction from knowledge and skill acquisition to deep knowledge and understanding that guides actions and behavior,

[CONTINUED ON PAGE 24]



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What Schools Can Learn from Ecological Resilience

■ by **AMANDA GELB**

The author puts forward "resilience" as a useful lens to regard our goals for the classroom, school culture and our students.

Why is the summer's poetry slam on the loss of the Beit HaMikdash (the Holy Temple) seared into our educational memories, while the details of yesterday's Jewish history class can hardly be recalled? Why do the ultimate messages of pride and unity felt at the end of a massive color war ring deeper than silently reading what Rambam has to say about the topic? Schools have the tremendous opportunity and privilege of accessing and serving students for a longer duration and often in more depth than camps, shabbatons, youth groups, etc. And yet informal learning venues are overwhelmingly cited as fun, remarkable places while school is something students may begrudgingly attend.

In a different world, frilly coral colonies, like swirls of tulle, run down the east coast of Australia. Considered one of the seven natural wonders of the world, the Great Barrier Reef is the mother ecosystem, the marine equivalent of the world's largest city. By all accounts, due to the increase of greenhouse gases, the acidification of the ocean and bleaching of coral, the coral should be gone. Wiped off the face of this earth. Yet it is still here, largely still glimmering its majestic colors. How? Ecological resilience. An organism or ecosystem is deemed resilient when it meets three criteria: it undergoes a tremendous change or shock but retains the same essential structure and function; it is capable of self-organization; and it can build and increase its capacity for adaptation and learning. The coral has recovered from major disturbance and further has continued to develop and reproduce.

Resilience theory is a perfect paragon for producing students who are engaged with the subject matter and strengthened in their Jewish identities. Camps, shabbatons, service learning, youth groups and other forms of education offer a dynamism and urgency that's often missing from classrooms. Current parochial schools risk system collapse (read: apathetic unengaged students) by not offering dynamic programming in the classroom. Yet we can harness the best elements of these programs to create powerful experiences at the day school level, inside the classrooms themselves.

How we do so is a fundamental question of building resilience, and it starts with creating a hybrid between what is traditionally referred to as "informal" and "formal" education through experiential education. (Let us also dispel the myth that experiential education is learning under a tree, or something of that nature. We are not discussing peppering every few lesson plans with an activity. Rather we are in the practice of making the topic come alive, of the students discovering their role in the topic.)

Antoine de Saint-Exupéry wisely said, "If you want to build a ship, don't drum up people to collect wood and don't assign them tasks and work, but rather teach them to long for the endless immensity of the sea." Our education systems should not be solely focused on memorizing the information to sufficiently pass the test. Rather, it is to create that longing of which Saint-Exupéry speaks, to discover one's self inside the information, to make

that information part of the fabric of one's identity. Information is not only retained this way, it is tangibly felt.

What would a classroom look like through the lens of resilience? For one thing, it would be multi-sensory. I ran a program for a synagogue in Montreal on Jacob robbing his brother Esau (a hunter who is characteristically rough and hairy) of his birthright blessing from their blind father Isaac. As the portion goes, Rebecca gives her preferred son Jacob advice on how to obtain the blessing. We blindfolded a few students who were "Isaacs" so that they



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could experience "blindness." A few of the girls in the room were "Rebeccas" who gave half of the students, the "Jacobs," twine (representing hair) to wrap around their arms and gummy candy (representing the meat). The "Esaus" were given a dash of strong cologne and a different candy, and were told to speak gruffly. The "Isaacs" had to guess which group received the brachah. By utilizing the powerful elements of taste, touch, sight, sound, and smell, the participants were fully engaged and had significantly more to contribute to our discussion afterwards. By enlivening the senses that frequently lie dormant in educational activities, we are involving the whole student, and creating a deeper connection to the material.

A resilient classroom includes multiple methodologies. With the economic recession continuing to rage on, many schools have had to grapple with difficult decisions of hiring and firing. Again, ecology can



provide a model for maximizing efficiency. One of the most innovative ideas in resource sustainability today is rice paddies in India that are used both for growing rice and breeding fish. Same resources being used, double the output. No waste.

Working off this model, knowledge generated in one classroom could be used in another, and experiences and sharing best practices should be openly encouraged. Let's creatively look at the diversity of educators we have in schools to double the educational gain. Let's encourage cross-pollination. Are the English teachers consulting the art teachers? Is the drama teacher asked to come in and help run an exercise on enacting the receiving of the Torah from Sinai?

Perhaps more importantly, are the students themselves—the ruach (spirit) or student government committees, that master doodler in the back row, that chronic texter on the right—co-opted into the curriculum planning stages? Are students themselves encouraged to dream up shiurs, lesson plans, exercises for their class? Want to really get students to master material? Put the onus of facilitating the class's learning on the students themselves. Make them

“By all accounts, due to the acidification of the ocean, the Great Barrier Reef should be gone. Yet it is still here, largely still glimmering its majestic colors.”

the teachers. Guiding this process is important. Proper attention to framing the learning and clear objectives should be shared. Such an approach would herald a watershed moment for Jewish education.

The backbone of experiential learning is a student-influenced inquiry process. Project-based learning and peer-to-peer learning in day schools serve as powerful tools for making this happen. These approaches are at the core of experiential education and, by their very design, promote collaborative classrooms and self-agency—hallmarks of educational resilience. The most successful classroom activities provide students with a clear context and mirror real life tasks, encouraging students to build expertise. The tasks are collaborative, complex and require examining from multiple perspectives and disciplines. Inherent in the project or learning activity is the opportunity for students to reflect on their beliefs and values. Most importantly, the end result is not predetermined; the

door is left open to multiple possible outcomes.

Resilient classrooms consider changing the physical settings and routines of the class by adding or rearranging things. They are dynamic by moving away from rote memorization and towards textual experiences that place the learner in the text. Underlying an activity I ran in which students build a community out of cookies were the questions: What elements and characteristics are essential to a community? What makes a community successful? What do I want my community to look like? Students had more thoughtful and introspective comments to contribute towards our conversation on community once they themselves had to construct their own communities.

Sara Smith incorporated these ideas in a lesson on gleanings, based on the second chapter of the Book of Ruth, that she

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taught to the 8th grade at Pressman Academy in Los Angeles. She had students literally glean, using pennies to represent crops, tapping into the emotions and realities of an impoverished person's lifestyle. Students were informed that they were so poor that their only option for feeding themselves and their fami-

complex dynamic between the owner of the field and his workers, as well as their relationship with the poor who came to glean on their field."

An ecosystem's dependence on a single type of support, and similarly a classroom's usage of one type of source, creates vulnerability. The experiential classroom's life-

mersion. Ms. Smith's gleaning activity discussion could have brought in texts from agricultural revolutions, other points in Jewish history or law that address the hunger, or included how other religions give to their poor.

Resilience thinking is as much about withstanding tremendous disturbances as it is about using those events to ignite renewal and build a deeper sense of self. Building resilient Jewish identities and values is achieved when students are presented with meaty conflicts. The best way to enact this is by making classrooms challenging for each student via project-based learning, peer-to-peer learning, stimulating activities, probing questions and dynamic texts. Resilience in day schools emphasizes flexibility, a wide variety of disciplines, methodologies and content. It encourages us to anticipate, adapt, and transform in light of unforeseen disturbances and champions both adaptability and persistence. By implementing these strategies we can build resilience in our school cultures, our classrooms, and most importantly, with the students we serve. ■

 For a lesson on the Book of Ruth, the teacher had students literally glean, using pennies to represent crops, tapping into the emotions and realities of an impoverished person's lifestyle.

lies is to go to someone else's field and pick up crops that their workers had dropped on the ground. Three students were selected as workers in the field and given hundreds of pennies to scatter across the room. The remaining students picked up the scattered pennies, but could only do so one at a time. The motivations of the collectors and workers were discussed during the debriefing of the activity. Jewish laws pertaining to these concepts were explained. Ms. Smith shared, "They were able to understand the

blood is drawn from multiple disciplines. Diversity in content presented provides multiple venues for students to connect with the topic. Educators should make and encourage the making of wild connections. Showcase the Maasai tribe in Africa, graffiti art, ancient philosophy, current events, popular video games and comics. Bringing in diverse ideas, cultures, etc. can further be strengthened by presenting students with rich choices that enable them to cultivate their own strategic and narrative im-

Balancing Skills and Knowledge with Meaningful Experiences

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riors, we should begin with a focus on assessment. If the assessment is authentic, there is a far greater likelihood that the learning will be authentic and meaningful as a result. The most effective way for teachers to begin thinking in terms of authentic assessment is to ask students to show their mastery of what they learned by taking on the role of a "real person" and create a product that a "real person" would create.

The product should be one that has value outside of the classroom. We could ask students to take on the role of a journalist and write a diary as Joseph might have written; write a screenplay in Hebrew; design a book with guidelines that explain how to celebrate a holiday for a family who has just come from another country where they were forbidden from celebrating Jewish holidays; write a chapter in a book on a topic related to Jewish history; develop a plenary session

for an upcoming conference on a topic related to Jewish history, Israeli current history or the situation in the Middle East; take on the role of demographer studying the customs and practices of Jews in another country; write a chapter in a book on the Middle East peace process, or as a collector of Jewish folklore develop a PowerPoint on Jewish music through the ages and its relation to Jewish and world history.

One great strategy to use when assessing students is a RAFT. RAFT stands for Role, Audience, Format and Topic. Teachers ask students to take on a **Role** (travel agent) and develop a product for a particular **Audience** (grade 6 students); teachers outline the **Format** (a travel itinerary with explanations of why each site should be visited and what students will see there) and the **Topic** (plan a two week trip for students visiting Israel, what they should see and the significance of each place).

To make learning meaningful, educators must ask themselves essential questions such as, What is the core idea of the unit? Why should students care about this? How do we want the student to apply the knowledge and skills in everyday life? How can we teach toward application of the knowledge and skills? How will I assess the authentic application of the knowledge and skills? What do I want students to remember and be able to do in ten or twenty years from now as a result of what they learned?

If we as educators can ensure that we are delivering instruction to students in ways that encourage meaningful reflection and the application of knowledge and skills in ways that are relevant, then we will be assured that students are learning important life lessons that will serve them and the broader Jewish community in important ways throughout their lives. ■

RAVSAK was pleased to partner with the Global Day of Jewish Learning on a High School Art Competition. The students who submitted work first studied a sourcebook of rewarding midrashic and philosophical texts examining the Shema prayer, then found ways to express their reflections in a work of art. Despite this challenging process, more than 150 students submitted entries to the contest! A panel of professional artists affiliated with the Jewish Art Salon and Jewish Art Now served as judges for the competition. Selected entries were screened worldwide at more than 400 locations in a slideshow during the Global Day on November 13th. They can be viewed online at a virtual gallery at <http://www.theglobalday.com/>.



The Shema is personal and introspective. These words that we say with our eyes closed are about our personal relationship with G-d. In this painting, I am closing off the outside world as I listen to the Shema.

Taytum Orshan, Donna Klein Jewish Academy



We look into the skies, hoping and listening for answers so we may be seen, heard and comforted. Though we may not get a response, we continue to send out our message. That outward look into the unknown power of the universe is what compels us to continue on, to continue asking and never cease our wondering. We continue to listen, to search for the voice, the answer, to our endless questioning.

Bar Hass, American Hebrew Academy

“ I was highly impressed with the quality and diversity of the art work. Some entries were so strong, that for a moment I wondered if they were made by professional artists. Thanks to all the participants!

Yona Verwer, President, Jewish Art Salon

Planning for the Unexpected: Maximizing the Potential of Holocaust Educational Travel

■ by **JASON FELD**

Preparation for the school's trip to Holocaust sites in Poland involves methods to make the experience personal and reflective, removing layers of protective callouses that students acquired toward the subject.

Can we prepare for Poland or should we simply be open to the experience? That was the question I posed to my 12th grade Jewish philosophy students three months before our departure for a class trip to Poland and Israel.

As was quickly confirmed by their responses, Holocaust education in a Jewish high school presents certain challenges. For starters, the students felt that they had been overexposed to the subject and were "tired" of being reminded about their responsibility to carry on the memory and otherwise "never forget." Preparing the students emotionally and educationally for this journey provided me with an opportunity to design a multi-disciplinary Holocaust education program that seriously addressed the students' concerns and provided them with a renewed sense of engagement with this chapter of our history. The curriculum that resulted incorporated classroom learning, field study and intensive experiential education.

ESTABLISHING OBJECTIVES THE FIRST STEP

I set four education objectives for our program. The first was to expose the students to the diversity and vitality of pre-war Jewish life. Secondly, I wanted my learners to gain a personal appreciation for how victims attempted to sustain their humanity and Jewish identity under difficult circumstances. Additionally, I wanted them to appreciate the long and arduous process many survivors went through to

rebuild Jewish life after the war. Lastly, I wanted them to continue to process how the Holocaust and its aftermath have influenced their own Jewish identity as they move toward graduation and adulthood.

CHOOSING THE RIGHT TEAM

The program began eight weeks before our journey and continued with reflection and student presentations for two weeks after our return to the United States. In total, the curriculum lasted twelve weeks. In Poland, the class spent five days of intensive touring in and around Cracow, Lodz and Warsaw led by a professional tour guide.

Joining me as teacher chaperones were two other faculty members who were selected for the journey because of their well established relationships with the students. The level of trust and comfort that students have with their faculty chaperones proved to be an essential element for the educational success of the program. Each student reacted to the trip in his or her own way, and it was important for students to be able to talk freely with the faculty. Such intimate conversations, both planned and spontaneously held, helped students process their emotional and spiritual reactions to what they were experiencing. Additionally, because the trip was so powerful for the educators as well, there was a sense of

emotional vulnerability and trust that was built between students and educators.

PREPARING FOR THE TRIP: MAKE THE MACRO, MICRO AND THE HISTORICAL PERSONAL

On the first day of the unit, each student was issued a facsimile of an identification card with the personal information of an actual victim (an educational strategy used at the US Holocaust Museum in Washington). The personalities were carefully chosen to represent a broad cross section of Jewish life before the war. Some of the victims survived, however most did not. (An example appears on pp. 27-28.)



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While students knew nothing about the person on their ID card, each was carefully paired for maximum resonance and personal identification. For example, the editor-in-chief of our school newspaper received an ID of a teenager who published the only known Hebrew-language publication known to have appeared consistently throughout the Nazi occupation anywhere in Europe. Over the course of the program students not only learned both the general history and the personal journey of an individual victim of the Holocaust, they came to personally identify and emotionally connect with their stories.

To support our study of the basic history

leading up to the war, the class went on two visits to the Los Angeles Holocaust Museum. The first visit was a guided research exercise. The program was designed by me with the assistance of the educational department of the museum. Students engaged with the museum artifacts and began piecing together background on their IDs. Following the visit and throughout the unit, students were encouraged to share with the rest of the class new information about the person in their ID. A second visit to the museum just before the trip enabled students to walk freely and view the exhibits on their own.

JOURNALING AS PERSONAL REFLECTION

A few weeks before the trip, I had each student begin journaling. At first, students were skeptical. “That’s not how I express myself, don’t force me” was a popular refrain. I began by having each student write a short “dedication” on the first page. Because the exercise was short, was not going to be graded and was personal, students participated with some measure of buy-in. Prior to the trip I had two more journaling exercises. Like the first, each exercise was modest in scope and ungraded. The objective was simply to increase the odds that students would write in their journal during the trip.

VISITING POLAND: PREPARING FOR THE SPONTANEOUS

One of the greatest challenges in Poland was balancing our need to cover a lot of ground in a short period, with the need to carve out time for the students to reflect and process. Because each student (and each class) processed the experience differently, program flexibility was essential. In all, I held two formal group sessions in the late evenings after a long day of traveling. The meetings were mandatory but students were not required to speak. I began with a short personal reflection and then students took a few minutes to share their feelings. The “formal” meeting lasted no more than thirty minutes but many students continued the conversation independently long into the night.

In addition to these formal debriefing sessions, I made a point of spending some



time each day with every student. These informal meetings gave students yet another opportunity to process, ask questions or just joke around and decompress from the intensity of the experience. It is just such a balance between “planning the unplanned” that helped unite the students together and feel comfortable sharing the intensity of the experience with others.

