

The RAVSAK Journal

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The Jewish Community Day School Network
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iSchool

HaYidion: The RAVSAK Journal

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From the Editor

by **BARBARA DAVIS**

IN 1943, Thomas Watson, chairman of IBM, said, “I think there is a world market for maybe five computers.” In 1949, *Popular Mechanics* forecast “the relentless march of science” and predicted that “computers in the future may weigh no more than one and a half tons.” In 1968, an engineer at the Advanced Computing Systems division of IBM asked in regard to the microchip, “but what . . . is it good for?” And in 1977, the chairman and founder of Digital Equipment Corporation stated unequivocally, “There is no reason anyone would want a computer in their home.” As the long-defunct cigarette commercial used to say, “We’ve come a long way, baby!”

When I went to the North American Jewish Day School Leadership Conference this January, my small Jewish community day school had a website, a Facebook page for its alumni association, was wireless and utilized technology in its classrooms and its clubs. We googled and froogled and emailed and ordered online all the time. I thought we were sitting relatively pretty until I sat through our plenary session. Suddenly the world of moodles, wikis, Googledocs, way back machines, Twitter and tweeting was laid out before me. It was exciting, even thrilling, to see how tech-

nology was invading, altering and affecting our educational world. Many in the



DR. BARBARA DAVIS
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room were delighted by the innovations; a significant number were appalled. But as we all know, progress cannot be stopped, and as one of our conference speakers exhorted: “Don’t stand by—step forward!”

Corrections

This issue of *HaYidion* will allow us all to long for a Golden Age in the 21st century. Its articles speak to the challenges of this time, to utilize the new technologies in the content of our Jewish education by line on page 1. new age media to age old learning. Incorporating theoretic-

Now, more than ever before, does your support of RAVSAK matter. Give to RAVSAK.

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From the Desk of Arnee Winshall, RAVSAK Chair

THE energy, stimulation and excitement are still palpable from the first North American Jewish Day School Leadership Conference. I doubt I will forget the experience, especially being installed during the momentous transition ceremony as the Chair of the first RAVSAK Board of Directors.

I know I reflect the sentiments of the new board members when I say that I am both privileged and humbled by this opportunity. Privileged because of the leadership with whom I get to work—

New Board members: Paul Levitch, President of Levitch Associates in Louisville, Kentucky; Lesley Zafran, President of Donna Klein Jewish Academy in Boca Raton, Florida; Bruce Powell, founding Head of School of New Community Jewish High School in West Hills, California, and continuing her irreplaceable work on the Board, Barbara Davis, Head of School of the Syracuse Hebrew Day School in Central New York.

Past Executive Committee members, who with grace and wisdom have mentored us, and who have pledged to continue their active participation on committees that will further the success of RAVSAK and help to create its future.

And, the professional team headed by Marc Kramer who, in quiet, passionately and rigorously often achieve the impossible.

Humbled, because not only does our work build on that of the leadership who preceded us and transformed RAVSAK into one of the preeminent day school organizations over the last 24 years, but even more because of the opportunities and challenges that lie before us and the new realities that will shape the future of Jewish education. Whether it is playing the key role in the recent conference, producing each issue of *HaYidion* or running high-impact programs like SuLaM, schools across

the country look to RAVSAK for leadership, support, guidance, and vision.

In the words of Susan Weintrob, past chair of the Executive Committee,



Arnee Winshall is the 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.

“Genuine leadership provides a vision that gives us meaning and purpose. This vision inspires us to have the courage to support change when needed, to find purpose in our lives and to teach those around us to be leaders themselves. This is the vision of RAVSAK.”

RAVSAK is an organization that was created of, by and for its constituent schools. On behalf of the new Board, we are proud to join the ranks of those ensuring that the future of day school education remains vibrant and strong.

B'khavod,

Arnee Winshall

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A close-up photograph of a stack of matzah, showing the characteristic ridged texture and golden-brown color. The text is overlaid on the image.

חג פסח שמח

We at RAVSAK wish you and your loved ones a Happy Passover!

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those smart
kids who
wanted to
change the
world?**



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JEWISH EDUCATION FOR THE JEWISH FUTURE

Student as Contributor: The Digital Learning Farm

by **ALAN NOVEMBER**

YEARS ago, when farms dominated our landscape, children were responsible for performing meaningful jobs that were vital to each family's success. Depending on their age, children would care for animals, repair farm equipment, prepare food to sell at local markets, and more. Children were essential to the very survival of the family. At the same time, these jobs taught children the value of hard work, leading them to become more productive citizens within their communities as adults.

As mechanized tools and other advances developed, the work of children was replaced. To prepare for the industrial economy, students were required to attend school where teachers became central figures and where children took on more passive roles within their communities. Children's contributions to their community shifted to the responsibility of completing schoolwork. This continuing trend contradicts a fundamental human need that draws us to make contributions to our communities.

We have come full circle as globalization quickly becomes the norm, and it may now be essential for our students to compete with peers from around the world. Today, we can restore the dignity and integrity of the child as a contributor.

Across the country, pioneering teachers are providing students with new roles that have students contributing to their learning communities. We have powerful, easy-to-use tools such as screencasting and podcasting that give students opportunities to contribute content to the class. At the same time we can also provide them with rigorous and more motivating assignments and better prepare them to become more productive in our new global economy. It's an exciting time. The six jobs described below outline creative ways that your students can make valuable contributions to their learning community. While these jobs can be successfully implemented individually, it is in bringing them together in harmony that we can create a more balanced vision of teaching and learning.

TUTORIAL DESIGNERS

Students from Lincoln Middle School in Santa Monica, California, have energized their school through the use of screencasted tutorials. Through the leadership of their teacher, Eric Marcos, these kids have begun documenting their learning by recording themselves solving problems based on material discussed in class.

Marcos has been using Camtasia (www.techsmith.com) with his class to allow students to record the actions being performed on their computer screens while also recording their explanations about how to solve each problem. When completed, these movies are uploaded and become part of an online database that Marcos'

students—and anyone else around the world—can access at any time. Another option by TechSmith that is free and equally as powerful is Jing (www.jing-project.com). With this software, and a single click of the mouse, students can



Alan November is an international leader in education technology; his humor and wit push the boundaries of how to improve teaching and learning. He can be reached at alan@novemberlearning.com.

begin recording their work easily and at any time.

Marcos has found this task to be so motivating that he has worked to build a new YouTube-like Web site (www.mathtrain.tv) that he and the rest of his school's math department use to share the growing number of screencasts that students are creating. He has found that allowing students to create material for this site increases engagement and provides struggling students with more opportunities for reviewing troubling concepts.