STUDENT OWNERSHIP OF THE EXPERIENCE: OPPORTUNITIES FOR AUTHENTIC EMOTIONAL EXPRESSION

At two remote gravesites we gathered as a group for a brief memorial service. The service included traditional liturgy such as

Psalms and Kaddish as well as personal contributions from students. On one occasion, a student shared a poem that she had written in her journal, and on another the students spontaneously broke out into a spirited rendition of “Am Yisrael Chai.” The balance between tradition and spontaneity provided students with yet another opportunity to take some measure of ownership over the experience while benefiting from the foundational structures of a shared tradition.

THE LONG RIDES: PROCEED WITH CAUTION

Educational trips to Poland often entail

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hours of time on the bus traveling from one destination to another. Early on, I resisted the temptation to convert the travel into classroom time. The hours on the road provide students with much needed opportunities to catch up on sleep, visit with friends and be “normal teenagers.” However, given proper planning and the right attitude, travel time can also be a wonderful opportunity for group discussions and debates.

On one particularly long bus ride I decided to involve the entire group in a moral dilemma. Most of the students were quite bothered by what they called the Poles “profiting off of the Holocaust.” The bookshops and refreshment stands at many of the historical sites understandably rubbed them the wrong way and were a frequent subject of group discussion. On the bus, we posed the following challenge to the group: In what way would you distinguish the bookshop in Auschwitz with the Poland-Israel class sweatshirts the students created in advance of the trip? The discussion then turned to the role, responsibility and costs involved in preserving and maintaining Holocaust sites.

BRINGING THE CLASSROOM TO POLAND

On two specific occasions in Poland, students had very emotional reactions of identification between what they were experiencing and their connection with their docent personality from the ID card exercises: at Auschwitz-Birkenau and the Warsaw Ghetto. It is hard to quantify the impact of this very personal connection between student, historical figure and site visitation. However, the emotions were both genuine and profound. Additionally, in both the cases, classmates spontaneously encouraged the students to summarize what they knew from their prior research to give context and meaning to the experience.

When we were at the site of Crematoria IV, Auschwitz-Birkenau, the guide was explaining the history behind a plot by some of the prisoners to blow up the crematoria. A student turned toward me with tears in her eyes, and overcome by emotion she said, “Oh my G-d, that’s Anna, *that’s me.*”

Family name *Elkes*

First name *E. Heilman*

Date of Birth *1879*

Place of birth *Kalvarija*

Profession *Doctor*

During the weeks prior to the trip, this student had held a facsimile identification card of Anna Heilman and discovered that part of Anna’s life story was her brave attempt to blow up Crematoria IV.

Such bonds created spontaneous “teaching moments” that were genuine and impactful. In a written reflection two weeks after the trip one student wrote in his journal:

During the bus ride, Mr. Feld handed me a book full of resources and he showed me a page he thought would interest me. It was a poem from Primo Levi, who was an Italian survivor I had established a connection with during class. I found in Primo Levi’s poem “If This Is a Man” an expression of the unreal duality which my experience in the dormitory (at Auchwitz-Birkenau) revealed.

The student then went on at some length to describe the ideas developed in the poem, and he concluded:

Depending on the context (be it today or during the Holocaust), the same silence can be interpreted as peaceful or dreadful, and the same birds singing may be felt as joyful

or cruel. Nevertheless, as Primo Levi asks of us, “You who live safe” shall “never forget that this has happened.” Since no physical connection can serve to remind us of the sub-human treatment of our ancestors, only our remembrances will transmit from generation to generation what happened during the Holocaust.

This student who had never heard of Primo Levi prior to receiving his ID card in class made a very deep connection between himself, Levi, the actual experience of walking through the dormitory at Auschwitz-Birkenau and a personal commitment to transmit the memory of the Holocaust to the next generation.

BRINGING THE EXPERIENCE BACK: THE VALUE OF KEEPING A JOURNAL

Both during and after the trip, students thanked me for “forcing them to write” (I did no such thing) and other students shared with me journal entries and poems that they had written at various points on the trip. One student who was often seen as aloof and disengaged in school shared the following he had written after visiting

ber... D.M.201027



Signature of card owner

the mass grave at Chelmno:

Abandoned spirits surround me
As I wonder through the beautiful forest
of death and brutality
Walking among the ashes of which they
possess
Grasping on my very footsteps screaming
in distress
Pleading in agony for an escape to the
world of sanity
The sorrow of the ones left behind con-
tinually stand before me
Their silent shrieks of atrocity

This is one of any number of examples of spontaneous, personal student expression. I did not plan “journal time” nor did I ever require students to show me their journal. However, establishing in advance the practice of journaling enabled students to take ownership of the experience in a way that taking a picture or relying on memory could never capture. While it took some encouragement prior to the trip to get students regularly to write in their journal, in final interviews many stu-

dents said it is something they will always treasure.

CONCLUSIONS

Addressing the student body just prior to graduation, many of the seniors spoke of their deepened sense of connection with their heritage and with each other while others spoke of the emotional pain they experienced in Poland. I was struck by how the way each student approached the subject had changed so drastically from earlier in the year. What I heard from each student represented sincere expressions that something special was experienced on that trip and that their Jewish education would not be quite as complete without it.

There are no hard and fast rules for an effective Poland experience. However, I believe that using some of the guides outlined above can increase the meaning and impact of what is arguably the most dramatic teaching moment the students can experience in a high school setting. ■



RAVSAK Announces Second Annual Hebrew Poetry Contest

עורכי עורכי דבורה עורכי דבורי שיר
(שופטים ה:יב)

RAVSAK is pleased to announce that we are again running a contest for the writing of original Hebrew poetry in all RAVSAK schools. Last year's competition brought in an overwhelming response: more than 500 submissions from 28 schools. This year we can do even better!

For this year's contest, there is a theme: **Biblical Characters**. All entries should be about a character from Tanakh.

There will be a winner in each of six categories: one each for a **native** and a **nonnative** Hebrew speaker in RAVSAK elementary schools (grades

K-5), middle schools (grades 6-8), and high schools (grades 9-12). (For purposes of this competition, “native” refers to someone with one Israeli parent.) Poems may be of any style and no more than one page in length, single-spaced.

There is an additional category for **teachers** in RAVSAK schools (one award only). The same rules apply as for students.

Winners will be selected by distinguished judges. They will receive an age-appropriate book in Hebrew and a \$50 gift certificate to Steimatsky USA. Winning entries will be published in the summer issue of *HaYidion* and on the RAVSAK website. All

participants receive a certificate.

Deadline for submissions is **Wednesday, February 29th**. Student entries must include the author's name, grade, “native” or “non-native,” and school at the top of the page. Teacher entries must include author name and school. Submissions are limited to one poem per person. Entries must be in pdf, doc or docx format only.

All winning entries will be required to add nikkud for purposes of publication.

Students must be currently enrolled, and teachers must currently be employed, in a RAVSAK member school to be eligible. To submit an entry, go to www.ravsak.org/hebrewpoem. ■

Bridging the Chasm between the Formal and Informal

■ by **DANIEL HELD**

For informal education in day school to be most effective, formal and informal educators need to work tightly on coordinating goals and curricula.

During my first years of teaching I split my day in two. Each morning, from 8:30-10:30, I was “Mr. Held,” the Jewish history teacher. My students sat in desks, diligently took notes, and raised their hands to ask questions. I took attendance, marked quizzes, and taught a curriculum rich in primary sources.

As soon as the bell rang and I left the classroom, I became “Held,” the director of student activities. I worked in the “Cougar Cave” which doubled as a student lounge. I partnered with students in organizing shabbatonim and assemblies, holiday celebrations and an Israel trip. I sought to engage students in the activities of the Jewish calendar and to help them integrate Jewish values into their daily life. While these activities offered valuable experiences in Jewish socialization, at times the emphasis was on the social rather than the Jewish. Students cited the informal programs as a highlight of their school experience, an important selling point for the school.

At the time, the bifurcation of my role into formal classroom teacher and informal educator seemed natural. Historically, education developed on two parallel lines. On one hand, schooling, characterized by a content-oriented curriculum and a hierarchically organized structure, was termed formal education. On the other hand, a hodgepodge of educative activities, often loosely focused on identity formation and moral education, occurring in settings ranging from camps to the Golan Heights, was termed informal education.

When my school, like many others, began investing in informal education by hiring a dedicated staff and running new programs it took the first step in breaking down the wall separating formal and informal settings. Within the school, however, these two forms of teaching ran in parallel, non-intersecting paths. The Israel trip and community service program, tefillah and holiday celebrations had no direct connection to classes in rabbinics, Jewish history, Ivrit and Tanakh.

Isa Aron, in describing formal and informal learn-



Each morning I was “Mr. Held,” the Jewish history teacher. As soon as the bell rang I became “Held,” the director of student activities who worked in the “Cougar Cave.”

ing in congregations, describes these two paths as “instruction” and “enculturation.” The classroom is the home of instruction, passing information from teacher to student. “The school ... is a ‘delivery system,’ in which teachers, administrators, and a variety of specialists work together to transmit these objects to their students as efficiently as possible.” Informal education, by contrast, provides enculturation into the living experience of Judaism and socialization into school culture through immersive experiences, with a healthy dose of recreation.

The sharpest, though by no means the only, example of these two non-intersect-

ing tracks was the teaching of Shabbat. All ninth grade students were required to attend a school shabbaton. Through communal meals and tefillot, songs and stories, they discovered—some for the first time—a vibrant celebration of Shabbat. The students loved the experience. The optional tenth, eleventh and twelfth grade shabbatonim were oversubscribed, a group of students and teachers began their own Friday night tefillah at a local synagogue, and others rejuvenated the lunchtime Kabbalat Shabbat program in school. The rabbinics course covered Shabbat



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in eleventh grade. In the text-based curriculum, students studied the biblical and rabbinic origins of Shabbat, a variety of contemporary, philosophical relationships to Shabbat, and the halakhah and practices of Shabbat. The two curricula, however, didn't speak to one another. Separated by two academic years and differing pedagogies, the two Shabbat curricula were islands unto themselves.

Running two separate tracks was comfortable. It avoided conflict and smoothed planning and implementation. Teachers, who bemoaned losing valuable instructional hours, didn't have to sacrifice class time and weren't required to plan or at-

tend the shabbaton. I was able to convene a team of like-minded educators to implement the shabbatonim without thinking too far out of the box or challenging my own notions of teaching and learning. Although this approach avoided conflict and sidestepped the need to reorient existing norms, it belied the holistic approach to instruction and enculturation that our schools must adopt.

The contemporary day school must be a bastion of integrating instruction with enculturation, a paradigm that can be met through the incorporation of experiential learning into the central fabric of the school. Successful integration of experiential learning cannot take the form of informal activities that run parallel to classroom curricula. Rather, classroom instruction must inform the curriculum of activities just as the activities must shape learning in the classroom. Aron states, “Successful instruction is usually founded on a base of successful enculturation, which provides the student with both the motivation to learn and opportunities to consolidate that learning.” Similarly, Joseph Reimer demonstrates that while informal educators often define their goals in terms of socialization, such learning can only reach its potential with dual defining goals: socialization and education.

Once we articulated the challenge of running two parallel curricula, we laid three steps leading towards integration. First, the school’s classroom teachers and informal educators must engage in dialogue, sharing perspectives, resources and responsibilities. Second, informal educational programs and specifically the shabbatonim must, in Reimer’s language, “go deeper” by establishing a curriculum of experiences and conceptualizing cognitive goals. Third, the classroom curriculum had to be modified in order to allow students to reflect on their shabbaton experience and consolidate that learning with the classroom curriculum.

Engaging a wide swath of faculty was crucial in parsing the divide between formal and informal learning. We distributed a survey to better understand teachers’ perceptions of the impact of the shabbaton

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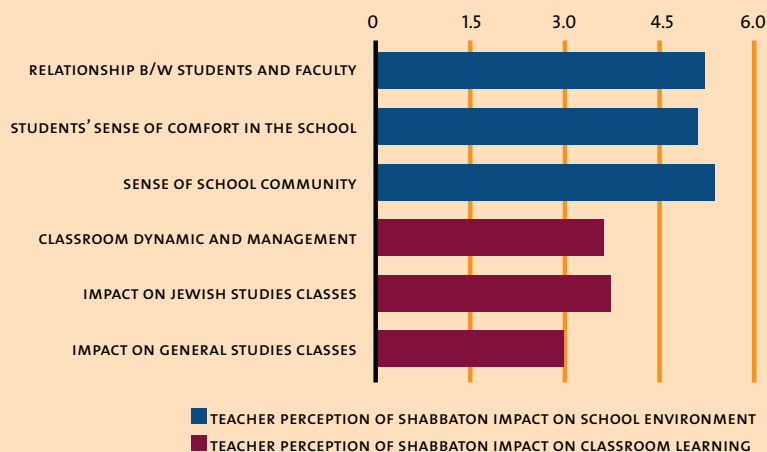
Measuring the Impact of Shabbatonim

We surveyed teachers regarding their perceptions of the impact of shabbatonim on the school environment and classroom learning. Teachers responded that while shabbatonim have limited impact on classroom learning, they exert significant impact on shaping the school culture.

On a six-point scale, teachers noted the significant role of the shabbaton in building a sense of community in the school (5.41) and forming relationships with faculty (5.23). Teachers stated, “The shabbatons create a comfortable atmosphere” and “nurture the family spirit.” One teacher stressed that the shabbaton “empha-

sizes unity within diversity: we are different, yet we can celebrate Shabbat together.” Similarly, shabbatonim help engage junior students. “It gets them involved in school life and creates friendships with each other and the madrichim from other grades.”

While the reported impact on classroom learning was higher in Jewish studies (3.75) than general studies (3.0), teachers across subject areas identified ways in which shabbatonim inform the classroom. One said, “Students feel closer to me because we have interacted informally; they often come to me with questions or concerns.”



Retreats from Soup to Ropes

■ by JUDITH SCHILLER

The author draws on her extensive experience to offer a how-to for planning school retreats.

T*The aroma of challah baking wafted through the hallways. Students set tables with tablecloths and floral centerpieces that they created. The 6th grade overnight shabbaton would begin in a few hours, and final preparations were underway. The shabbaton was the culmination of a unit of study about Shabbat; for several weeks, students were involved in creating tallitot, developing tefillah enrichments, and exploring texts that offered insights into the concept of Shabbat.*

Over the course of the shabbaton, the students experienced Shabbat in a whole new way. Their enjoyment was grounded in the fact that they had prepared the foods they were eating and produced materials that they used. The shabbaton offered them a time to connect with each other through prayer, learning sessions and group challenge activities. Although, due to budget constraints, this event was held at the school rather than a retreat site, the students still felt a sense of “being away” having transformed their day-to-day environment into a sacred Shabbat space.

For over 20 years, the Retreat Institute (RI) of the Jewish Education Center of Cleveland has worked with supplemental and day schools and congregations of all denominations to develop experiences that integrate informal with formal education. An important goal of our programs is to invite participants to explore Jewish texts and to find meaning through experience with Jewish tradition and community.

A well-constructed retreat addresses the whole person, including the intellectual, emotional, physical, and spiritual dimensions of each participant. A retreat experience provides an opportunity for “living the learning.” The use of extended time, space and context serves to create a learn-

ing journey, enabling participants to make powerful connections with content and one another, and work collaboratively as a community. Participants come away with both new understanding of a topic and an association of fun and friendship with Jewish learning.

Efforts to create “aha moments” require thoughtful planning and focus. In the opening snapshot, many elements came together in planning the shabbaton, including curricular integration, text study, co-production of materials by the students, the intentional creation of an environment, experiential learning and the fostering of community. While each of these elements has its own integrity, together they connect to produce a full experience. Developing a retreat is like baking a challah with multiple strands that get braided together into a sweet, aromatic, nourishing bread.

PLANNING PROCESS

TIMELINE AND INITIAL DECISIONS

A three to five month planning timeline is recommended, to allow time for promotion and recruitment, program development, curricular connections, creating materials, logistical considerations, and preparing faculty. Look at your institution’s overall calendar for the program year. Determine a time of year for your proposed retreat that makes sense for the pacing of time and energies of your staff. Consider this point for both the planning and implementation phases of the retreat. Also, check the calendar of events outside of school, including important community dates, SAT exams, scheduled holiday celebrations, and events at other

institutions that may affect your recruitment.