OFFICIAL SCRIBES

Do all of your students take excellent notes every day? What if there were online collaboration tools that would give your class the opportunity to collaboratively build one set of perfect notes? Using a shared blog, wiki, or another collaborative writing tool like Google Docs (<http://docs.google.com>) students can share this responsibility and create a detailed set of notes that the entire class can use.

Darren Kuropatwa, a high-school calculus teacher, has transformed his class-



room from individual students working on “their stuff” to a collaborative learning community. His “scribe of the day” program (http://adifference.blogspot.com/2006/11/distributed-teaching-and-learning_21.html) has been a great success. Each day, a new student is responsible for taking notes and collecting diagrams that become part of his class’ online calculus textbook.

Kuropatwa has found success with this program, as students who never took notes in the past are now doing so knowing that their peers depend on what is published on the class blog. At the same time, students who struggle to take good notes are getting better as they see constant high-quality models being posted by others.

RESEARCHERS

Many classrooms have one computer sitting in the back that gets very little use. What if that computer became the official research station where one student each

day was responsible for finding answers to all the questions in class—including the teacher’s?

This might not sound imaginative, but it can be very effective. Each day, assign a different student to sit by that computer. When questions come up during class, it is that student’s responsibility to search out the correct answer. Once sites are found that give details about the questions being asked, you might consider adding it to your own search engine built using Google’s Custom Search Engine creator (www.google.com/coop/cse/).

This search engine can be designed to meet standards, coordinate with your curriculum, and include sites from reputable resources. Imagine creating a Global Warming Search Engine that cuts through the hype on both sides of the issue and only accesses factual information from NASA, NOAA and other scientific research organizations.

Don’t expect this to work easily right from

the beginning. Most educators know that there is a great amount of misinformation online and acknowledge that students don’t always use the most effective search techniques. Understanding this makes this student job that much more important. We should be providing students with guided opportunities and teachable moments that allow them to practice and hone their research skills.

COLLABORATION COORDINATORS

Not long ago it was cost prohibitive to have your class connect with other classes and subject experts around the world. That time is gone! In an ever-shrinking world, we now have free access to make these very connections.

Using Skype (www.skype.com), a collaboration team could be responsible for establishing and maintaining working relationships with classrooms around the

[CONTINUED ON PAGE 8]

[CONTINUED FROM PAGE 7]

world via the Internet. How can you leverage that power?

Prior to a discussion of the American Revolution, charge your collaboration team with finding a class of British students who would be willing to interact with them concerning the issues that led to the start of the Revolutionary War. How many eyes do you think would be opened by the differing views that arise during the debate?

Connections can also be established with experts who might be willing to talk to your students regarding other meaningful topics. For example, middle school students from one Chicago suburb were learning about the effects of globalization. Their teacher, Andrea Trudeau, could have provided students with only a short passage from a textbook or a few magazine articles. Instead, she facilitated a project that had her students creating interview questions for an American factory owner who felt he had to outsource his production to China as well as a businessman in China who was managing a factory for the American market (<http://dps109.wikispaces.com/Skype>).

The questions the students developed became a part of a series of interviews that were recorded and provided students with a learning experience that went far beyond any textbook or article. This project attracted a global audience, including a teacher in the United Kingdom who repurposed this material with his class as they were discussing similar issues.

Hundreds of other opportunities like this are waiting for any adventurous group of students looking for opportunities to bring the world into the classroom.

CONTRIBUTING TO SOCIETY

It's almost impossible to watch TV or listen to the radio today without hearing about issues in countries around the world. While they do seem distant, these issues are important, and we can use them to teach students about social justice and empathy.

Kiva (www.kiva.com) is one of today's most important social responsibility Web sites. This site opens the doors of learning and gives students the opportunity to make a small but meaningful difference in the lives of others.

Through this site, your class can join others in making small loans to entrepreneurs in developing countries who are trying to make better lives for themselves and their families. These loans are repaid over time as students are kept up to date on the successes and



Many classrooms have one computer sitting in the back that gets very little use. What if that computer became the official research station for finding answers to all the questions in class—including the teacher's?

struggles of those to whom they have invested contributions.

You might consider pulling together a team that searches out investments the class finds important and relates to their current studies. They might organize snack sales or penny drives while educating other classes about their mission. This team then works with the research team to investigate what is happening in these other parts of the world. They might work with the collaboration coordinators to find experts whom they can talk to about how loans work.

The learning cycle can go on and on as loans are repaid and reinvested. Your students can be tracking the results of their micro-investments long after the school year has ended.

CURRICULUM REVIEWERS

As the resources above come together, the curriculum review team jumps into action to create material that can be used for continuous review. This team combines visual and audio components into podcasts that can be posted online for individuals to download into their mp3 players.

Bob Sprankle and his class from Wells Elementary School in Wells, Maine, are

quite well known for doing exactly this. Their Room 208 Podcast burst onto the scene several years ago and provided classes with a fantastic model that can be duplicated by others. Weekly, during their snack time, Sprankle's students organized, recorded and edited their podcasts before publishing them to a global audience (www.bobsprankle.com/podcasts/0506/rm208vodcast.mov).

If you plan to attempt this, you may want to get your school to purchase a few generic mp3 players that can be used by

students who might not have their own. These devices can be loaded up at school with podcasts that cover multiple courses, and the material on these players can be accessed anywhere, at any time.

CONCLUSION

In some ways, the idea of the digital farm and the jobs outlined above is counter to the current policies of many schools where community tools are routinely blocked on the network. The opportunity before us is much too valuable for this to continue.

If our children are to grow up to make important contributions to our society, it is essential that we provide them with powerful tools and experiences across the curriculum. This will require a new culture of teaching and learning that engages students as contributors. Our students have already chosen tools such as MySpace and Facebook for their own communications and social interaction. Now is the time to take elements of these tools and provide students with the appropriate role models of how to use them to make important and rigorous contributions to their own school and beyond. If we do not teach students social responsibility and ethics, then our worst fears of children abusing these tools will come true.

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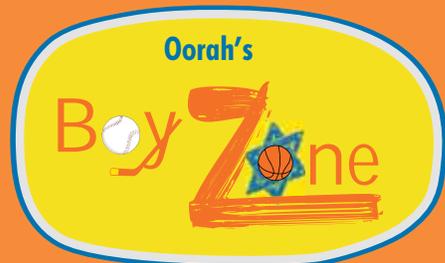


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Into Tomorrow: Moving the Educational Debate

by IAN JUKES

DURING a recent break from my travels I had put some time aside to learn how to use one of the new electronic toys I'd bought on a recent trip. I thought that being a reasonably educated person, having taught at almost all levels of education and being somewhat technologically adept would more than prepare me to learn to use a simple gadget.

Nothing could be further from the truth. I read the manual and understood very little. At first glance the instructions appeared to be written in tongues. By someone who spoke English as a 37th language.

So I decided to do what any educated person does based on my training. I broke the instructions down into even smaller pieces in order to understand what to do.

The problem was that breaking the instructions down into pieces didn't help because nothing about learning about this gadget was linear.

I did the tutorial and learned a few techniques, but when I tried to do the same thing on my own, I found myself in a whole new situation with no prescription for what to do next.

My son Kyler kept chuckling and telling me how proud he was to see me struggling with what people of his and our generations all over the globe are attempting to do.

This was learning unlike anything I'd experienced in school or, when it comes right down to it, unlike anything I had allowed my students to experience—what I call ready, fire, aim or making it up as you go learning.

And although I'm an author who writes and presents about the need to change how young people are taught in prepara-

tion for the Information Age, this event brought me face to face with my own non-digital "programming."

I simply had no past experiences that



Ian Jukes, Director of the InfoSavvy Group, a Canadian-based consulting company, is a speaker and educator who has given presentations to over 8,000 clients in 70 countries in the past decade. He can be reached at ijukes@mindspring.com.

would support learning by searching for the critical patterns, feeling free to experience ambiguity and uncertainty and experimenting and allowing myself to fail in the process of learning.

Despite being a vocal advocate for this type of education, I found it extremely difficult to walk my talk and to act or take



the lead as a learner. The entire venture has left me more convinced than ever that the way we are teaching in our education system is fundamentally flawed.

Much of what we do in schools is simply wrong if we want students to succeed in an age of technology and InfoWhelm where organizing information and continuous learning are increasingly critical skills.

Clearly the public has every right to expect higher standards from our student, for teachers to do better at teaching the basics, and ensure that all kids are technologically and informationally literate if not fluent.

But hidden behind these expectations are powerful assumptions about what schools should look like based on our own collective experiences in the schools of our youth.

Genuinely new solutions are hard to envision because so few of us can imagine the age for which this generation needs to prepare. Most of us grew up in the industrial era, and yet in less than five years, only 8% of the population will be working in industry.

We lived and grew up in schools modeled after the factory, and, by and large those schools worked. The problem is that much has changed while our schools have not. In order to really understand the changing nature of education, we need only ask local schools why all children are “herded” it to a large building or site, and why subjects, regardless of how simple or complex they are, have been fragmented into “periods” lasting from 45 to 60 minutes.

Why does the teacher typically divide and deliver “lessons” on topics dictated by an outside agency of one kind or another? Why are learning activities often

unrelated to student interests, purposes and meaning? Why is testing still limited to paper/pencil tests that largely ignore genuine performance?

Why does the teacher...

Why do the teacher, the school, and various administrative and political bodies retain the sole authority over instructional materials, class organization and teaching methods? Why is significant teacher time taken up with classroom management—maintaining order, monitoring student work and conducting quizzes? Despite a whole class setting, much of the time students essentially work and achieve alone, with virtually no opportunity for small group collaborative work.

Little time is spent on commending and correcting students, or on guidance for

improved performance. Students have limited exposure to primary sources of information, relevant technology, field trips, outside presenters and little hands-on contact with subject matter beyond the printed page.

The truth is that the purpose and assumptions behind the current approach to schooling has long been forgotten. Assembly line procedures with pay for “work done” (grades), time lines (due dates and paper/pencil tests) and rewards (promotion) are so deeply entrenched that we no longer question them.

And unless we are willing to examine the assumptions that underpin these fundamental “basics” and reinvent schools and education at a deeper level, there is the real danger that all of efforts we are mak-

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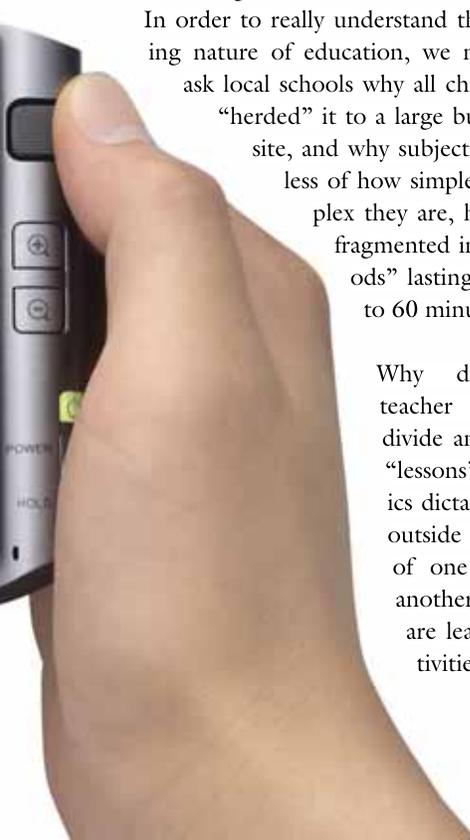


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ing to raise standards and test scores may just be us rearranging the proverbial deck chairs on the Titanic.

In reality, it's our collective beliefs, our mental models about education and learning, which are grounded in the Industrial Age that is actually keeping education spinning its wheels at precisely the time that there is the great-

cific topics and content to be "covered" at different grade levels—that there is a specific set of standards that students need to know and be able to regurgitate on demand in order to be an educated person.

At the same time they are ignoring most of the literature, music, art, science and knowledge that has been added to the human front in the last 30 years; not to mention what we have learned about

The new age of InfoWhelm and the "flat world" are already bringing with it the need to communicate both locally and internationally with different individuals of varying cultures, and different perceptions. If today's students are going to effectively operate in this new global economy, education will have to look different than it does now.

There are schools all over this nation (albeit a very small number) where students are already learning through complex experiences that require that they apply and use knowledge.

These experiences range from replicating the Amazon jungle (down to the topography, rivers, plants, animal species and insects) with basic materials to designing products, creating bike paths, printing newsletters and newspaper columns, designing space stations or following the paths of birds and animals on the endangered species list to name but a few.

Students do this in groups and individually. Their work includes math, writing, reading, computer know-how and sophisticated research, communication and interpersonal skills. Skilled teachers guide their projects, as substantive questions, insist on the inclusion of critical skills and continually urge students on to higher standards.