Examine how a retreat can best be integrated into the group’s curriculum or educational goals for the year.

BUDGETING

Retreats require a lot of resources, not the least of which is money. There is a range of site costs, depending on where the retreat is held, along with food, materials, staff, and transportation. Participant fees need to be determined based on the total expenditures less available sources of income



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(perhaps a special retreat fund or grant). Keep in mind that participant fees should be set at a reasonable amount to encourage participation. Be realistic about numbers of participants who can be recruited or required to attend the retreat. Planning is easier when a projected budget reflects realistic potential.

EDUCATIONAL CONTENT

Spend time focusing the theme of the proposed retreat and related pre- and post-retreat sessions. A retreat is best used to address a defined aspect of a topic; “tefillah” or “identity” or “community” is too broad.

The purpose of a retreat is to create a viable educational journey that is stimulating and enriching. The learning unit needs to make sense as it unfolds over a two to three day period with activities anchored in clear educational goals and outcomes.



LOGISTICS

Careful attention needs to be paid to site selection, arrangements, and coordinating with site staff; menu planning, food shopping, kashrut requirements, acquiring and organizing supplies, producing educational materials, pack-up, set-up, first aid, hospitality, and often schlepping everything to a site. It can be very helpful to designate a logistics coordinator.

RETREAT LEADER

In addition to Jewish content knowledge, the retreat coordinator should have the capacity to think creatively, develop experiential programming, work collaboratively, connect with participants, and manage administrative details. With such a broad range of needed qualities, it may turn out that two professionals with complementary skills can work together as a team. In addition, the retreat leader should be familiar with the decision making process and culture within your school; someone in his or her first year will face a steep learning curve. This professional needs to devote a significant amount of time for the full planning implementation, and evaluation of a retreat, over a 3-5 month period. Make sure this is part of the leader's reasonable work plan for the year.

“Developing a retreat is like baking a challah with multiple strands that get braided together into a sweet, aromatic, nourishing bread.”

STAFFING

A striking difference between the classroom and a retreat is the staff to student ratio: we recommend one staff person to eight participants, to cover small group facilitation and sleep time. Collaborative efforts generate the strongest outcomes in both the planning and implementation phases of a retreat. Select faculty who are open to collaboration, comfortable facilitating learning in an informal setting, willing to interact with students on a personal

level, and able to take responsibility for some aspects of program design and development. (This may not always be the grade level teachers.) Retreat staff should meet a few times to become fully acquainted with the content and all aspects of the retreat, encompassing program facilitation, meal time, free time and bed time. Depending on school culture, they may be compensated for their additional time. Retreat planning offers professional development in experiential education

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that complements, and can be integrated into, the classroom.

PEOPLE

COMMUNITY BUILDING AND GROUP SAFETY

The first questions to ask are, Who are the participants? What have they been learning? How well do they know each other and work together? It is essential to have a basic understanding of the group's knowledge base, skills, needs and interests so that the program is truly in sync with the participants.

Groups are often motivated to do a retreat in order to build community. Invest time in the beginning of the retreat to encourage the group to bond and connect. Throughout the programming, consider ways to promote teamwork and cooperation. Participants always have priority over programming. Staff must be attuned to the group, and recognize that there may be times when the schedule or program needs to be adjusted, depending on the participants' needs. Retreat staff should check in to share how the participants are doing, and discuss any issues that may have arisen.

Retreats often take people out of their comfort zones. While there is much potential for discovery, excitement, and fun, a retreat is also a place that presents challenge and risk. For people to participate in any program such as this, an atmosphere of safety needs to ex-

ist—a space where people can speak their minds and push themselves to new limits. More importantly, learning happens best in an atmosphere of trust, safety and fun.

for everyone to commit to those norms, and 3) to accept a shared responsibility for their maintenance.

Here is a suggested, adaptable format for developing a brit.

We agree to:

- *Value everyone and not devalue anyone*
- *(Adhere to) safety guidelines—(physical and emotional safety)*
- *Give and receive feedback*
- *Honor and maintain ruach Shabbat*
- *Respect our environment*

Students discuss what each point means, share examples of desired behavior, and then sign the brit. The group should do a few check-ins during the time they are together on how well they are keeping with brit expectations. With the brit as a guide, facilitators can give feedback and have a clear basis for identifying unsafe as well as valuing behavior. The brit enables community building and group bonding to permeate the entire retreat.

A SPIRIT OF WELCOME

Retreat participants should feel that they have entered into a warm, welcoming environment from the moment they arrive at the retreat. Attention to important details, including a welcome snack, staff interactions with participants, set-up and décor

beginning what participants are to come away with from the experience. Sharpening the outcomes from the outset shapes coherent programming. Keep in mind that once a retreat template is developed, and staff has the experience of implementing it, the planning process will not be as time-intensive as in the first go-around.

EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING AND JEWISH TEXTS

There is a wide range of experiential modalities—field trips, debates, ropes course and group initiatives, the arts, games, to name a few. The experience alone does not create the learning. Attention must be given to how the experience is set up, what happens in anticipation of the experience, and the debriefing of the experience, which can be done as a group discussion, journaling, art, blogging, etc. Following are examples of two kinds of experiential learning connected to Jewish texts and values.

EXPERIENTIAL/ADVENTURE EDUCATION

Icebreaker activities, problem-solving games, and physical initiatives offer surprising challenges and risks within a playful context. They can be utilized in a purposeful way both for community building and to connect with Jewish texts and values. Take for example a text from Pirkei Avot: “If I am not for myself who will be for me? If I am only for myself, what am I? If not now, when?” A well planned and skillfully facilitated sequence of group challenges that require a balance of coping with group and individual needs opens up new insights into the meaning of this text.

SIMULATION ACTIVITIES

Example: A group of 5th graders explore the texts and values that inform an understanding of Jewish community. Their challenge is to make recommendations about what community institutions should be funded, utilizing a limited amount of funds. Their program takes them on a simulated “tour” of the Jewish community in which they interview staff representing various institutions. Later in the day, working together in groups, they reach consensus on what to fund and what

A retreat is not just “the program.” Every aspect of the experience offers opportunities for learning, reflecting and bonding, and should weave together into a cohesive whole.

CONTENT

As with more formal curriculum, informal education is driven by big ideas and enduring understandings. Clarify at the

Establishing a group brit at the beginning of a retreat can serve to create the group's “safety net.” Its purpose is 1) to establish safe and respectful behavioral norms, 2)

To Learn More

Biers-Ariel, Matt; Newbrun, Deborah, and Smart Fox, Michal. *Spirit in Nature: Teaching Judaism and Ecology on the Trail*.

This is an invaluable resource that offers ways “to turn an ordinary walk in the woods into a journey of the spirit.” The activities in this book have the potential of creating “aha” moments, linking Jewish texts, prayers and blessings with nature experiences.

Cain, Jim and Jolliff. *Teamwork and Teamplay*.

A comprehensive resource with an easy-to-use format, this book contains all the elements for creating challenge and adventure programs, event planning tips, get acquainted activities, processing and debriefing ideas, games of all kinds, and detailed instructions for designing equipment.

Elkins, Dov Peretz. *Jewish Guided Imagery*.

Elkins provides insight into the goals and purposes of guided imagery, along with guidelines, preparation techniques and how-tos of setting the atmosphere for experiences of high impact. Included are almost twenty guided imagery scripts for the Bible, rabbinic literature, Jewish history, prayer, Shabbat and much more.

Foster-Harrison, Elisabeth S. *More Energizers and Icebreakers for All Ages and Stages Book II*.

All of the activities in this book were developed to enhance the learning environment in a class or group. Easy to use, well designed with illustrations, set up to be photocopied.

Frank, Laurie S. *The Caring Classroom: Using Adventure to Create Community in the Classroom and Beyond*.

A guide for teachers with activities, tips and information that help facilitate the growth of a classroom as a community.

Pollack, Stanley with Fusoni, Mary. *Moving Beyond Icebreakers: An Innovative Approach to Group Facilitation, Learning, and Action*.

A valuable resource offering insight and practical exercises for building effective teams, engaging students in learning, and making meetings and trainings work. It documents over 300 interactive exercises to help group members make difficult decisions, create new ideas, solve problems, resolve conflicts, and understand new concepts.

Project Adventure: www.pa.org.

Project Adventure is a pioneer and

leader in adventure-based experiential programming which uses physical exercises to build character, promote team work, and encourage responsibility. The website offers helpful information about adventure based experiential programming. Materials and publications can be ordered from the website.

Rohnke, Karl. *Silver Bullets*.

Rohnke, Karl. *Cowstails and Cobras II*.

These books are resourceful guides for group-building programs that include adventure leadership, icebreakers, initiatives and trust building. They unpack the essential concepts of sequencing, debriefing and closure.

Silberman, Shoshana and Mel. *Active Jewish Learning: 57 Strategies to Enliven Your Class*.

The authors offer activities and strategies designed to enliven learning, deepen understanding, and promote retention.

Spolin, Viola. *Theater Games for the Classroom: A Teacher's Handbook*.

Handbook for teachers of theatre games to promote learning and interacting socially and emotionally with each other.

to cut, based on the Jewish texts that they studied.

CONTEXT

CO-PRODUCTION

Content and context work hand in hand when developing a retreat experience. A retreat works best when it is part of a larger learning unit. In the opening shabbaton example, students were highly invested in their participation in the retreat since they helped to create many of its component parts. Their initial study of Shabbat culmi-

nated in experiencing it in real time. They took on the challenge, whether they realized it or not, of creating their own meaningful Shabbat experience.

FLOW

A retreat is not just “the program.” Every aspect of the experience offers opportunities for learning, reflecting and bonding, and should weave together into a cohesive whole. This encompasses site set-up, meal times, rituals, tefillah, bed time, breaks and free time. Consider how the food served can relate to the retreat theme; the kavan-

ah of Jewish rituals; bed time rituals; integrating tefillah as part of the flow, and not separate and compartmentalized; transitions throughout the schedule; debriefing and closing circle.

Free time is not just a break from programming. Participants need to shift gears into a more playful or restful mode. Consider offering several optional activities such as sports, crafts, board games, a hike, as well as informal bunk time. Retreat staff should have free time assignments, as they are needed to monitor, facilitate and interact with students.

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Web Tools for Jewish Formal and Informal Experiential Education

■ by **RICHARD D. SOLOMON** and **DEBORAH PRICE NAGLER**

The Web offers an enormous panorama of new options to expand and improve informal education. Go to ravsak.org for this article with hyperlinks.

Upon observing that the Holy One was adding crowns to the letters of the Torah, Moses inquired: "What is their purpose?" God replied: "In a future generation there will be a man who will teach scores of laws from each mark." Moses asked to see this teacher and when he turned he found himself at the back of Rabbi Akiva's classroom.

Moses was confused and overwhelmed. He could not understand the lesson. Then one of the students asked: "Rabbi, what is the source for this decision?" Rabbi Akiva replied: "It is the Law of Moses from Sinai." Only then did Moses relax. (Based on Talmud Menachot 29b)

As technology gains rapid footholds in education, many teachers, particularly those trained in the twentieth century, can sympathize with Moses. The changes that are beginning to take place will in time become a sea change. It is easy to imagine standing in the back of the room, filled with confusion while observing the interplay of technology and teaching.

Future classrooms will bear little resemblance to those of the previous century. Already, the boundaries between formal Jewish education, i.e., traditional classroom learning, and informal or experiential Jewish education, i.e., camp, youth programs, trips to Israel, etc., have begun to blur. The rapid evolution of computer hardware (Smart Boards, laptops, and mobile devices) and Web 2.0 applications are bringing the outside world into the classroom and learning spaces into the outside world. This integration of formal

and informal experiential education in new technological platforms has been described as Jewish Integrated Experiential Education, or JIEE.

Yet for those who wish to break through their bewilderment at the burgeoning of technological resources for formal and informal education, there is a simple key for understanding and using these applications. Educational technology can be summarized with five Cs: Connectivity, Communication, Collaboration, Creative Expression, and Customization. This paper will describe each of these elements and offer specific examples of how digital applications can be employed.

CONNECTIVITY

"Social networking technologies are powerful tools for enhancing the process of *learning to be*, of defining our identities" (Heidi Jacobs, *Curriculum 21*). Since Jewish education has a similar charge, namely that of cultivating identity and connection, Jewish educators should be in the vanguard of social network use in the Jewish community. Klal Yisrael in the context of social networks can be vibrant, far reaching, and meaningful. Web tools, such as Facebook, MySpace, and Bebo can be used to

Cultivate and share knowledge:

- Research topics or questions that are "crowdsourced" on social networks

result in interesting and wide-ranging resources. Social bookmarking tools, including delicious, diigo, reddit, and many others offer a means of building a knowledge community. Here participants can store and tag websites, as well as disseminate these resources with classmates and friends.

Support social justice or tzedakah projects:

- Facebook pages, for example, are a venue for sharing media, announcing events, gathering feedback and recruiting participation.



Dr. Richard Solomon works with faculties to create online communities of practice; he is well known through his blog, *Mentoring Jewish Students and Teachers*, his book, *Toolbox for Teachers and Mentors*, his website, *Jewish-education.org* and as the co-writer of BabagaNewz's "Tech Tuesday." He can be reached at rdsolomonphd@gmail.com.



Deborah Price Nagler is a frequent technology consultant to day schools. She is Director of the Gratz College Certificate Program in Educational Technology and Director of *Simnik.com*, a project dedicated to the development of 3D, online, immersive environments for education and training. She can be reached at Deborahnagler@gmail.com.

- Foster student interaction beyond the walls of the classroom in a manner that does not depend upon geography or scheduling. Closed social networks, like Ning or Edmodo are sites where only registered participants can engage, interact, and share.

Because so many of today's students are already participating in social networks of all kinds, it is critical for Judaics teachers to understand this medium and to teach good digital citizenship and responsible behavior. Jewish values such as *derech eretz* apply

in all venues, whether real or virtual.

COMMUNICATION

Are paper and pencil passé? Not yet, but blogging and micro-blogging are among today's most popular online tools for written expression. In a formal classroom setting, free blogging tools like Wordpress, Blogger, and Edublogs allow students to participate in class-supported blogs, to showcase writing or research, or to create a personal journal. In an experiential learning context, blogs can be a means of documenting activities such as trips and chesed projects. They are a wonderful way to convey the story of participation in Jewish community life.

Twitter is an example of a widely-used micro-blogging tool. Each "tweet" or communication is limited to 140 characters. The concise nature of Twitter challenges the user to offer brief, clear statements. Built-in search tools enable the learner to search for relevant tweets and Twitter's social networking capacity means that specific contributors can be "followed." The result is that there are dozens of ways to use Twitter in the classroom. For example: Post a tweet as a story starter and have the students continue the story with their own tweets. Tweet in the persona of a historical figure and have students respond with relevant questions. Tweet a language or math challenge and see who is the first to respond with the correct answer; and many, many more. As with blogging, tweeting updates on extracurricular activities, trips, or tzedakah campaigns are another way to generate excitement about community activity.

Inevitably, online research will lead students to the blogs of "experts" in one or another field. Digital literacy, like the non-digital variety, includes the ability to discern fact from fiction, fact from opinion, and statements that are credible and documented from those that are unsubstantiated. While teaching this skill of digital literacy, your class may want to follow the blog of an expert as a source for class discussion.

COLLABORATION

According to the Partnership for 21st

Century Skills, collaboration skills are among the chief competencies that our students will need in order to succeed in the future (www.p21.org). Globalization, rapid technological

Telephone and video-conferencing tools, like Skype or Oovoo, mean that students can learn together anywhere, any time. Teachers and students in Israel and other Jewish communities can be a regular part

“Since Jewish education aims to cultivate identity and connection, Jewish educators should be in the vanguard of social network use in the Jewish community.

change and an unpredictable job market are just a few of the reasons given for the necessity of cultivating collaborative skills.

“Cooperative learning”—think “chevruta study”—is not a new concept for Jewish education. Today's online tools, however, bring collaboration to new levels by removing the barriers of time and distance.

of classroom study. Distance learning can take the form of webinars, lectures, and discussion, as well as virtual break-out groups that provide additional opportunities for student collaboration.