Students are also allowed to determine their own learning goals in consultation with an expert adult, and to measure their learning in relationship to those goals. Although traditional paper and pencil test are

est need to change our collective thinking.

These mental models have become deeply entrenched, unexamined beliefs about how the world works. In terms of schools, these collective assumptions dictate what schools should look like, what teachers should do, how students learn and how that learning should be assessed.

We accept these mental models in large part because, despite the fact that many educators will acknowledge that the world has changed and continues to change, the existing educational model "worked" for us.

When our generation of adults went to school, society as a whole could agree on what students should learn and what an educated person should know. Much of what we still are teaching in our schools is based on this view.

Even decades ago however, major researchers in several fields were lamenting the fact that it was impossible to keep up with the information explosion.

Today, anyone who wants to maintain relevancy and marketability as a professional must continue to learn on an ongoing basis. And because there is simply too much information, we no longer expect to "know it all."

Yet traditional educators still insist on spe-

history, archaeology, geology and other many other fields since technology and advanced dating and research tools have been with us.

Even more daunting is that according to some estimates, by the year 2010 the amount of unique new data and information in our world will be doubling every two weeks.

How does today's prescribed curriculum prepare students to live in a world where massive amounts of information are available at the touch of a button?

Learning can no longer be defined by the amount of "stuff" we know and recall, but by how well we can access the appropriate knowledge

“ Unless we are willing to examine our assumptions and reinvent schools and education at a deeper level, there is the real danger that all of efforts we are making to raise standards may just be us rearranging the proverbial deck chairs on the Titanic.

and information necessary, and then use it to complete real life task, inventing new approaches to solve real problems in the process.

included, genuine performance is critical, these students are doing what any successful citizen and worker in the Information Age will be doing and will need to know.



Much of what we do in schools is simply wrong if we want students to succeed in an age of technology and InfoWhelm where organizing information and continuous learning are increasingly critical skills.



Unless we are willing to examine our assumptions and reinvent schools and education at a deeper level, there is the real danger that all of efforts we are making to raise standards may just be us rearranging the proverbial deck chairs on the Titanic.

Time lines are flexible and determined by specific tasks. Breaks are taken on an “as needed” basis. Knowing how to find information is as critical as the information itself. Many sources for learning and information are utilized. Individuals work with others as they plan, coordinate and cooperate. They also access their own creativity, acquire self-discipline and come to believe in their own abilities.

Let’s contrast this with a classroom deeply steeped in almost exclusively replicating WHAT the teacher decides to be important and marked by an environment where the curriculum is fragmented into courses, topics to be mastered and test be taken.

At the heart of this type of teaching is an almost pervasive meaninglessness and lack of purpose. In an age of unlimited access to information, students are steeped in a curriculum unrelated to the world they

experience outside of school.

Is it any wonder that they must be controlled or that classroom management and student discipline is of growing necessity? The difference between the 21st century school and the Industrial Age school are staggering.

Real education reform cannot succeed until the adults in charge of education have a new mental model that embraces the future. The answers are already there.

But in order to move ahead, teachers not only need to have expertise in their respective disciplines, they need to know how to engage students in meaningful, complex learning experiences.

To do this, teachers will need help in moving away from an outdated factory approach to teaching. And in order to

do this, they need support and guidance, not edicts and mixed messages. Teachers also need to have the opportunity to work together as professionals in their schools. They need to experience the conditions for 21st century learning we want them to provide for students and to develop the skills that they themselves will be expected to teach their students.

Genuine meaningful change means not succumbing to the seductive certainties of the past or assuming that the future will be a natural extension of that past.

Only by challenging our assumptions about ourselves and embracing the future one step at a time will we move our schools from where they are to where they truly need to be.

It won’t be easy, but do we really want to do less? ¿

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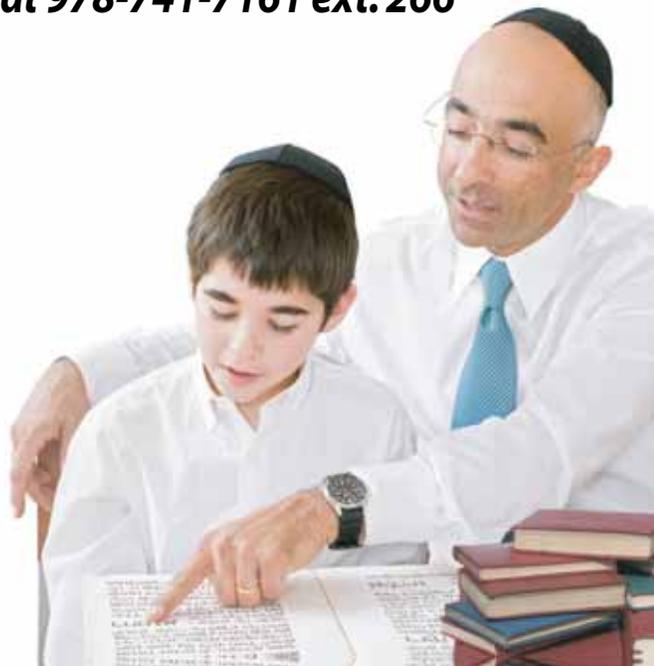
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Off-Line Human Contact in the Digital Age

by **GARY SMALL**

MANY young people who are entering the work force today have perfected their skills for gathering and manipulating vast amounts of information and images on the Internet, but all that solitary computer time leaves their brains less exposed to the vital stimulation of face-to-face social interaction. These young tech-savvy Digital Natives often need to fine-tune their people skills. Many could use a refresher course in direct communication, including basic lessons in eye contact, empathic listening, and interpreting and responding to non-verbal cues during conversation.

Some young people have become challenged beyond fundamental social skills—they have gotten so isolated in their digital cocoons that they fall short in their essential knowledge of the practical world. In response to this educational need, many colleges have introduced courses on paying taxes, doing laundry, preparing meals, balancing a checkbook, and even dining out and using proper manners. The high-tech revolution has disrupted much of the basic life-skills learning that in prior generations would have taken place in almost any tight-knit family. Today, nuclear family members may still live under one roof, but they often substitute cyber interactions for traditional social exchanges with relatives and friends.

Chronic Internet use may produce symptoms of loneliness, confusion, anxiety, depression, fatigue, and addiction, which in turn may further erode users' social skills. The anonymous and isolated nature of online communication does not provide the feedback that reinforces direct human interaction. For example, an email message has a built-in delay prior to a response, allowing the responders time to think about how they wish to phrase their response and what style they want to convey it in. This delay can reinforce social inhibition.