The real game changer in virtual cooperative learning has been the emergence of

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Jewish Edutainment

■ by **RONIT CHAYA JANET** and **NICKY NEWFIELD**

Students today turn to the Web for entertainment; schools can create Web environments to capitalize on their excitement for this media to benefit Jewish education.

In the shtetls of Europe, the rebbes would encourage their young pupils in the love of Torah study by pouring honey over the pages of their books and allowing them to lick the letters of the Torah, symbolically tasting the sweetness of Hashem's words.

Today our children are raised and educated in so much more complicated and fast paced world, with information spewed from every angle and direction. The formal classroom is no longer the "one stop shop" for education. How do we as educators keep up and compete with the distractions of the surrounding and virtual worlds? How do we access children lost in a virtual reality? Perhaps by embracing it.

The world of "edutainment," designed both to educate and amuse at the same time, has opened up endless opportunities for us. Exciting media can make the learning experience more relevant, appealing and challenging, particularly as the information becomes more personal and engaging. Edutainment can be beneficial if the learning is incremental and effectively distributed. Children can learn and build at their own pace, in the way they themselves best absorb the information, and communicate with others.

So then, is it out with the old and in with the new? Should we get rid of teachers standing at the front of the classroom and replace them with a gaming console or television screen? In fact, the latest and most well-planned trends do not recommend this. Rather they promote what is termed "blended education/learning"—an integrated instructional approach that combines face-to-face classroom methods with computer-mediated activities. They recommend independent, self-directed learning accomplished through skills-hon-

ing tasks assigned by the teacher as well as further opportunities for learners to pursue their own areas of interest during independent study time. This growing trend is very exciting for parents, teachers and learners. In an article entitled "10 Reasons Why Teachers Love Blended Learning," Tom Vander Ark of the *Huffington Post* says that this modality enables teachers to motivate hard to reach kids, focus on deeper learning, and work in teams, to promote blended learning.

If implemented properly, technology supported education can promote the acquisition of the knowledge and skills that will empower students for lifelong learning. When used appropriately, computers and Internet technologies enable new ways of teaching and learning rather than simply allowing teachers and students to do what they have done before in a better way. These new ways of teaching and learning are underpinned by constructivist theories of learning and constitute a shift from a teacher-centered pedagogy—in its worst form characterized by memorization and rote learning—to one that is learner-centered.

A key educational term today is *innovation*—in pedagogy, curriculum and, most importantly, learning. Even though the most significant innovation must always be with the child who should participate in his/her own learning, educators should resist substituting content for innovation. Instead, content should be presented in innovative ways. Content should be con-

textualized in such a way that learners are able to uncover their own information, create their own material, thus empowering themselves in their own learning process. When this is monitored, supervised and directed by creative educators, the learning becomes deeper and more complete.



Ronit Chaya Janet is Director of the United Hebrew Schools of Johannesburg in South Africa, and has over 12 years' experience in informal Jewish education; she is also the editor of the South African Jewish Observer magazine. She can be reached at TBD.



Nicky Newfield is the founder and executive director of Jewish Interactive (www.jewishinteractive.com), an innovative, multimedia Jewish learning organization. She can be reached at jonny.nicky@gmail.com.

These developments blur the lines between formal and informal education, and between teacher-centered and child-centered education. The setting for learning crosses between the classroom and the home.

The introduction of interactive whiteboards, laptops per child, iPad applications, educational software development, Facebook, Twitter and blogging have transformed the modern classroom. Geography is taught via spinning a globe on Google maps and students can review biology in 3D. These developments blur the lines between formal and informal education, teacher-centered and child-centered education, frontal teaching and active teaching. The setting for learning also crosses between the classroom and the home.

This dynamic trend is also spilling over into Jewish education. In recent years



substantial funds have been invested in the development of Jewish studies curricula by top designers and educators. For many children, technology is the “honey” that can be poured on the pages of Torah. Torah is not just another subject to be taught or downloaded. Torah is about connection, the passing of knowledge from generation to generation. How do we bring out the information and make it real and experiential? How do we give color to age-old Jewish traditions and utilize technology to instill a love of our Jewish heritage?

One example of blended Jewish learning, developed and introduced into schools in South Africa, is Jewish InterActive. The program is based on the constructivist approach: children can build their own learning, with guidance. The individual modules incorporate directed feedback so as to allow learners to discover the material themselves.



For many children, technology is the “honey” that can be poured on the pages of Torah. How do we give color to age-old Jewish traditions and utilize technology to instill a love of our Jewish heritage?

To include innovation and learner-centered learning to the process, the children are also expected to complete digital homework which is linked to the classroom work in a creative and exciting way, whether through blog writing or video uploads to YouTube. All these web based activities are hosted by a web learning system which monitors the progress of both individuals and the class and generates reports which are sent to the respective schools.

The unique quality and meaning of Jewish education is solidified in practice. Students need to feel connected to the content and must be able to incorporate it into their lives. Education today must have both

theoretical as well as practical elements to it; it needs to encourage the questioning of both how and why we do things, whether at home, in the classroom, or in the synagogue. The world becomes the classroom.

Educators around the globe should reflect on their own teaching tools and create new and dynamic ways to draw their pupils into Jewish experience through converting the content of high quality technology into a real experience. In the age where technology is the language of our children, we need to ensure that our rich and ancient heritage is sweetened by tasty presentation and delivery. ■

Formal/Informal Programs in our

If someone wanted proof that our schools are hubs of innovation, dynamism and creativity, they need look no further then the following short articles. From high school business and social entrepreneurship to a professional-quality second grade Passover music video, from Ecuador and South Africa to Israel, DC and LA, RAVSAK schools everywhere are making local and global connections, breaking down barriers and crossing barrios to learn, grow and make an impact. Get inspired!

Student Entrepreneurship

Collegio Alberto Einstein, Quito, Ecuador

In 2010 our students participated in the Junior Achievement competition “La Compañía,” which requires students from different schools to create a company, sell its shares, obtain capital, assign a general manager, and create different departments. Our product, which we called Cushqui Pocket, consisted of wallets made from recycled milk and juice Tetra Pak cartons covered with specially designed fabric and stickers. One of our most important objectives was to be an ecological company maintaining a high profitability by using raw material donated and collected at school, which

kept the cost of the wallet low. During the competition, the 19 members of the company produced 663 wallets and sold 621; the rest were donated. In the process of creating our company we realized how communication skills, teamwork, responsibility and tolerance were essential for the progress of our business.

As we wanted to be a socially responsible company we created a department in charge of carrying out social projects. We taught low-resource schools about global warming and the importance of saving water. Additionally, we supported

an organization called “La madre Guápulo,” where we taught women how to make the wallets and sell them. Our goal was not only to grow as a company, but also to show people how creativity and organized work can create a quality product from used materials.

For the ten-week local competition, we created a business plan, submitted review reports and finally liquidated the business and returned the shares to the shareholders. Every company earned points based on presentations, media appearance, and detailed reports; in the end, the company that earned the most points won the competition. Thanks to the hard work of every member, our company obtained the fourth position in the national contest, and subsequently was selected to



represent our country in Rio de Janeiro at the Americas Regional contest.

The international contest lasted for three days. We had icebreakers with the members of the other companies, interviews with the judges, seminars offered by representatives of Fedex, and time to present our product at a booth in a local shopping center. Something that was remarkable during the entire contest was the way the contestants related to each other, despite the competitive spirit of the event. It is hard to describe how enriching it was to meet people who came from very different

parts of South America and the Caribbean. We shared personal experiences and a view of our countries' cultures. After only a few hours together we could already feel we had become a big group of friends.

At the awards ceremony we were all very anxious. There were five prizes that would be designated. When they finally said, "And First Place goes to Cushqui Pocket from Ecuador!" we looked at each other and shed tears of pure happiness. Those tears were the satisfaction and pride of having placed this small country's name, Ecuador, up high. ■

member of the Judaics staff, Rabbi Benjamin Resnick, started a tradition during the 2008 playoffs: we began each game with a kavannah (focused thought; literally, a direction)—a verse from the Torah, a piece of Mishnah or Talmud, a single thought to help focus and guide us. With this one-liner, we review skills we have worked on, reinforce the need to work as a team, and instill confidence by building towards a common goal.

For example, in Pirkei Avot (1:14), Hillel says, "If I am not for myself, who will be for me? But if I am only for myself, who am I? If not now, when?" On the soccer field, our team first reviewed this mishnah and then learned firsthand that when there's a chance to score, no one else can kick the ball for you—you must act for yourself. However, you must learn to play as a team—you cannot win as a loner. We also saw that we had to put forth our best effort immediately, or we might not have that chance again.

Integrating rabbinic wisdom into the excitement of sports means that students see texts come alive and help them succeed at their passion. And it's just a small step to using the experiences gained in this arena to inform thought and action in other circumstances.

There's another saying in Pirkei Avot (2:16) that encompasses both the desire to succeed at athletic contests and the challenge of putting together a successful and educational athletic program: "It is not incumbent upon each individual to finish the work, but neither are we free to desist from it." Even while knowing we may never complete the process on our own, we must nevertheless put forth our greatest effort in pursuit of excellence.

Here is a sample of some sources we have discussed:

Teamwork: Two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labor. For if they fall, the one will lift up

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Jewish Athletics: Torah Lessons in Real Situations

New Community Jewish High School, Los Angeles, California



The Jewish day school curriculum often is defined by long hours of rigorous study of both secular and religious studies in school, followed by hours of homework. Athletic programs provide a means of carrying out the mitzvah of caring for our bodies while also allowing for some down-time. It also is a way to teach life lessons in real situations. We routinely discuss values and ethics in

the classroom. However, it can be difficult to suddenly put theory into practice in a real-life decision. This is the benefit of a sports program: it places students in a pressured situation while still providing a safe environment. It allows thinkers to become doers.

At New Community Jewish High School, our soccer team, coached by a

Formal/Informal Programs in our

[CONTINUED FROM PAGE 41]

his fellow; but woe to him that is alone when he falleth, and hath not another to support him. And if a man prevail against him that is alone, two shall withstand him; and a threefold cord is not quickly broken. (Ecclesiastes 4:9-12)

Complacency: Even if everyone considers you to be a tzaddik, you should view yourself as negligent in your duties. (Talmud Pesachim 50a)

Productivity and Resilience: It is written: The righteous shall flourish like a palm-tree; he shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon. Like a palm tree, that bears edible fruit; like a cedar, that grows back even if it is cut down to its stump. (Bava Batra 80b)

For a righteous man falls seven times, and

risers up again, but the wicked stumble under adversity. (Proverbs 24:16)

Perspective: The wise man, his eyes are in his head; but the fool walks in darkness. (Ecclesiastes 2:14)

Initiative: Each person should see himself as half righteous and half wicked, and the entire world as hanging in balance. By performing one mitzvah, he tips the scales for himself and for the entire world on the side of merit, bringing deliverance and salvation for himself and for all others. (Rambam, Laws of Repentance 3:8)

Action: He (Rabbi Chananiah) said: If one's action exceed one's knowledge, his knowledge shall be preserved; but if one's knowledge exceed one's actions, his knowledge shall not prevail. (Pirkei Avot 3:12) ■

shinshinim work for Federations; JPDS-NC created a new paradigm. Our *shinshinim* work primarily for the school, and deal with synagogue groups and Israeli scouts in the evening and on weekends. They assist children in lower grades just beginning to read and write Hebrew; they work one-on-one for support or enrichment in Hebrew; they run special monthly programs about a chag in Israel or a facet of Israeli culture. They create Israeli bulletin boards in the hallways and offer lunchtime multimedia presentations on Israeli life and culture. They host a weekly Hebrew lunch for children in third through sixth grades.

The children get to hear Hebrew spoken easily and familiarly in the hallways. The young emissaries are “cool”; hence, it becomes cool to speak Hebrew with them. The *shinshinim* are hosted by families during the school year, and the impact they have on the host families is great, with some later inspired to spend a semester in Israel.

Informal Strategies for Israel Education

Jewish Primary Day School of the Nation's Capital, Washington, DC

We bring Israel into our school utilizing informal education: by employing *shinshinim* (*shnat shlichut*), emissaries from Israel in their gap year between high school and army; by hosting Mekor Chaim *shlichim*, students from Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz's yeshiva who do a year of service *chutz*

la'aretz (in the Diaspora); and by twinning with a school in Israel under the auspices of Gesher Chai, a part of the Partnership 2000 project of the Jewish Agency.

The *Shinshin* program is also run in conjunction with the Jewish Agency. Most

We also host two yeshiva students in their mid-twenties who each spend six hours a week at school. The “Mekor Chaim guys” participate in tefillah with the older grades and do skits and songs with the younger grades about the chagim or parashat hashavua. They conduct special activities before chagim such as *hoshanot* and *biur chametz*. Because these *shlichim* work on the weekends in synagogues, children and parents see them on a regular basis throughout the week. Their influence is evident when the kids emulate them, for example, by wearing tzitzit.

In addition to bringing real people from Israel into our school, we connect virtually with children in Israel. Under Gesher Chai, JPDS-NC was paired with Jabotinsky, a primary school in Beit Shemesh serving approximately 200 students in grades 1 through 6.

Students in the same grades have exchanged *kartisei brachah* and *te'udot*



zchut (identity cards) in which they have shared their names, some of their favorite things, and their families' countries of origin. They were surprised to encounter as many similarities between them as differences. This past year, we held three videoconferences with Jabotinsky students: at Chanukah, when our fifth graders lit candles together; at a Tu

Bishvat seder for fourth graders; and at a model Passover seder for the third graders.

Each of these programs presents its own unique challenges, but they have all been very successful in connecting our children to Israel. ■

Gemilut chasadim is a cornerstone of the leadership program. Students take charge in organizing, administering and arranging chesed projects. There is also a fundraising component included. For example, this past year students worked with Habitat for Humanity to build a house; the cost of the house was approximately 90,000 rand (roughly \$11,000), and the students were required to raise 50,000 (about \$6,000). Another leadership activity involved our students assisting with younger kids and acting as madrichim.

Student Leadership Training

United Herzlia Schools, Capetown, South Africa

Herzlia Middle School (grades 7 to 9) has implemented an Inclusive Leadership Programme, which ensures that every student is given the opportunity to gain essential life skills.

In the past, student leadership comprised 12 councillors who were appointed to different portfolios in the school: Head, Deputy, Secretary, Judaica, Zionism, Kesharim (establishing connections within the school), Community Action Group, Sport, Culture, Media, Technical and Environment. Under the guidance of a teacher, each councillor worked with a deputy to run school committees.

This program, while successful, impacted only a select group of students. We decided to significantly expand our leadership initiative through the appointment

of other positions. These include representatives from each grade who take part in the above-mentioned committees; captains and vice-captains for our three houses, which permeates the school's sports and cultural life; and class monitors and vice-monitors, responsible for administrative duties and establishing class spirit.

Altogether this great mass of new appointments has opened up about 250 leadership positions in the school! Each level has a job description and training that has been structured to ensure that the students acquire the necessary skills. We have created a Young Leaders Day with workshops on public speaking, time management, group dynamics and establishing a leadership legend.

Finally we decided that, beyond the students who hold appointments, every single pupil in the school should receive leadership training. This takes place in two ways. Each term, class advisors are given a book to teach that is developed by skilled teachers and covers characteristics of leaders, leadership styles and an intensive analysis of a leadership movie (*Remember the Titans*, *Coach Carter* or *Invictus*). Furthermore, the whole school is given the opportunity to enroll for the President's Leadership Award (a registered nonprofit organisation), an international program that involves four components: adventure, service, skill development and physical activity. To date we have 40 students enrolled for the bronze medal and one for the silver medal.

[CONTINUED ON PAGE 44]



Formal/Informal Programs

[CONTINUED FROM PAGE 43]

Part of our aim is to exchange ideas with leaders in South African schools of the same age group. We have invited four schools to an integrated and inspirational leadership evening to be held in October. This will be the cherry on

the cake of a successful year in training young leaders.

In summary, we are reminded of a quote by Franklin D. Roosevelt: “We cannot always build the future for our youth, but we can build our youth for the future.” ■

Freedom in Education: Passover Music Video

Beit Rabban Day School, New York, New York

“*Mah nishtanah halailah hazeh mikol haleilot?*”

The ancient question asked at Passover seders is traditionally answered with Avadim hayinu, a passage about the journey from slavery to freedom. Connecting with such abstract concepts from a time so long ago and a place so far away can be very challenging for even the most sophisticated of elementary students in America. Creating learning experiences to help students understand the underlying themes of Passover can also be challenging, as even the most progressive of educators would likely oppose a genuine re-enactment.

Progressive education is similar to informal education in that both are unpredictable. A progressive educator is responsible for satisfying specific curricular goals, but is not limited to particular methodologies. Striking the right balance between student initiative and the achievement of social/emotional, cognitive, and academic objectives requires continuous flexibility and reflection.

Last March, the students in Mary Seton’s second/third grade class expressed interest in making a music video. Inspired by the YouTube sensation “Candlelight” by the Maccabeats, the children were determined to create a sensation

of their own. This posed a dilemma for the teacher: Would actualizing this idea satisfy curricular goals and justify the time commitment necessary to execute it meaningfully? Given a supportive environment, she decided to move forward with the project.

The class engaged in an authentic creative process by inviting experts in the fields of songwriting and filming to share their expertise. Beginning with a close reading of the Exodus story in both the Chumash and Haggadah, students worked together to write song lyrics that would serve as the “core text” of their video. They then collaborated to select scenes and screen shots, draw storyboards, paint backgrounds, collect props, cast parts, sew, glue, tape and staple costumes, practice, and finally record the song and film the play.

The outcome was unpredictably better than we had hoped. The process necessitated extensive collaboration; students were challenged to listen to one another attentively, disagree respectfully, and make decisions democratically. The class became closer through their shared commitment and discovered new strengths and abilities in themselves and each other. They learned to think and solve problems creatively and experienced the power of hard work and perseverance. The film portrayed understanding of the essential themes of Passover, and it established a cognitive association between the historical event and its commemoration.

The music video helped us realize that there is no better way to teach about redemption, or any other abstract concept, than to empower students with the freedom to make choices and pursue interests. Only through their own initiative could students appreciate the essence of the holiday, as over the course of the project the students gained a true sense of the spirit of freedom. That is, until the end of filming when a second grader, exhausted by the exertion of doing several takes, exclaimed: “Now I know what it means to be a slave!” ■



Bridging the Chasm between the Formal and Informal

[CONTINUED FROM PAGE 31]

program on classroom learning and the school environment. The instrument itself was seen by teachers to demonstrate a level of seriousness and reflection not previously associated with the seemingly raucous and informal nature of the shabbatonim. General and Jewish studies staff, novice and veteran teachers, those who had been on shabbatonim and those who had never attended spent time reflecting on the program and sharing their insights.

Many noted the unintended impact on classroom learning. Recognizing the group-building experience, teachers cited increased participation in classroom discussions and activities. Similarly, teachers who had attended a shabbaton demonstrated that students felt more comfortable approaching them to address both curricular and non-curricular issues. Using these responses and the resulting conversations as triggers, a core group of teachers interested in the shabbaton was assembled.

The key to teacher engagement is providing a sense of purpose for involvement. When teachers view their role as supervisory or perfunctory, they balk at volunteering their time. When they have a sense of purpose and recognize the unique contribution of their time, skills and expertise, I found them eager to contribute.

Increased teacher involvement came in two forms. First, a core group of teachers partnered with students in planning and implementing the junior shabbatonim. For many teachers, shifting from a hierarchical teacher-student relationship to a more collaborative working style was challenging and required continual reflection. Second, on each shabbaton we set aside time for teacher electives. During these blocks, teachers were invited to teach their passion—often avocational topics that did not relate to their core teaching subjects. Both of these pathways for engagement allowed the teacher and student to form a new type of rela-

tionship, one which is sometimes inhibited by the classroom hierarchy.

Greater teacher involvement increased the educational rigor of the shabbaton, expanding the program from one focused on enculturation to include instruction. Student leaders and teachers developed a text for the shabbatonim including prayers, songs, commentary and explanation. A curriculum was developed ensuring that on each shabbaton rituals were framed with background information and explanation. Newly engaged teachers led text studies and parashah discussions.

“For many teachers, shifting from a hierarchical teacher-student relationship to a more collaborative working style was challenging and required continual reflection.”

With a core group of teachers helping to shape the work of the Department of Student Activities and a revamped shabbaton curriculum, it became easier to find links between the shabbaton experience and classroom learning. Before the shabbaton, in rabbinics classes, teachers taught elements of the rituals students would encounter on the shabbaton and madrichim began teaching songs. We divided freshmen shabbatonim by rabbinics class in order to encourage the teacher to attend and to extend classroom learning into Shabbat. Following the shabbaton, the classroom was a forum for reflecting upon the experience and extending enculturation into instruction.

Throughout the process, my role in the school changed. While at first, I wore two different kippot—one in the classroom and one in the Cougar Cave—over time the roles melded. Beyond work integrating the formal and informal Shabbat curricula, I worked with a variety of teachers and departments to build experiences to complement their teaching. Akin to the educational technologist who consults with teachers on integrat-

ing technology into their curriculum, I acted as an educational experientialist, working with the Jewish history department and our Israel trip provider to scaffold the Israel trip, the Ivrit department to video speeches for students to review and critique, and the politics teacher to convene a mock trial on Israel's security fence. While many schools have hired experiential educators or seconded teachers to take responsibilities for informal activities, the role of the educational experientialist runs deeper than planning and running assemblies and holiday celebrations. He or she is charged with bridging the divide between the formal and informal curricula.

Our schools have come a long way in growing the scope of educational activities. Day schools invest heavily in extracurricular activities and informal education. All too often, however, these programs are isolated from core instruction, acting as peripheral programs to classroom learning. They are conceived as recreational, value-added programs that help with recruitment and retention, rather than educational activities designed to buttress core elements of the curriculum. If our schools are to serve as the holistic centers of education, the formal and informal must meld into one overarching curriculum that runs between the classroom and the experience, merging instruction and enculturation. ■

TO LEARN MORE

Aron, Isa, “The Malaise of Jewish Education,” *Tikkun Magazine* 4:3.

Reimer, Joseph, “Beyond More Jews Doing Jewish: Clarifying the Goals of Informal Jewish Education,” *Journal of Jewish Education* 73:1.

Jewish Education: New and Improv'd

■ by **ANDREW DAVIES** and **AARON FRIEDMAN**

Games derived from improvisational theater can help students internalize the stories, characters and lessons of the Torah.

“**A**be, I’ll use my Spidey senses to help you!” The twelve-year-old “angel” said as he leaped like Spiderman over to the rabbi playing Abraham in an improvised skit at Beit Chaverim, an Orthodox shul in Westport, Connecticut.

It was a Shavuot service, but hardly a typical one. One of the major difficulties facing Jewish education today is making ancient stories and customs fun and accessible for students. Attending Jewish day school from kindergarten through 12th grade, we saw the good, the bad, and the boring. As Hebrew school teachers, we realized the many challenges of making Jewish education meaningful and relevant to students in the 21st century. Working as comedians and actors, it dawned on us that we could bring the fun and creativity of the theater and comedy club to the classroom. So we wrote a Torah comedy show called *The Bible Players* and the *Quest for MenschHood*, and designed a curriculum to train educators on how to use improvisational theater in the classroom. We started The Bible Players with the mission of using improv to enhance Jewish education in three ways: help build community, create personal empowerment, and infuse a sense of fun into classroom activities, making Jewish stories and values more memorable.

Started in its modern form in the 1950s, improv is an art form which sees value in an audience watching the process of

creation taking place. For our purposes, improv is a set of games that a group can use to create original scenes. *Shlishiyot* or Three of a Kind is a game in which one student creates a crazy version of a biblical character and the other two have to match that character’s voice and mannerisms. At Beit Chaverim we played Abraham’s Angels, which involves three students playing angels (each with a specific quirky character trait) who are visiting Abraham’s tent. Abraham must then try to figure out what is unique about each angel. All of our improv games have two rules in common: always listen to each other, and always say yes to each other’s ideas. These simple rules create the safe atmosphere for improv and allow for games which have many positive benefits.



Andrew Davies and Aaron Friedman are the co-founders of *The Bible Players*, a group which performs Torah comedy shows and trains teachers in the use of improvisation. They can be reached through their website www.TheBiblePlayers.com, where you can read testimonials and watch videos.

IMPROV BUILDS COMMUNITY

“Do not separate yourself from the community.” Hillel (Pirkei Avot 2:5)

Improv creates a strong sense of community within a group. Students come to understand that Improv is not about one person being the funniest or most interesting, but rather the group creating a compelling scene together. Improv teaches us to always put the needs of the group before our own, fostering a sense of unity and kehillah in a safe and fun environment. This

past summer, we led an Improv group with campers at a Ramah Day Camp in Nyack, New York. After a few weeks, we saw our campers, age 8 to 12, playing together, creating scenes, and building friendships because they respected and valued each other’s ideas. They learned that it was more fun when they worked together and left their egos at the door.

IMPROV CREATES PERSONAL EMPOWERMENT

“If I am not for myself, who will be for me? If I am only for myself, what am I?” Hillel (Pirkei Avot 1:14)

TIPS FOR IMPROV

1. Safe space: Create a positive, inclusive space where students feel comfortable being spontaneous.
2. Lead by example: If you demonstrate that you can be silly and play the games, then the students will want to play them, too.
3. Always listen: Start with games that utilize taking turns, so that students learn listening is crucial for building scenes.
4. Play to each student’s strengths: Some might prefer verbal games, others silent games.
5. Always say “Yes”: Make sure students stay positive and embrace each other’s idea, not reject them.
6. Have fun!

The feeling of having the full support of the improv group leads to personal growth and empowerment. This support becomes internalized and students begin to feel more confident with the knowledge that they are never alone. Students see that no one else is judging them, so they begin to stop judging themselves. This can happen in a game like Foreign Translator, where one student speaks a gibberish language which is then translated into English. The kids mimic actions while creating silly new meanings of their words, turning “blurgidy” into “bologna,” and nervousness into self-assurance.

When we taught improv at Congregation Habonim in Manhattan, one student did not want to be a part of our final Purim performance because he was nervous about looking foolish on the bimah. But as the class progressed he learned to trust the group, and then learned to trust himself. During the student-written show, he shone as Esther’s pet pig who saved Purim. He was no longer afraid because he believed in himself.

IMPROV IS FUN AND HAS STICKING POWER

“And Sarah said, ‘God made me laugh; everyone who hears will laugh with me.’” (Bereishit 21:6)

Improv is valuable because the games bring fun and playfulness to the Torah which can feel archaic, boring, and even intimidating to many students. The fun factor must not be overlooked, since it leads to sticking power. A student is more likely to remember a fun activity than a boring one—it sticks with them.

That’s why the principal of Solomon Schechter of Nassau County brought us in on NYS ELA testing day, to provide some much needed comic relief. We performed two assemblies for the Kindergarten through the 5th grade, featuring scenes from the Torah followed by improv games. A performance of Balaam (Andrew) riding around on his donkey (Aaron) got the students laughing, but also learning about leshon hara.

At first the older grades were reluctant to show enthusiasm, trying to act “cool” in

THE JEWISH EXPERTS GAME

Three volunteers sit in chairs in front of the class and are the three foremost experts in the world on Judaism.

Here’s the catch: Experts 1 and 2 have fun saying completely silly and outrageous answers, while Expert 3 gives the most correct information that he or she can. Then the teacher can point out the right answer or ask the kids if they know which one is right.

Older students can mix it up, alternate which scholar has the correct answer for each questions. Students love this game because it allows them to be silly, but it also reinforces what the students have been learning. Example:

“God talked to Moses from a Burning....”

Expert 1: “Marshmallow!”

Expert 2: “Dinosaur!”

Expert 3: “Bush!”

front of the younger students. But as the show progressed they started having fun and were the first students to volunteer to participate. One that the students loved playing onstage was the guessing game “Silent Scenes,” where pairs of volunteers had just 30 seconds to prepare and silently act out a scene from the Torah.

After the show, the teachers were eager to learn how to bring these tools into the classroom. We spent lunch playing improv games with teachers and sharing ideas about how games could enhance their curriculum. The teachers realized improv reinforces what students are learning in a memorable and tactile way. So if they have just learned Hebrew vocabulary, a Torah story, or Jewish holiday, improv games can be a fun and creative way to test the students’ knowledge on a subject (see sidebar for the Jewish Experts Game).

A week after performing at Solomon Schechter of Nassau County, the principal noticed that students were singing the jingle “Mitzvah Moments! Mitzvot in Disguise!” from our show. A mitzvah being “in disguise” means it is a kind

deed that we don’t always acknowledge as a mitzvah. The students in the school yard were singing the jingle every time they thought someone had performed a mitzvah “in disguise.” The song was fun for them, and so they remembered it and wanted to repeat it. They had learned Jewish values and been able to put them into practice.

The Bible Players were started with a simple philosophy, that making Jewish education engaging for kids requires making the Tanakh fun. Bible stories must be brought into the here and now, and made fun and accessible for everyone in the process. We combine the most ancient text with the most modern art form: Torah-inspired improv. It leads to a stronger community, more personal empowerment, and the fun of improv makes the lessons memorable.

The goal of Jewish education is not merely to teach facts, but to endow the students with a passionate connection to their Jewish identity. By allowing them the joy of creation, improv enables students to bring the stories of the Torah to life and make them last a lifetime. ■

This year, as our Rosh Hashanah greeting, RAVSAK created a card that describes how the values of the ushpizin are embodied in Jewish day schools and their students. We invited our schools, students and supporters of Jewish day schools to join us in one “big sukkah” to celebrate the many ways Jewish day school education builds and nurtures the Jewish future.

The response was delightful and overwhelming, as dozens of schools and thousands of students took part in the RAVSAK Ushpizin project. Sukkot throughout North America were adorned with these cut-out figures decorated with all the talent and creativity of our students. Enjoy some of their work here.

RAVSAK posted the card on our Facebook page with questions for the field designed to spur reflection on how day schools cultivate the qualities that the ushpizin embody. Here is one question and response:

Tonight, the seventh night, we invite into our sukkah David and Esther. They represent malchut (leadership). How does your school reflect this Jewish value?

Over lunch in our sukkah today, in fact, we talked about these invited guests’ willingness to be or not to be outward in their Jewish identities. Moreover, we talked about their involvement in the politics of their times. We expressly say to our students that we expect them to take up civic, as well as Jewish, leadership roles in high school and college, and beyond, when they graduate. Your initial question, RAVSAK, helps educators frame our Jewish heroes and our past in a wonderful way. As spiritual and activist archetypes, we stand to learn so much about our own lives reflecting on what we know of our cousins from ages past. Rabbi Scott Bolton, Reuben Gittleman Hebrew Day School ■



Students from The Jewish Academy, East Northport, NY

Tools as Ushpizin for Sukkot



Carmel Academy, Greenwich, CT



Students from Columbus Jewish Day School



Students from Hillel Academy of Tampa



Students from the New Orleans Jewish Day School



Students from JCDS Boston



Staff and faculty at the Lerner School, Durham, NC.

Not Just Fun and Games:

Preparing Teachers for Meaningful, Constructivist, Experiential Education

■ by **SHIRA D. EPSTEIN** and **JEFFREY S. KRESS**

The authors propose kinds of teacher reflection and discussion that can lead toward greater student engagement and encourage an organic development of informal techniques in the classroom.

The terms *informal* and *experiential* conjure up images of children singing songs at a Shabbaton or laughing together while playing sports or games at a summer camp. While we have no objection to integrating songs and games into teaching, implementing disconnected activities for the sake of “fun” will be of limited impact. Further, equating experiential education with discrete moments of fun leads educators to compartmentalize the work (“Now I am being an experiential educator, and now I am not”) and to see the experiential moments as items to check off a list (“This week we played three games, so I did my experiential duties”).

What we aim for is deep integration of basic elements of experiential education into the definition of what it means to be a day school educator. We have found that when teachers are asked to play out the idea that learning should be fun, what they really mean is that they want students to be *engaged* in learning. We utilize the framework of “constructivism” to bridge this seeming gap between the goals of teaching for “fun” and “engagement.”

Constructivist Jewish educators maintain that all students, no matter their background or intellectual advancement, arrive in our classrooms with a wealth of lived experiences. A teacher’s role is to develop activities that connect learners with this prior knowledge so that they experience Jewish subjects as relevant, meaningful, and applicable to their world outside of day school. Linking constructivism and

experiential education demonstrates that the latter is not a foreign concept to classrooms.