By contrast, spontaneous face-to-face reactions from others help shape our own intuitive responses. Over time, these interactions create an accepted array of behavioral social norms, such as how to greet a stranger or co-worker or how to dine at an elegant dinner party. Corresponding brain neural circuitry controls each of these complex behaviors and social interactions.

Recent neuroscience points to pathways in the brain that are necessary to hone interpersonal skills, empathic abilities and effective personal instincts. In Digital Natives who have been raised on technology, these interpersonal neural pathways are often left unstimulated and under-developed. However, electronic overexposure leading to altered neural pathways and waning social skills can happen at any age. Baby boomers and other Digital Immigrants also run the risk of becoming so immersed in the Internet and other

new technologies that they experience a social and emotional distancing between themselves and their families and spouses.

Brain scanning research has not only isolated the neural networks that define our humanity, it also shows that we can take control and train our brains to refine our human behavior and social skills. Not



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only can our face-to-face communication talents improve with off-line training, but other complex mental abilities may sharpen as well. This type of training can include playing chess, learning a new language, taking up painting, or any number of methods of flexing the brain muscle in new and non-technological ways.

Brain function generally does decline with age. It may take older people longer to learn new information and recall it later; however, some abilities improve with age: vocabulary, language skills, expert know-how and emotional stability are among them. Thanks to life-long brain training as we age, our experiences get stored into neural circuits or mental templates that help us solve complex problems quickly and with little mental effort.

Dr. Arthur Kramer of University of Illinois and colleagues at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology studied older air traffic controllers and found that their reaction speeds, as well as memory and attention abilities, were worse than those of younger co-workers. But when Kramer tested the study volunteers on realistic, complex and

fast-paced tasks, the more-experienced traffic controllers out-performed their younger associates. They had the mental muscle to juggle multiple bits of information at a rapid pace. Their years of experience compensated for other areas of age-related cognitive decline.

An older, well-trained brain can recognize new situations and problems as similar to previous ones it has already solved and use that prior knowledge to work out the current quandary. By contrast, the untrained younger mind may use a more linear, step-by-step approach. One might argue that Digital Natives will learn some of this complex problem-solving online, but it will likely be limited to the mental skills developed for the computer application that is used repeatedly, and may not carry over to other contexts or real-life situations.

Years of face-to-face social interactions train mature people how to control their emotions, particularly feelings like impatience and anger that can lead to interpersonal conflicts. Professor Leanne Williams of the University of Sydney used functional MRI scanning to reveal the strengthened neural circuitry that older brains develop. Her team demonstrated that the medial frontal area of the brain—just behind the forehead—was more active in older volunteers than in younger ones when they experienced negative emotions.

Other research by Dr. Thomas Hess of North Carolina State University has demonstrated the so-called *emotional intelligence* of the socially experienced, mature brain. His group found that older research subjects were better able to judge character traits such as honesty, kindness, intelligence, or deception, and to ignore irrelevant details about another person, when compared with younger volunteers. Additional studies support the idea that a mature brain is more resilient and less prone to sadness and depression. Government scientists have found that older adults in their sixties and seventies report fewer sad days per month compared with people in their twenties.

Intervention studies using PET scans show that various forms of talk therapies can influence brain activation patterns. In depressed patients, psychotherapy stimulates

certain brain regions known to control mood deep within the brain. Obsessive-compulsive patients who respond to therapy show decreased activity in the caudate nucleus and other deep brain areas. The psychological insights gained from discussing personal thoughts, feelings, and problems with a trained therapist can activate additional brain regions, which control thinking and problem solving (frontal lobe), as well as memory and emotions (temporal lobe). All of these psychotherapeutic interventions involve language and face-to-face contact, which contrasts greatly to the brain stimulation that comes from exposure to a computer or video screen.

Off-line brain training may counteract many negative consequences of extensive time online, particularly the neglect of a healthy lifestyle. Chronic Internet and technology users generally exercise less, gain weight, and experience more stress related to multitasking compared with people who rarely use technology. Our UCLA group studied what happens when instead of constantly manipulating hand-held devices and computers, research subjects adopted a healthier lifestyle. We recruited primarily middle-aged volunteers to follow a healthy lifestyle program consisting of cardiovascular conditioning, memory exercises, relaxation techniques, and a healthy brain diet. After just two weeks, we found significant improvements in memory scores, as well as dramatic changes on their PET scans demonstrating increased mental efficiency in the front part of the brain, which controls short-term memory and complex reasoning.

As the lure of technology distracts people of all ages from their usual personal interactions, their neural circuitry changes and everyday social skills begin to decline. The extent of these adaptations vary, depending on an individual's previous experience, amount of time online, and other influences. New technology has brought us remarkable advances, and the challenge is to take advantage of the technology without letting it take over other important aspects of our per-

sonalities. By identifying areas in our lives where off-line brain training can counteract the impact of digital stimulation on our mind's neural pathways, we can take control of how our brains adapt to new technology.

To get started, consider the following general tips for enhancing relationship skills and keeping technology overload at bay:

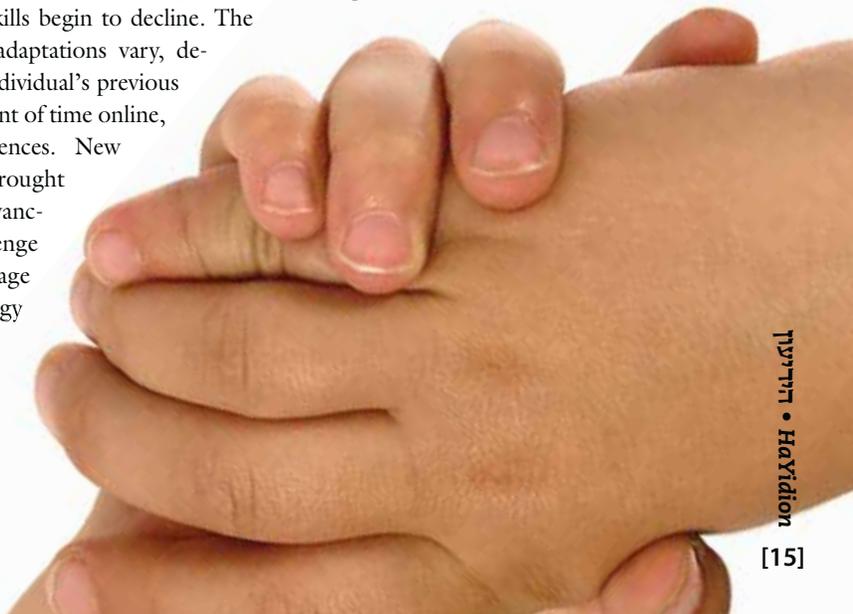
Cut back on the amount time you spend using all types of technology. Keep track of how much leisure time you spend answering email, talking on your cellphone, text messaging, watching television, or anything that does not involve face-to-face interactive contact with others each day. Add up the total time, and begin decreasing that amount by 10 to 20 percent at intervals that feel comfortable for you.