We also draw on the groundbreaking work of Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi to reframe *fun* as *flow*, the type of experience in which the participant becomes completely immersed to the extent that even his or her sense of time blurs. The participant and the activity become one. Meaningful challenges hold potential to foster “flow.” Such deep engagement occurs when participants are engaged in clearly defined, meaningful activities for which the challenges push participants to—or even beyond—the limits of their skills. Flow can occur in activities not traditionally associated with laughter and merriment. We have heard students and educators describe feelings of flow that occurred while writing a paper, teaching a class, or singing Shabbat zemirot.

A helpful conversation for educators in this regard has to do with the goals of Jewish education. We are often surprised that while many of our students have worked in Jewish educational settings prior to beginning their masters, they have not had opportunities to engage in this conversation. We ask educators to imagine a

“graduate” of their program who comes back to visit when he or she is, say 21 years old, and to brainstorm a description of this young adult. The results invariably encompass a range of Jewish knowledge, behaviors, emotions, beliefs, and attitudes. For example, an outcome such as *engaged in prayer* can be “unpacked” to reveal elements that fall into each category.



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Although novice teachers will often refer early in their training to the desire to be the “guide on the side,” much of the formality of day school teaching leads them to more readily embrace a frontal role. Constructivism shifts the role of the educator to a model that is more often outwardly visible within Jewish experiential learning, that of co-investigator alongside students. One way to achieve this is to ask teachers to focus on the types and frequency of questions they ask in the classroom, thereby illuminating the degree to which they facilitate discussion. As part of a professional development initiative, teachers can listen to recordings of their own work, or be observed



by a peer who then offers feedback on their use of questions, and how they might better frame activities that allow for a more facilitative stance.

Problem-based learning, in which students explore a key question through an extended project, is a pedagogical approach that enables this type of co-investigation and could become the focus for professional development. For example, middle school students in New York inquire about the Occupy Wall Street protests downtown: Why do people participate in time-consuming protests? What do they want to accomplish? When students are told about the recent massive housing protests in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, they push further: How do you

“Middle school students in New York inquire about the Occupy Wall Street protests downtown: Why do people participate in time-consuming protests? What do they want to accomplish? How do you know when a protest is “successful”?”

know when a protest is “successful”?

The educator might ask students to consider what they already have learned about historically significant protests. What have been the outcomes of different kinds of protests? What would they want to know about the recent protests? How might they go about learning more? The students and teacher might craft a project in

which they visit Occupy Wall Street, interview protest participants, and review footage from both New York and Israel.

Classroom educators can build upon student interests and shape those questions so that they cohere and align with the school’s formal curriculum and overarching goals and standards. The experiential

[CONTINUED ON PAGE 62]

Can the Arts Foster Serious Jewish Learning?

■ by **BRADLEY SOLMSEN** and **RACHEL HAPPEL**

Artistic exploration and Jewish exploration can and should be one and the same. Here's how.

For the past five years we have been engaged in a quest to better understand how to help teens learn and grow both as artists and as Jews. Many young people today spend their time in a highly compartmentalized fashion. Talented young artists take lessons or have studio time after school and on weekends. Their opportunities for Jewish expression are often relegated to less than inspired time in synagogue. We believe that these two areas, when connected and mutually nurtured, create a whole that is bigger than the sum of its parts: young Jewish artists strengthen and deepen their artistic voices while enriching their Jewish practice and beliefs. This article suggests possibilities for applying this approach to practice in the day school setting.

BIMA, the Brandeis Institute for Music and Arts, is a month long residential summer program for talented teenage Jewish musicians, artists, writers, dancers and actors. BIMA was founded in 2004 by Rabbi Daniel Lehmann, whose vision was to create a rich, pluralistic Jewish setting in which teens could grow as artists. At BIMA, teens work intensely on their skills and portfolios as emerging artists with the guidance of professional artists. They do not necessarily explore “Jewish art,” but instead ask themselves who they are as artists and as Jews, and how these two parts of their identities might relate to one another.

We know that few schools or educational programs share our combined focus on high level artistic and Jewish growth. Yet we believe that the questions and issues with which we regularly grapple will be

relevant to many other Jewish educational environments: questions regarding the roles and relationships between professional artists and Jewish educators, as well as the programming, approaches and curriculum they utilize. Our main question is: When the arts are not secondary but rather primary, what do meaningful Jewish learning experiences look like?

BIMA’s approach places an emphasis on learning through living and through creation. We believe that the most meaningful Jewish learning takes place when all mem-

in working with younger, emerging artists, and experiential arts educators whom we call community educators. The community educators live in the dorms with the participants; they develop and facilitate programs blending artistic and Jewish exploration.



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“When the arts are not secondary but rather primary, what do meaningful Jewish learning experiences look like? How can art expand my understanding of and connection to Judaism?”

bers of the community are encountering Judaism as an active part of our lives, both individually and collectively—in our case, as individual artists and as a community of artists. We strive to blur the lines between “formal” instruction and “informal” community building and creation, in order to create an environment where all community members are actively exploring, discovering, creating, and expressing themselves—both Jewishly and artistically—all the time.

BIMA employs two separate faculties: accomplished professional artists interested

The role of the faculty in helping us promote Jewish growth is crucial to our success. Many of the young BIMA artists seem to be more comfortable taking risks with a musical instrument or paintbrush than with Jewish traditions and practices. Our faculty, who “speak their language” in their art forms, play a key role in helping them translate their artistic risks and growth into Jewish risks and growth and in helping them connect these disparate parts of their lives.

The community educators recently developed an Artists Beit Midrash. As in a con-

ventional beit midrash, the participants work together to learn and interpret Jewish texts in chevruta. Participants use artistic creation, not just dialogue, as a way of exploring source material. The “texts” explored range from traditional sacred sources to poetry, fiction, visual art, music, film, art history, artists’ writings and more. The participants and educators ask themselves: How can Judaism inspire my art? How can art expand my understanding of and connection to Judaism?

As the community educators work and create alongside the participants, they model various ways of connecting the arts and Judaism. They develop creative ways of engaging with text through improvisation, experimentation, and associative processes. They demonstrate how an artist can use Jewish sources to inspire artistic work. They reflect on the differences and similarities between their interpretive process and their artistic process, and how their artistic process can serve as a gateway to understanding a source. They model how working in chevruta can stretch, chal-

[CONTINUED ON PAGE 58]



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Reclaiming the “Ed” in Informal Education

■ by SHIRA MELODY BERKOVITS

Too many Jewish educators in various settings confuse informal education with pandering; the author urges a different approach, blending sensory engagement and group dynamics.

Informal Jewish education has become something of a catchphrase in recent years, with teacher training, financial resources, and school personnel devoted to its execution. Schools, synagogues, and camps alike hope to supplement boring mandatory lessons with fun programs that will rouse children to “like” Judaism. The results often rely heavily on classical conditioning: pair a Judaic event with pop-culture, food, or both, and you’ll guarantee a successful turnout and happy teens brimming with positive Jewish associations. Alternatively, initiate an incentive procedure, such as raffle tickets that are contingent on “good” tefillah, and students will be clamoring for more tefillah time.

It is important to note that not all situations necessitate classical conditioning, and it behooves administrators to ascertain an incentive’s appropriateness prior to its implementation. Imagine a child who loves tuna sandwiches, but loves ice cream even more. In an attempt to instill a love for tuna in the child, her mother repeatedly pairs tuna sandwiches with an ice cream dessert. The pairing of the tuna and ice cream in this instance is superfluous—a waste of time and resources, since the child *already* likes tuna. It is not that ice cream is never appropriate, it simply needs to be delivered judiciously.

In today’s day school world—a world of intensive dual curricula, hours of daily homework, constant bombardment of electronic stimuli, and iCals full of extra-curricular activities—informal Jewish educators recognize the “necessity” of making a loud, fun, noise. Teachers and programming staff brainstorm for the newest and

coolest ways to attract students to Judaism. I have listened to “experts” on Jewish education advocate for rewarding every “good” tefillah with time on the basketball court. I have heard of schools incorporating rap and hip hop music into their Chanukkah chagigahs.

Teachers have publicly suggested that the best way to engage 5th–8th graders in tefillah is by providing sugary food. One rabbi explained to me how the children in his shul came to love Simchat Torah: they were shown a giant wall of candy and told they could keep whatever fit in their mouths and pockets (I’ll let you imagine the scene that followed). Several colleagues of mine have regaled me with stories of the fabulous Yom Ha’atzmaut festival their school ran, replete with blowup rides and clowns, but absent any connection to the State of Israel. School yom iyyuns, community youth groups, and summer camps have used dedicated learning time to show hit movies and TV shows (e.g., *The Matrix*, *The Truman Show*, even *Gossip Girl*) and stretch them to relate to Torah values (did they run out of Torah sources?).

At a recent national convention on the topic of informal education, a keynote speaker urged school administrators to dedicate a “major” percentage of their budget to food, for how else could they expect to attract students to their extra-curricular Judaic events? The applause that met those words was remarkable, and I couldn’t help but wonder: hadn’t any of

the audience members heard of program *quality*?

When I ruminate on the above examples, I feel frustrated. In the rush to connect more students to their heritage, the natural reinforcers of Judaic programming are being masked with flashy tactics and desperate “hooks.” The hours that should be spent researching a holiday and making it relevant are instead spent on ensuring that the glitz is properly in place. While one might assume this pandering is most prevalent in preschool programming, in fact it pervades all levels of informal Jewish education.

I am not advocating an avoidance of incentives altogether. After all, incentives ensure numbers and attract students’ attention.



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However, once students are in attendance, we need to quiet the background noise and let the genuinely interesting stories of our history, the beauty of our tradition, and the intellectual stimulation of our text, do the rest. After students have tasted the substance of our programs and the inherent fun, extra incentives would be like pairing ice cream with a beloved tuna sandwich—completely superfluous.

WE CAN DO BETTER

The first step in planning an informal education program is to ask “What is my goal? What do I hope my students will gain?” Next, the educator must thoroughly research the Judaic subject matter until s/he has achieved mastery and can highlight

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BIRCHOT HASHACHAR

BASIC SUGGESTIONS

1. It is always best to have a large repertoire of brachot at your disposal. On any given day, only use some of it, so that each session is slightly different. At this age you can explore a brachah in a particular way 1-3 times before the students know it and get bored. Preempt this by having an idea of how long you want the brachah segment of your tefillah to run, and then having 2-3 times the material that can be alternated in a myriad of combinations, making each session familiar in its general structure and yet unique in its specifics.
2. Take note of the students' reactions and their ability to understand and interact with each activity. Slowly begin to grow the curriculum, as the program progresses and the students mature. Look for new details to add or a way to take an activity to another level. Add completely new components so that the students don't become "too" familiar.
3. This brachah curriculum is meant so that you can see the basic approach. Almost all of the brachot included here can be applicable to multiple age groups; they just need to be tailored appropriately so that they do not seem "babyish" or over the students' heads.

SAMPLE BRACHOT: Not comprehensive. Add to this & create your own curriculum customized to your class's needs.

Brachot were originally meant to be said as we get ready in the morning. Let's say them in the way they were intended!

SHE'NATAN LASECHVI VINAH

- Try beginning with the shades closed and opening them as you say the words *bein yom*.
- Have props (e.g. a sun and a moon) that the students raise up at the appropriate times.

POKEACH IVRIM

- Ask the students "What is the first thing you do in the morning?" They will say all sorts of things like "brush my teeth" or eat breakfast. Walk around the circle with your eyes closed and mime all these things. Bump into some of the students (gently) and put your hands out in front of you. Act a little silly. They will shout out "You forgot to open your eyes!" Say "That's right. The first thing we do in the morning is open our eyes. Let's thank G-d for helping us to open our eyes, and see this beautiful world."
- Ask them to say the brachah with their eyes closed and open their eyes as *pokeach ivrim*.
- Use your hands to emphasize wide eye opening. Or make hand-eye glasses.
- Ask the students what things in the world they love to see. Let them name these things.
- Have a show and tell. Ask students to bring in one of their favorite things to see.
- Create your own "touch tunnel." Black-out the room, or make a tent, with lots of things to feel/smell. Talk about the experience after, and how in general our eyes are quite helpful.
- Blindfold all the students, or just one at a time, and conduct a taste test between foods that taste very similar. Talk about how our eyes help us decide which foods to eat. Sometimes our eyes are very helpful, and prevent us from eating food with mold (bring in some moldy bread in a Ziplock bag and ask if anyone wants to eat it), but sometimes they trick us, and we eat "flashy" food that's not really as tasty. Bring some examples of fresh fruit compared to some bland but flashy food. You can really squeeze in so many different lessons with this brachah and can switch it up continuously.

MALBISH ARUMIM

- Move a particular article of clothing that you are glad to be wearing as you say the words *malbish arumim*—swoosh skirt, stamp your shoes, etc.
- Talk about what types of clothing you wear in different weather.
- Talk about what it would be like to not have clothing—to have to come in pajamas or slippers! Or to be cold, or sunburnt.
- Bring some clothing that they can actually put on as you say the brachah. This can be clothing the students bring from home, or dress-up.

ZOKEIF KEFUFIM

- Walk like a monkey—hunched over with your arms swinging. Ask students, "Who walks like that?" Let them guess. Ask if people walk like that. When they say no, stretch and stand straight and tall. Show them how people walk, how G-d helps us to stand so straight.
- Talk about how you like to stretch in the morning. Practice some great stretches/yoga.
- Crouch down and then jump and stretch arms way up at the words *zokeif kefufim*.

SHE'ASAH LI KOL TZORKI

- This brachah provides a wonderful opportunity to talk about our needs, and all the wonderful gifts G-d gives us on a daily basis.
- Discuss the difference between wants and needs.
- Do show and tell.

OZER YISRAEL BIGVURAH

- Have students make big muscles
- Can you name some times that G-d helped our nation with *gvurah*? What about individuals? What about team work? When we work together, the load is not as heavy—maybe G-d provides us with strength and is happy when we share the load.

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its key components. Finally, the educator must devise ways to make the highlighted components relevant to the students. Ideally, substantive relevance is achieved through interactivity, engagement of all the senses, and a focus on group dynamics (for a sample program see sidebar “Journey Through the Living Torah”). For example, with the right tefillah curriculum, children ages 2–17 can pray for one hour and be eager for more (for a sample tefillah see sidebar “Birchot Hashachar”). The key to engaging students in tefillah is not a great incentive, but a substantive curriculum that is inclusive, explanatory, and utterly relatable to their everyday lives.

Quality programs *should* be a lot of fun. Informal educators that are bursting with excitement have won half the battle. Teachers should engage children with stories, skits, props, and activities. Students should be included in the creation and execution stages of a program so that they take ownership of the event. Energy and love for Judaism should permeate the very walls of our day schools.

There are countless opportunities to transform schools into building-size canvases. Try decorating the school from top to bottom for parshat Noach, Shabbat Shira, Shavuot and any occasion you can dream up. Involve your students in the decorating and programming processes by creating student-led committees (e.g., painting and costumes). Take a leaf out of *Improv Everywhere’s* book and create spontaneous scenes of Judaic chaos and joy in your school’s public spaces. Be goofy. Be relatable. Shed some of the formality inherent in the educator’s role, and in so doing allow your students to connect with you, each other, their teachers, and Judaism.

Informal education should not be a code for pandering to our students. Just like their formal counterparts, informal educators should invest time and effort to create thoughtful, substantive programs that are enjoyable *because* of their content, not in spite of it. Let us recognize and exalt in the true beauty of informal Jewish programming: the sincerity of our prayers, the enthralling history of our holidays, and the richness of our culture. Let us graduate generations of students who actively *choose* to engage in Jewish life because of the intrinsic value it holds for them. Finally, let us commit, both in the classroom and without, to take our students seriously and program accordingly. ■

JOURNEY THROUGH THE LIVING TORAH

OVERVIEW

Journey Through the Living Torah is an experiential tour of the Torah for young children and their families. Families sit on the floor while a Sefer Torah is unrolled entirely to surround them. The children are taken on a journey through the Torah with dynamic storytelling and props. Children actually get to see what the breaks between parshiot look like...the textual layout of the Shirat Hayam and can say things like “I am now standing at the Yam Suf.” You should walk around as you go, so they get the sense that your movement through the story reflects the movement through the text. Say things like “Come join me over here in Sefer Bamidbar.”