As you begin reducing your time on one technological device, take care not to substitute it with another.

Make a conscious effort to spend more time with people you care about. A fun, relaxing and fulfilling social life will reinforce your tendency to stay connected off-line.

Try to schedule regular family dinners. Recent research has found that teenagers who have a chance to reflect on their day with their families are less likely to abuse drugs, become violent, or engage in other high-risk behaviors.

In addition to working on people skills, adopt other healthy lifestyle habits. Keep your brain fit with off-line mental aerobics, eat a healthy diet, get regular cardiovascular conditioning, and practice stress reduction techniques. ■



From an Packed Storehouse to a Heap of Pebbles: The New Jewish Literacy

by AVI WARSHAVSKI

A STARTING POINT

A *BBA Saul was the tallest man in his generation, and R. Tarfon came up to his shoulder. R. Tarfon was the tallest man in his generation and R. Meir came up to his shoulder. R. Meir was the tallest man in his generation and Rabbi [Yehuda Hanasi] came up to his shoulder. Rabbi was the tallest man in his generation and R. Hiyya came up to his shoulder, and R. Hiyya was the tallest in his generation and Rav came up to his shoulder. Rav was the tallest man in his generation and Rav Yehudah came up to his shoulder, and Rav Yehudah was the tallest man in his generation and his waiter, Adda, came up to his shoulder. Parshtabina of Pumbeditha came up to half the height of Adda the waiter, while everybody else only reached the loins of Parshtabina of Pumbeditha. –Babylonian Talmud, Niddah 24b*

Clearly the writer of this Talmudic passage had no intention of surveying the differences in height among the leading sages over a period of approximately 200 years. Rather, it was his intention to convey the general impression, regarding the world of the sages, that “each generation was less knowledgeable than its predecessor.” Such an insight is almost inherent in our reflections on ourselves. In every generation we have the sense that the generation that preceded us was greater in terms of its knowledge, culture and literacy. This sense becomes stronger when we wish to examine what has been called the “new literacy,” that literacy that is developing, before our very eyes, as a result of the challenges and opportunities that have arrived along with the digital age.

Contrary to the sense that this literacy represents a deterioration or retreat in human literacy, in 2009 the results of extensive research carried out at Stanford University under Professor Andrea Lunsford, were published. Lunsford’s research followed 14,672 students over a period of 5 years, and examined their reading and writing activities. According to her research, the present generation of students is the one that writes the most, compared with all previous generations in human history. Over one third of this writing activity takes place outside of the learning context, in the students’ leisure time. In the following paragraphs I would like to outline some of the characteristics of this new literacy, probing where it creates a challenge for

Jewish literacy, and where it provides an opportunity.

WHAT IS JEWISH LITERACY?

When we speak of literacy, we are talk-



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ing about the way in which we read and write, but also about the way in which we remain accessible to information, and can expand on it, beyond the sporadic addition of texts. Reading is a cumulative process in which we learn to identify terms, structures and relationships between phenomena, and slowly build for ourselves a kind of network that organizes the information, and which will then serve as a sound infrastructure for absorbing additional information. This internal network uses numerous different systems of coordinates: chronological, geographical, thematic and so on.

When we speak of Jewish literacy there are two additional significant elements that play a more important role than in other cultures: the canon, and the active dimension of literacy.

The collection of canonical texts that underlie Jewish culture constitute the basis for dialogue—between Jews of the same generation, and between Jews of different generations—as well as a kind of map on which we define ourselves, whether or not we agree with the text. Moreover, we are commanded, at all times, to be in



a state of active learning. Jewish literacy focuses not only on the outcome—the acquisition or achievement of knowledge—but primarily on the activity. The ancient commandment calls on us to teach our children; it does not state that our children should know.

WHAT'S SO NEW ABOUT THE NEW LITERACY?

Human culture has traversed enormous distances in the past few decades, particularly when it comes to technologies allowing the communication, expression, presentation, recall and transmission of information. These changes have had a dramatic effect on the way in which we read and write, and, in the view of certain researchers, even the way we think. These changes may be divided into three groups.

a. Changes in the basic units of meaning

Writing on the web is characterized by short texts. We are impatient and impulsive, and have a multi-tasking orientation. Long texts (such as the present essay, for example) do not have a good chance of survival. A nice illustration of this trend can be found in the built-in limits imposed by Twitter, which allows each tweet, or Twitter message, to be no longer than 140 characters. Text on the web contains a great deal of punctuation, bulleting, and numbering, which permit they key ideas to be stressed, without complexity or es-

thetics. The concept “text,” in its simplest sense, is too narrow to encompass the variety of modes of expression developing on the web. Text on the web includes the extensive use of visual or iconic elements, logos, abbreviations, etc. In addition to these, video has become a language of expression available to all, no longer reserved for professionals, and no different from the keyboard or the pencil.

b. The collapse of familiar structures for organizing information

According to a midrash in Avot deRabbi Natan, Rabbi Yehudah HaNasi distinguished between the way in which Rabbi Tarfon organized his teachings, and the way in which Rabbi Akiva did so. Rabbi Tarfon was referred to by Rabbi Yehudah HaNasi as a “heap of pebbles” or a “pile of nuts”:

Just as ... when a man takes out one, all the rest topple over one another, so too with Rabbi Tarfon; when a scholar approached him and said ‘Teach me,’ he would cite the Scriptures, Mishnah, Halakhah and Aggadah, so that the scholar would leave full of blessing and satisfaction... (Avot deRabbi Natan A, 18)

Rabbi Akiva, on the other hand, was referred to as an *otzar balum*, a packed storehouse of knowledge. He was compared to a worker going out to the field with his basket:

Finding wheat, he puts it in; finding barley, he puts it in; finding beans, he puts them in; lentils, he puts them in. When he returns home, he sorts them out—the wheat by itself; the barley by itself; the beans by themselves; the lentils by themselves. Such was the practice of Rabbi Akiva, who thus rendered the whole Torah into a combination of rings. (ibid.)

The contrast between these two descriptions may be an apposite expression of the revolution proclaimed by the new literacy: a transition from the organized, classified world of Rabbi Akiva to the rich, associative, unorganized world of Rabbi Tarfon; from a world viewed as a packed storehouse to a world seen as a heap of pebbles.

The network of coordinates through which we organize our knowledge is shrinking to the narrow aperture of the Google search; we focus in on exactly the text passage we need. We are not interested in questions such as who wrote the text, or in what context it appears; what’s written in the paragraphs that precede or follow; or the theme of the overall work of which the text passage we have found is a part. “Native” users of this approach to obtaining information also lack other dimensions of context. They do not know how to position the text on a chronological timeline, on a subject-based axis or on an axis that distinguishes between “important” texts and those of little importance. Our reading of the text is an instrumental

[CONTINUED ON PAGE 18]

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one, aimed at reaching the essential content of the writer's words without traversing the path that the author planned for us. When we read, we can jump to other places, or skip over paragraphs and find links to other texts; the structure of our reading is highly associative.

A common language is not created among readers through a uniform, common background, or through common knowledge, but through the viral distribution of what evolutionist Richard Dawkins has termed "memes," a term coined in the 1970s by analogy with the biological "gene." According to Dawkins, just as in biology the genes store within them a complete set of data that serves as the basis of our physical characteristics, so too, in culture, there are memes. Examples of memes include melodies, ideas, catchphrases, clothing fashions, and techniques used in pottery or in the construction of arches. Just as genes propagate themselves within the gene pool by transmission from one body to another, so too memes propagate themselves within the meme pool by jumping from one mind to another. Dawkins' description was created in the context of culture in general, but is particularly apt in regard to the way information is propagated through the Internet.

c. Redefinition of the relationship between the reader and the text

The informal "contract" between reader and text is changing. In the new world, the text is found halfway between spoken language and written language. The author's ownership of this text is insecure. The reader makes many secondary uses of the text; he quotes it without always remembering to cite the source, or requesting the author's permission. He creates new mixes of content which constitute a new, effective genre of expression. But, primarily, he is very active: he reacts, responds, and involves other members of his community.

The fact that the texts that the reader encounters are isolated fragments requires him to create for himself a network of connections between them that gives them meaning. About 100 years ago, Russian

filmmaker Lev Kuleshov showed how viewers would interpret the meaning of a scene, in light of the sequence of images that they viewed. In an experiment that defined what later became known as the Kuleshov effect, he showed a series of short films in which a picture of an actor, with a neutral facial expression, was followed by another photograph. Each film had a different photograph—in one it was a bowl of soup, in another a woman sprawled on a sofa, and in a third it was a picture of a child in a coffin. The viewers attributed to the actor in each of the films a different facial expression, ranging from laughter to tears, in spite of the fact that in all of them the actor's facial expression was identical. As in the Kuleshov effect, the reader on the internet assigns meaning to the fragments that he encounters in the same way, based on the sequences that he creates. He is thus a more influential reader than his forebears, who received these fragments within fixed, predetermined contexts.

WHAT IS GOOD LITERACY?

Within the new world there is no canon other than what Nicholas Carr has referred to as Google's "popularity engine." In the new world there is no importance to authorship; Roland Barthes's call, in the late Sixties, for the "death of the author" is being realized before our very eyes. In the new world there is no importance to order, in the spirit of David Weinberger's book *Everything is Miscellaneous*. These are not trivial changes; they are a true revolution. In order to evaluate the meaning of these changes, we need to describe, in more abstract terms, the activity of literacy and the criteria for success or failure in it, and based on this definition, identify the challenges and opportunities that the new literacy opens up for Jewish literacy.

Wittgenstein in his *Brown Book* describes a reading machine that scans the printed words and produces sounds—syllables and other notations that match the words that it is scanning. It is clear that this is still not a description of reading. As Marilyn Witrock showed in the 1980s, the process of reading is a process of reconstruction. The reader creates the meaning of the text anew.

Whether we are talking about a scientific

text, a book of poetry or a religious work, the writer creates a kind of picture of the world that relates to a certain segment of reality. The reader builds this picture anew; it contains elements that probably correspond to the entities that the writer intended, but it also contains a broad range of new elements which are the contribution of the reader himself, anchoring the arguments within his own internal network of concepts, filling in lacunae in the text, and so on.

This activity of reconstruction also involves guidance from the community. The representatives of the community, parents and teachers, teach us the language and the "correct" ways of decoding the text. The community's immediate agents, the teachers, stand on the shoulders of the teachers of previous generations. The community defines both the canon and the historical figures who direct our reading. For example, for hundreds of years Rashi defined (and in a certain sense still defines) the glasses through which we read the Torah.

The process of reading is, therefore, a three-way relationship between the picture of the world created by the author, the reconstruction of the meaning carried out by the reader, and the guidance provided by the community as to how to read the text.

Successful literacy preserves an appropriate balance between the three sides of this triangle. If the reader is very active in constructing the information, the process of reading is more meaningful from his point of view. If he is too active, there is the danger that the text being read will disappear; the reader will, in effect, be talking to himself. If the community is "present" in the process of reading, then this reading is well-anchored within the life of the reader's society. If the community is overly involved in the reading, it can suppress the individual's constructive ability, creating a reality characteristic of totalitarian regimes.

ACTIVE LITERACY AND TRADITIONAL LITERACY

Based on the general criterion that we have formulated so far for judging whether a

literacy process is good or not so good, we now have the tools to create an initial outline of some of the challenges and opportunities created by the new literacy.

In the information age, the reader is a much more active participant than in previous generations. In this sense, the new literacy is an outstanding opportunity to create a connection, identification and a sense of belonging between the reader and the texts.

In regard to the role of the community, the new literacy is detrimental to the historic role of the community, but at the same time suggests a blossoming of the presence of the contemporary community. The fact that the canon has been eroded diminishes the role of the historic community in reading. On the other hand, the role of the living community—the community of here and now, which rates, shares, comments and rewrites—is growing, and this community is present and active in reading in real time.

In terms of the concepts that make Jewish literacy unique, on the one hand there is an outstanding opportunity to provide greater impetus to the active dimension of

this literacy. On the other hand, there is a real threat to the traditional canon—the shared arena within which Jewish dialogue takes place. As Moshe Halbertal has shown, the canon began to lose its power well before anyone had begun to dream of the Internet. However, the rise of the Internet culture has greatly accelerated the process, and creates a real threat to the canon as a shared platform.

We might compare the canonical text and Jewish literacy to a living organism which, in order to survive through natural selection, must change and adapt itself to changes in environmental conditions.