PREPARATION

Check out www.parshaactivities.com or www.g-dcast.com for outline ideas

- Write up an outline of the Torah with key plot/parshiot points
- Remember: The Torah is long, so be selective and brief in your storytelling
- Make sure to discuss textual anomalies (the verse pattern in Shirat Hayam, space before a new sefer)
- Rehearse! Assign biblical characters and practice mini skits

SUPPLIES

- Prepare your story
- Sefer Torah (preferably pasul)
- Yad
- Box of white cloth gloves for volunteers to hold the klaf (disposable rubber works too)
- Bag of props. Get creative—bring whatever you can think of. Suggestions:
 - Tour guide/Explorer outfit, binoculars: As narrator, you can act as an explorer taking the children on an exciting journey
 - Headscarves for the Imahot
 - Noach. Pour water on someone’s head for the flood (with advance permission)
 - Animals in the Ark, plagues (throw cotton balls in the air for hail), sacrifices
 - Donkey on a stick—Eliezer, Bilaam
 - Fruit—spies (magnifying glass), first fruits

PRACTICAL NOTES

- Secure a large room. Set up consecutive rectangle tables along the length of the room.
- Plan on a minimum of 30-40 min for set-up. Logistically, this is quite complicated.
- You need a LOT of volunteers. Recruit as many parents and teens as possible (up to 40). Ideally you want 3 managers to 1) oversee volunteers and Torah holding 2) maintain quiet and facilitate listening and 3) oversee storytelling and props

Getting Beyond “Formal vs. Informal”: Good Education is Good Education

[CONTINUED FROM PAGE 19]

those settings is on par with the sublime moments of learning that take place in Jewish day schools. Instead of trying to bring the informal into the formal, day schools ought to focus on learning from the informal so as to realize their own potential. (Those of us who are committed to educating in informal settings would be well served to study from our colleagues in schools to reach our own.) The tasks and goals, however, are the same.

The potential of working together on those tasks and goals, instead of speaking at each other from the confines of our own settings, could be truly transformative. Here are some proposals to fundamentally alter the conversation about and reality of Jewish education in North America:

1. creating an integrated market for high-quality, content-intensive experiences that span settings, redefining Jewish education by degrees of excellence rather than counter-productive choices between “school” and “camp” or “service-learning” and “Israel trip”

ing conversation taking place in the social sciences about developmental psychology and sociocultural theory

3. most importantly, augmenting the impact we all have individually and as a networked community in the achievement of the many objectives we share

“ Instead of trying to bring the informal into the formal, day schools ought to focus on learning from the informal so as to realize their own potential. The tasks and goals, however, are the same.

2. developing a rich vocabulary of what and how we effect transformation, learning how to document our impact, and joining the dynamic and stimulat-

by catalyzing the development of the next generation of Jewish adults who are energized by, engaging with, and enhancing their Judaism. ■



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BIRCHOT HASHACHAR

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OTER YISRAEL BETIFARAH

- Make crowns, with, or for, the students. Have the students crown their neighbors.

HANOTEN LAYA'EF KOACH

- Students can make big muscles.
- Talk about what it's like to be tired.

What happens when we get tired? What if we were tired all the time? Isn't it amazing how we can be exhausted and grumpy and wake up good as new? Was there ever a time that you felt like you had no energy but were able to do something anyhow—did you get a special boost from G-d?

NOTEN HATORAH

Use a Torah scroll.

- Pass it around and allow the students to kiss it very gently.
- Open it up to show the students what it looks like inside.
- For younger students, consider purchasing stuffed Torahs for each child.
- Try a Torah parade. Sing Torah songs and dance with the Torah.

Can the Arts Foster Serious Jewish Learning?

[CONTINUED FROM PAGE 53]

lence and support both partners in developing interpretations and also in creating and refining each partner's artistic work. Individual teens will rarely connect with *all* of these ways of integrating Judaism and art. When educators model a variety of approaches and provide multiple opportunities to try them, they help teens to find the ways of connecting that work best for them.

In a well-composed work of art an idea of outstanding importance is not introduced haphazardly, but like a king at an official ceremony, it is presented at a moment and in a way that will bring to light its authority and leadership. In the Bible, words are employed with exquisite care, particularly those which, like pillars of fire, lead the way in the far-flung system of the biblical world of meaning. Heschel, The Sabbath

Jewish involvement. We aspire to help our students grow, expand both their artistic and Jewish palettes, and to consider the fullest repertoire that is available to them within Judaism.

PRACTICAL DIRECTIONS TO CONSIDER

Professional artists who happen to be Jewish can be found in every community. Consider inviting professional artists into your school to work with your students, and provide the appropriate setting and materials to create an environment for high level artistic work. We have found this to be fundamentally different from the experience

often engage students in ways that traditional texts cannot. Consider creating opportunities for students to respond to texts using an artistic process in addition to more traditional chevruta approaches.

Create arts-infused learning opportunities for your faculty. Adding the arts to professional development can provide faculty with new ways to be engaged and consider subject matter, pedagogy, and the school's Jewish community from new perspectives.

If you have artists on your faculty, allow them opportunities to present their own

When you treat and relate to students as serious emerging artists themselves, this increased level of intensity can spill over into the entire learning environment of the school.

We want high school students to grow as artists *and* as Jews. We believe that these are two distinct parts of a person, but that there are also relationships between the two. We want their art to nurture Judaism and their Judaism to nurture their art. We want these relationships to be defined and explored by each artist on an individual level, in a supportive communal setting where everyone is engaged in the same exploration. As a painter has to make a series of choices in composing a work, so a Jew, we are teaching, has to make choices how to compose his or her

students have with art teachers or Jewish educators who use the arts as a tool. When you treat and relate to students as serious emerging artists themselves, this increased level of intensity can spill over into the entire learning environment of the school.

Consider a broader definition of "text" for your school's beit midrash or other study opportunities. Bring works of art as texts to be studied or as commentaries on traditional texts. Music, visual arts and literature, for example, can

work and to serve as models of people who are engaged—seriously—in both arts and Jewish life.

We believe that the arts can serve as a portal to unlock creative expression within students far beyond the range of artistic forms. Artistic expression can inspire the creative reading of text and creative approaches to ritual, belief and commitment. In short, the arts can endow students with the creativity, confidence and flexibility to engage with Judaism with their hearts and souls. ■

Retreats from Soup to Ropes

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CREATING SACRED SPACE

An ordinary classroom, camp, or hotel meeting room can be transformed into a group's sacred space in a number of ways. Consider ways to set a tone, both consciously and subliminally. Post texts on the walls that reflect the theme of the retreat and reinforce the feeling of being in a Jewish space. Display student artwork to decorate the space and affirm the contributions of the participants. Use table tents with thematic texts, icebreaker questions, and table seating. Play music in the background as participants enter. The space should convey a sense of togetherness.

A FEW LAST NOTES

ACQUIRE FOR YOURSELF A TEACHER

Professional development is an ongoing, necessary part of our work. There are many resources and experts within a given community, and a day school often has unique access to faculty from many disciplines who could share expertise and collaborate with Judaic educators in developing experiential programming. Additionally, there are excellent books and online resources on experiential learning, as well as professionals and organizations that offer training. (See sidebar.)

FAMILY RETREATS

A day school community can be greatly enriched by family retreats. More than just a weekend getaway, retreats can deepen connections among families and to Jewish learning and practice. They are also more complex to plan than student retreats owing to multiple age groups, different site requirements and more diverse staffing needs. The retreat theme needs to resonate with adults as well as children, and offer ways to be integrated into the families' lives. For example, holiday themes can enhance family holiday celebrations with new learning and ideas. The retreat should provide interactive family programming and separate learning for adults and children.

PLAYFULNESS

Even though many of us would agree with the broad concept of play being important, it is often astonishing how many of our Jewish learning environments do not embrace play. When play becomes the dominant pedagogy, our children smile and have fun; not only are we contributing to their overall development, but they are also more open to learning and experiencing the beauty of what Jewish life has to offer. (David Bryfman, Bryfy.net)

Play is the essential component to any retreat. It is often missing from our students' and families' lives, with the pressures of achievement, tests, and extracurricular activities. A retreat experience, with an atmosphere of playfulness and in which each participant feels valued and connected to others, can have long-lasting impact for each individual, family, and community. ■

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Lessons from Montessori for Jewish Day Schools

■ by **DEBRA KIRA**

The author shows a method for blending the student-centered approach of Montessori with the goals of Jewish education.

Often students are presented with a formal Judaic curriculum in an attempt to instill a sense of Jewish identity through knowledge. I must admit that prior to being a parent and a Montessori administrator, I felt that this was the most effective way in which to “make” students learn. I provided texts and gave formal lectures to “instill” the knowledge I wished them to have.

Yet through research and experience, I have found that Jewish knowledge and awareness comes more naturally and powerfully from activities at home and at school, rather than through scripted lessons. An integrated Judaic Montessori classroom provides this experience through informal tactile learning, and thus, creates a lifelong learner eager to find his or her Jewish identity and foster a love for Judaism. Although this concept seems to be simple, the implementation of the model and the true integration of a Judaic curriculum in a Montessori classroom is complex.

Educating children is a skill involving attentiveness and an awareness of the individual child. Each child comes to us as a seed, and we must find a way to assist in his growth so that he will continue to grow after leaving our classrooms. Discovering the correct way in which to reach each student is an integral part of this education process. I can assure you that this is difficult to achieve this through the repetition of formal assessment drills in a conventional classroom setting. Nevertheless, it has taken me years to understand,

appreciate, and promote the techniques that are best used to provide students with optimal Judaic education that will promote a strong Jewish identity.

Maria Montessori’s methodology offers the most effective educational options for this model. Tactile learning, emphasis on respect, individualized education, and independence all helped to draw me in to this approach. However, the Montessori models in existence often separate the Judaic curriculum from the rest of the program. In order to instill a love for Judaism and foster a strong Jewish identity, the Judaic curriculum has to be combined with the secular aspects of the program. At the UOS Goldberg Montessori School in Houston, Texas, we



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“Through informal tactile learning, an integrated Judaic Montessori classroom creates a lifelong learner eager to find his or her Jewish identity and foster a love for Judaism.”

have created a model for integrating Judaic practice and learning into the pillars of the Montessori curriculum. In the classrooms teachers serve as guides, presenting the lessons and allowing the students to practice and master their work.

The Montessori classroom incorporates the informal education that fosters love of learning and a true Jewish identity. The Montessori classroom has six main areas of learning that integrate Judaic content into the Montessori curriculum: Practical

Life, Sensorial, Language, Math, Geography, and Science.

Practical Life activities are based on the ways in which people in our culture relate to each other socially as well as the ways in which they complete everyday tasks. The exercises are real-life activities using fully functional objects matched to the size of the child’s hand and strength. They provide children with endless opportunities to imitate the everyday behaviors of people and in the process gain independence, develop concentration, and build determination. The Judaic curriculum is integrated within Practical Life through the pouring of grape juice into Kiddush cups, the braiding of challah, and the spooning of seeds at Tu Bishvat. Students learn the

brachot for the foods that they are preparing in this area. They can be observed squeezing oranges for juice, reciting the brachah independently, and then enjoying their snack.

Sensorial activities invite children to use their senses in order to master their learning. These exercises are based on sets of graded objects with design specifications as precise as those of scientific instruments. Each set of objects materializes, isolates, and grades one quality includ-



ing texture, color, volume, mass, length, temperature, shape, sound, and smell. One common activity found within the Sensorial center of the classroom involves students matching different colored kip-pot with color cards. Students aged three to six practice alephbet yoga, using their bodies to make the shapes of the Hebrew letters while learning them.

“Included in the Math exercises is the counting of Judaic objects, counting the days of the Omer, and counting the mitzvah leaves representing the daily mitzvot that the students perform.

Language development, according to Montessori, is intertwined with the development of movement. As a child's ability to move develops, the field of activity expands and so does the need for language. Movement and manipulation are a feature of the way that children use the Montessori language materials. Activities began with early language and progress to reading, writing, and early grammar. Both the Hebrew and English alphabets are part of the Language program. Students use sandpaper letters to begin the tactile experience of learning the sounds. They then use the moveable alphabet to create words that match objects. Judaic teachers create these materials to ensure that Hebrew language is equally presented in the classroom.

Math activities work with the array of intriguing objects that Montessori designed in order to represent abstract mathematical concepts in the form of concrete objects. When children use the Montessori mathematics materials, they explore mathematical concepts using movement and their senses. Included in the Math exercises is the counting of Judaic objects, counting the days of the Omer, and counting the mitzvah leaves representing the daily mitzvot that the students perform.

Geography activities use maps and other materials to learn about landforms, con-

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learning that flows from these questions becomes the primary vehicle for classroom learning.

Informal/experiential education is often imagined in active terms with varied activities—singing, dancing, hiking, etc. However, theorists such as Dewey have pointed out that activity alone is insufficient to ensure educational impact. Rather, *reflection* on activity facilitates connections between new experiences and existing frameworks for understanding that provide the groundwork for meaning-making.

There are very simple, but potentially very powerful, techniques that can be implemented by classroom educators in this regard. Teachers can incorporate reflective activities that encourage students to ask “meta” questions such as, “What is one thing I learned today that I found particularly meaningful (or challenging, etc.)?” or “What surprised me at school today and why did I find it surprising?” Many schools have also established teacher-facilitated advisory groups in which teachers participate, thereby fostering a culture that supports students in making connections and in turn, making meaning.

Recent research in neurobiology has underscored what perceptive educators have known for some time: learning does not occur in a cognitive vacuum, but is deeply entwined with the personal dynamics of the learning context. Informal settings often excel in the latter arenas even as they question

In some schools, for example, Judaic studies teachers begin class by asking each student to “dedicate” the day’s study to honor or mark an event, person, or concern that is on their mind and which they share with the class. Many teachers have ritu-

tions of that community.

Using their own experiences as a basis for reflection, teachers can generalize to their work, considering why these hands-on experiences are so powerful and how a classroom setting can incor-

“Activity alone is insufficient for educational impact; *reflection* on activity facilitates connections between new experiences and existing frameworks for understanding.

als that mark transitions in classroom time, such as morning meeting, or a refocusing exercise after recess. Many educators have taken the advice in Ruth Charney’s book *Teaching Children to Care* and made community-building an intentional and transparent element of their work, regularly processing with students their progress in this arena. Asking teachers to attend to the “little things,” such as how they greet students when they enter the room, can make a big difference.

BRIDGING THEORY AND PRACTICE WITHIN TEACHER TRAINING

We find it very helpful to ask educators to think about their own education. For example, teachers can consider those experiences that have helped them grow professionally. It is likely that they will focus on times (whether in a pre-service program, student-teaching, formal or informal mentoring, etc.) when they had the opportunity to bridge theory and practice through fieldwork and re-

porate similar elements: How have they been engaged as co-intentional learners? How have they engaged in active reflection within their own learning? When have their socio-emotional needs been met and when have they not and what are the implications of each?

Further, teachers can reflect on the learning experiences and/or those educators they feel greatly shaped their lives as Jews (or other faith traditions). They notice commonalities that cut across educational settings: caring relationships with peers and educators, safety and support, an educator who knew their interests and built on them. They describe activities—in and out of schools—in which they felt deeply immersed and about which they were able to reflect and discuss with their peers. This discussion helps facilitate the disconnection of *practice* and *place*; the active ingredients of Jewish growth need not confine themselves to one particular type of setting. As they consider the elements that contributed to the power of their own past experiences, they can draw lessons on how to create a classroom that replicates those.

In conclusion, our vision is that informal/experiential education are not just popular buzzwords, and that incorporating these elements into a classroom is not just a matter of adding more fun and games. Rather, constructivist theory and attention to the *experience* of being a learner in a classroom calls for ongoing effort to create environments for Jewish growth. ■

“Teachers can generalize from their own lives, considering why hands-on experiences are so powerful, and how a classroom setting can incorporate similar elements.

how to incorporate “more content.” Day schools often confront the reverse challenge. Again, initial inroads are not difficult and can have a perceptible impact on the “feel” of a classroom.

reflection. Acquiring the complex range of competencies, knowledge, and attitudes needed to gain access to a community of professional educators requires active engagement with “real life” manifesta-

Lessons from Montessori for Jewish Day Schools

[CONTINUED FROM PAGE 61]

tinents, countries, and states. An example of this is learning directions, such as with the tent of Avraham. Also included in Geography is the study of Israel and the creation of pin-punched maps of the region.

Science activities introduce students to an array of scientific units that include biology, weather, nutrition, electricity, and ecology. Science experiments are performed in the classroom. Pupils learn about the concepts of floating and sinking in relationship to Noah as well as color mixing in relationship to the rainbow, and about the life cycle of a plant during Tu Bishvat.

It is the tactile manipulation of materials that reinforces the concrete learning within the Montessori classroom. The teachers cannot write manuals and use formal templates to assist in the creating the “perfect” Jewish education. Administration cannot provide a formal education for the staff in order for them to present an informal education to the students.

One day I was in a primary classroom performing a standard teacher observation. Frequently in Montessori classes the teacher is an observer as the students master their work. I sat back and watched my teachers as guides. They had provided the students with the materials and instruction necessary for them to complete lessons and then sat and merely guided them in the direction of the work. Students happily were preparing the besamim for havdalah in Practical Life, created a rainbow of colors in Science to correlate with the story of Noah, and were counting tzedakah that had been collected earlier.

I became curious to know if the children were simply playing, since this was a three to six year old classroom, or if they truly understood what lessons were being taught. Though I am a certified Montessori administrator, I regressed to my traditional school model and began to investigate through oral assessment of each child. Student after student informed

me of what work he or she was mastering and why it was important. One small child then reminded me that this is a Montessori classroom, and she needed her space to master her alphabet. Our students didn't need any formal, scripted work to gain a true understanding of the Jewish curriculum and how it created a strong Jewish identity. They only needed it to be introduced and to be granted the opportunity to literally “get their hands on it” in order to use the knowledge to help them grow.

Since this observation, I have learned to trust the students and their guides. I enjoy watching them blossom through tactile learning and through the support of the educators. I no longer find a need to stay up late at night scripting a text to be recited; I let their voices guide them. We have provided them with the materials and knowledge through activity. I can relax knowing that all children need is the access to this information, and they will thrive. ■

Anyone Can Have Gaucher Disease.



If you feel tired all the time, bruise and bleed easily or have bone pain, you could have Gaucher Disease (pronounced “Go-shay”) – a potentially fatal genetic disorder that can affect anyone, regardless of ethnicity, gender or age. Symptoms can be easily misdiagnosed or overlooked...but shouldn't be ignored.

Gaucher disease can cause:

- * Anemia
- * Fatigue
- * Easy Bruising and Bleeding
- * Nosebleeds
- * Osteoporosis
- * Bone pain and easily broken bones
- * Swollen stomach due to enlarged liver and/or spleen

Prevalence: The carrier rate for the genetic mutations which cause Gaucher Disease may be as high as 1 in 10 Jewish people of Eastern European ancestry, and 1 in 200 of the general population.

Ask your doctor about a simple diagnostic blood test and treatment options now available from Actelion, Genzyme and Shire.



Learn about the importance of early diagnosis, testing and treatment.

1- 888-275-8719 (toll free) or www.GaucherDisease.org/rav

Web Tools for Jewish Formal and Informal Experiential Education

[CONTINUED FROM PAGE 37]

the user-content Web, which enables the user to interact with websites. A Wiki is one type of interactive website where the users can easily create and edit pages. The most familiar example of a Wiki is Wikipedia, a free encyclopedia with a million and a half articles created by thousands of volunteers in just a few years.

Wikispaces, Google Sites, Socialtext, and pbworks are among the many free wiki applications available for education. Collaboration on a Wiki is an excellent means of developing classroom and school community. Writing and research projects can be developed, edited, and shared in one site. Pictures and video, as well as links to other websites can be added as enhancements. When complete, the Judaic knowledge product can then be archived and made available as a resource for future learners. One of the key principles of JIEE is student centered learning. Imagine the excitement and engagement of students who are empowered to collaboratively build such a repository of Judaic knowledge.

CREATIVE EXPRESSION

“Research strongly suggests that learning will be stronger and retrieval of information will be easier if more senses are involved” (Marilee Sprenger, *Brain-Based Teaching in the Digital Age*). The incorporation of technology in JIEE offers the opportunity to use multiple modalities. Beyond the written and verbal products produced in a blog or vlog (video blog), the student can be involved in:

- Writing and producing music: Garageband, Audacity
- Producing and filming video: YouTube, Vimeo, Extranormal, Screenflow, iMovie
- Creating digital posters: Glogster
- Building presentations: Power Point, Keynote, Prezi

- Editing, annotating and sharing photo collections: Photoshop, Flickr
- Creating cartoons and comic strips: Toondoo, Comic Life
- Designing and playing games: GameSalad, Gamestar Mechanic

These are just a few examples of the types of work product that can be included in a student’s digital portfolio. As schools begin to adopt alternative forms of assessment digital portfolios that follow the student from grades K through 12 will become normative.

“Since Jewish education aims to cultivate identity and connection, Jewish educators should be in the vanguard of social network use in the Jewish community.”

Pew research has found that 97% of today’s teens play video games. These games are interactive, long and complex, yet teens find them highly engaging and motivational. Good learning principles, like strategic thinking, discovery and problem solving, are often key ingredients in the gaming experience making them an educational ally for the savvy teacher. Games can also provide opportunities for “transformational play,” where the student “becomes a protagonist who uses the knowledge, skills, and concepts embedded in curricular content to make sense of a fictional situation and make choices that transform that situation” (Barab, Gresalfi, and Arici). Quest Atlantis, SvivaIsrael.org, and ActiveWorlds.com are examples of 3D immersive online environments where curricular goals can be met. An online search for educational games, serious games, or games4change.org will provide a wealth of resources for use in the classroom.

Game design is another popular arena for the development of logic, critical think-

ing skills and learning by doing. GameSalad and Gamestar Mechanic are two examples of programs that have been developed with the classroom in mind.

CUSTOMIZATION

Technology has been a boon to special education, enabling schools and communities to be more inclusive and attentive to the needs of differentiated learners. Assistive technologies like voice recognition programs, touch screens, and optical scanners are among the many tools now available for students with physical disabilities. Mobile devices, like iPad and iPod, offer a wide range

of affordable programs to support student learning. Even universally available programs like Word contain tools that can help slower learners succeed. For example, the AutoSummarize option will highlight key points in a text or create an executive summary. Windows also comes with a basic screen reader called Narrator. For more information about these and other tools visit <http://windows.microsoft.com/en-US/windows/help/accessibility>.

Jewish tradition suggests that we educate our children by beginning in their own starting place. Whether that means addressing the interests or abilities of the students, the use of technology in a JIEE learning environment offers a rich array of opportunities for students of all ages.

CONCLUSION

The rubric or “keys” to educational technology described in this article have been described individually as a means of simplifying a vast and growing field for novice technology users.

The five Cs, Connectivity, Communication, Collaboration, Creative Expression, and Customization, are rarely found in isolation. The beauty of these tools lies in the connective capacity of Web 2.0. The social networks, communication platforms, knowledge and media storage applications, collaborative tools, media creation devices, and supportive technologies frequently mix together to form what is called the Personal Learning Network (PLN). A PLN launched in the context of a Jewish school has the capacity to grow and endure throughout the student's lifetime.

Appropriate application of this technology, as through a Jewish Integrated Experiential Education program, can have a multiplier effect on the educational ef-

forts of the school and the individual. We have the opportunity for learning that is unbound by geography, unfettered by limited budgets, and unchained from traditional textbooks. It is an exciting prospect as long as we can continue to respond to the questioners in the same way that Rabbi Akiva did, with consistent clarity of purpose: that of delivering effective Jewish education rooted in Jewish values and tradition. ■

TO LEARN MORE

To see a listing of web tools, tutorials, and classroom applications, many referred to in this article, go here for A (animation tools) to M (music tools): <http://tinyurl.com/WebTools4Ed1>, and here for P (painting and drawing tools) to

W (word collage tools): <http://tinyurl.com/WebTools4Ed2>.

Barab, S., Gresalfi, M. & Arici, A., "Why Educators Should Care About Games," *Educational Leadership*, 67:1.

Lenhart, A., "Teens, Video Games and Civics," *Pew Internet & American Life Project*.

Solomon, Richard, "Linking the Silos Between Jewish Formal and Informal Education: Jewish Integrated Experiential Education."

For a more elaborate explanation of Jewish integrated experiential learning activities, go to <http://tinyurl.com/3h83x3d> and <http://tinyurl.com/4ygd39y>.



RAVSAC's Task Force on Hebrew Language Charter Schools Moves Forward

As Hebrew language charter schools (HLCs) arise in communities across the United States, they have added to the array of choices that parents face when making education decisions. In response to this change to the education marketplace, Jewish day schools have recognized the need to clarify the distinctive values of a Jewish day school education.

RAVSAC has convened a Task Force on Hebrew Language Charter Schools to explore the impact of the HLCS movement on Jewish education nationwide. This past June, 50 people took part in a webinar that explored the philosophy and branches of the charter school movement, mapped the locations of current and soon-to-open Hebrew language charter schools and fostered an open discussion about the interests and needs of the day school field.

RAVSAC's Task Force has divided into

three working groups, which meet monthly via phone to work together to tackle three critical areas:

Advocacy: This group focuses on making the case for Jewish day schools, including a clear articulation of the value of Jewish day school education in relation to other options.

Research: This group researches Hebrew language charter schools, including current and prospective schools and locations, as well as gathering information on their impact on both local communities and enrollment at local Jewish day schools.

Professional Development: This group examines current professional development opportunities in the general marketplace in both pedagogy training and content training in service of keeping Jewish day schools strong. It also studies existing implementations of day school professional development.

We are pleased to announce that Jerry Isaac-Shapiro, Head of School at The Agnon School in Cleveland, Ohio, and Tammy Fayne, Board Secretary at David Posnack Jewish Day School in Davie, Florida, have agreed to co-chair the Task Force as well as the Advocacy Work Group. Additionally, we welcome Dr. Larry Kutler, Scholar in Residence at San Diego Jewish Academy, as chair of the Research Work Group and Dr. Ray Levi, Head of School at the Heilicher Minneapolis Jewish Day School, as chair of the Professional Development Work Group.

We invite you to join a work group and help schools respond in a proactive and productive way to the challenges and opportunities presented by HLCs. Please email HLCS@ravsak.org to sign up, to share your thoughts or to learn more. And look for the session hosted by the Task Force at the upcoming conference in Atlanta! ■

Why I Teach in a Jewish School

■ by **SCOTT CULCLASURE**

Ten years ago I made a risky career move. Leaving the public school where my reputation as a teacher was secure, I came to the newly-forming American Hebrew Academy in Greensboro, North Carolina. A pluralistic Jewish boarding school erected on a suburban campus in a southern city—as if this was not enough of a venture, one additional consideration gave me great pause: I am not a Jew.

Growing up in Greensboro, I understood the deep and rich heritage of Jewish business acumen and philanthropy in this city. This was the place, after all, given international standing over a century ago by the Cone brothers and their cotton mills. Greensboro elected a Jewish mayor nearly two generations before choosing one who was African-American. Two vibrant congregations continue to contribute in out-sized ways to the community.

All things Jewish, however, I knew only from a distance, which is to say I did not know them very well. For me, “Jewish” was embodied in learning to dance “Hava nagila” in elementary school and listening with a child’s amusement to the arguments over politics between my father and our neighbor, a Jewish refugee from Germany, which often ended with the two of them sharing a beer.

Jews were also few and far between at the school where I had made my career. One

happy exception was a rabbi’s daughter, who introduced me to the warmth of her synagogue’s congregational life by inviting me to a Shabbat service at which she read Torah. As I walked into the sanctuary, an unseen hand clapped a kippah on my head; I had no idea I should be wearing one! My student also introduced me and my history classes to a survivor of the Holocaust and an army veteran who helped liberate a concentration camp.

When, therefore, many years later, a colleague called to say he had taken a position at the Academy, I thought I was prepared to consider submitting my own application, but uncertainty over how I would fit into such an environment nearly overwhelmed me. Here was a school, after all, dedicated to the idea of raising up youths to be the next generation’s leaders in ways that reflected their heartfelt Judaism. The school’s founder—Maurice “Chico” Sabbah (z”l)—had poured a fortune into making this dream a reality. What could I contribute, even if my place was simply to teach history in the secular division of the school’s curriculum? Perhaps even my presence in a community literally bounded by a green fence would be problematic.

So why do it? There was no denying the attractiveness of the opportunity to help create a new school with a level of resources rarely available to a classroom teacher. But I found myself drawn to something more intangible than classrooms equipped with

computer technology and outfitted with learning tables. Just as real and much more significant was Mr. Sabbah’s dream that Jewish adolescents should pursue their own intellectual and moral development while simultaneously creating a community in which to learn from those who understandings of Jewishness were different. The dream gained potency from the hope that in learning these things young people would help repair the world, fulfilling the promise made first to Abraham that in his family all the families of the earth would be blessed.

Dreams are full of risks because they take us to unfamiliar places. Those brave enough to share their risk being labeled as cranks, and yet a dream dies with its dreamer unless it is shared. Mr. Sabbah lived long enough to hear from those who regarded his idea for this school as preposterous and to witness how his vision inspired others to dare new things. What he did reminds me of what Tom Paine, pamphleteer of the Revolution, famously declared in *Common Sense*: “We have the power to begin the world over again.” Now, writing these lines in the midst of the Days of Awe, I am struck anew by how the school’s mission speaks a prophetic voice that can attract us all. ■

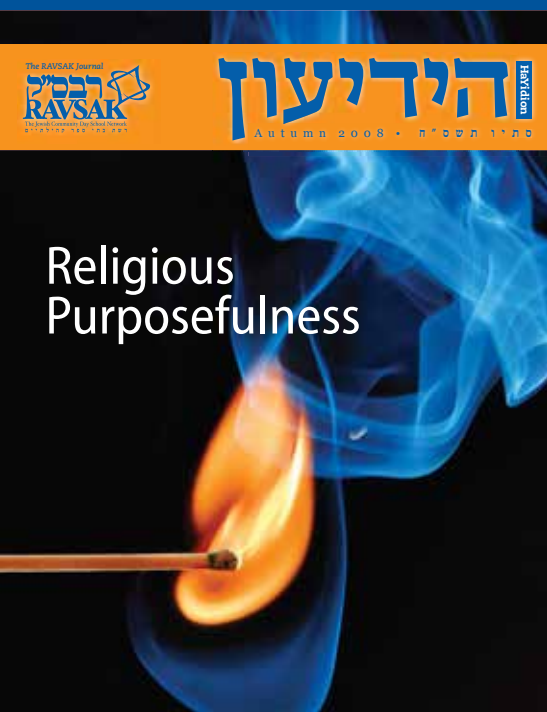
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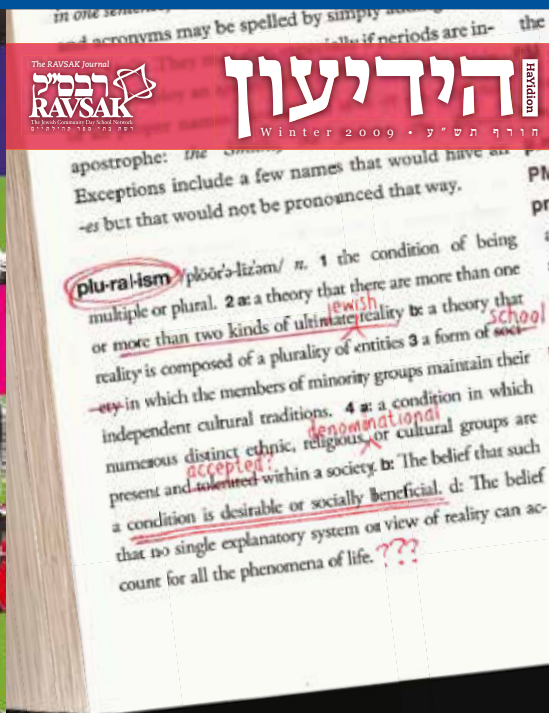
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