Throughout history, there have been a number of such changes which, ostensibly, were only technological changes but, in fact, were evolutionary survival changes that influenced not only technology but also content. The transition from an oral to a written culture, the transition from scrolls to codexes, and the transition from manuscripts to printed texts: these changes also influenced the movement of the pendulum between community reading and the reader's active, creative role. We might indicate the Jewish expressions

of 12th century France as an example of a pendulum movement with characteristics similar to those of our own generation. The fact that commentators such as Rashbam turned to a “plain” reading of the biblical text, independent of and even contrary to the traditional understanding, is an example of an intensification of the active side of Jewish literacy. The tendency of members of those generations to “intervene” in the manuscripts of their teachers, adding to or deleting from them, is a further demonstration of the shift to strengthen the community of their own day over the historical community.

The change we face is dramatic, but we should see it through the perspective of the pendulum's movement. As long as this vantage is maintained, a healthy dialectic between tradition and new creation—between the active and the canonical sides of Jewish literacy—is also maintained. As those entrusted with transmitting the world of Jewish literacy to the next generation, we must decipher the world of the new literacy, its strengths and weaknesses, its flexibilities and inflexibilities, and learn how to bear our precious burden toward new vistas of expression. ז

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We Must Be Bold: Jewish Learning and the Challenge of Social Media

by **DAN MENDELSON AVIV**

JEWISH educators seem to be hard-wired to worry about change and fret about the Jewish future. Now, with Web 2.0 firmly rooted in the collective consciousness and server clouds everywhere, these twin fronts of agitation have merged into a perfect storm of palpable anxiety. The urge to ask “Is Web 2.0 good for the Jews?” is ever-pressing, but, in 2010, it is also as useful as asking “Is furniture good for the Jews?” For children under the age of 18, Web 2.0 is as remarkable as a folding chair. It is an utterly mundane part of their landscape. Furthermore, these young Jews will endeavor to construct a meaningful Jewish identity in this brave not-so-new world, one where a substantial part of their identities will play out through social networking sites (SNS) and computer-mediated communication (CMC).

Many a Jewish educator has tsk-tsked this increasingly prevalent phenomenon, wondering how such a critical task could be achieved in a medium which is in equal parts ephemeral, optional and artificial. Though the criticisms of this new mode are valid, we cannot dwell on them. We must be bold and fearless in the Web 2.0 world especially because aspects of it are a little bit scary—especially for those of us who do not even know what a Web 2.0 is.

Even before Web 2.0, open, post-modern globalized societies challenged traditional notions of identity and community. And yet, in a sense, Jews have always been early-adopters of that development. Ever since Napoleon asked in 1806 if his Jewish subjects were Jewish-Frenchmen or French-Jews, many Jews have been energized by the high-voltage tension that crackled along that hyphen. Nevertheless, even with the passage of more than two centuries, many American Jews still struggle with that “old” post-Emancipation question, one that has been further compounded by the complexity and speed of globalization and the Internet.

Steven M. Cohen and Arnold Eisen have written extensively about this dilemma, documenting the rise of what they call the “sovereign self,” a Jewish individual engaged in a radically personalized and idiosyncratically constructed Judaism. This sovereign self chooses its own level of engagement and defies any standards to measure it, as no Jew should be able to determine for others what a “good Jew” is. However, as they write elsewhere, these sovereign selves also voluntarily constitute a tribe, where its members are familiar with one another, feel responsible for one another, and possess a higher opinion of Jews and a lesser opinion of non-Jews. These two accounts of our Judaism of the moment, presented by the same duo of researchers, seem at best paradoxical, or, at worst irreconcilable. A tribe of radical in-

dividuals? Yet, with Web 2.0 applications, Jewish users have been able to meaningfully achieve just that.

Web 2.0 thrives on such paradoxes—or at least they seem like paradoxes to those



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of us who were born before 1980. For example, users of Facebook, Myspace, chat-rooms, text-messaging and Second Life sit alone in their own houses or apartments pecking away at their keyboards, yet they profess a sense of connectedness and, in some cases, see themselves as part of a transnational community. Friendship, by most conventional definitions, is regarded as a private, intimate matter, yet in Web 2.0, “friending” is a verb and very, very public. And yet, if we look at online friendships, we find that they are literally avatars of offline relationships. They may be weak, but, typically, the individuals who friend each other have a preexisting, common offline connection. Online profiles also offer another example of paradox. As the *New Yorker* cartoon famously proclaimed: “On the Internet, nobody knows you’re a dog.” And yet, research since that legendary cartoon came out, has found the opposite to be true. Everyone knows you are a dog because you, most likely, will represent yourself that way.

Jews have been Jewishly active online for almost as long as there has been an “online”. We blogged before blogs existed. Because of the sheer volume of Judaism-related postings in the USENET

religion newsgroup, Jewish users pushed for, and subsequently gained permission to set up the first religion-specific newsgroup—net.religion.jewish—in *February of 1984*. Even 25 years ago, Jewish users were establishing and defining their own online identity as *individuals who are part of a distinct community*. Our students will invariably join this distinctly Jewish community, this *protean tribe* of ever-shifting, ever-changing individuals—if they have not already.

The animating force that drives Jewish-protean tribalism is a relentless grappling with Jewish tribal meta-issues. In other words, Jews love to navel-gaze and blog about their wonderfully interesting navels. In the process, they ask tough, occasionally irreverent questions about the nature of the Jewish tribe and their own place and participation in tribal affairs. The answers they generate are often unconventional and contentious—but equally illuminating. This form of engagement with Jewish tradition is not only valid but must be acknowledged as a valued expression of Jewish identity.

The questioners challenge, embrace and engage with what Michael Rosenak calls the *language* of Jewish tradition—its basic assumptions, problems, aspirations and understandings. These bloggers' *language*, however, is spiked with Internet slang acronyms we may not easily comprehend. There are thousands of Jewish bloggers, over four thousand by my unofficial count. For every blogger, there are hundreds if not thousands of Jewish users who lurk and occasionally leave a comment. Though these bloggers are plentiful, loud, brash and funny, they blog out of a profound sense of commitment and engagement. This ever-evolving collective corpus engenders a new kind of *Torah she-be'al peh*. To mash up Hillel, all of it is commentary and we must go and learn it.

I repeat: As Jewish educators, we must act boldly in this realm, becoming charter members of this protean tribe. We must add our erudite, schooled and passionate voices to the important discussions that are going on across the Jewish blogosphere, whether it be about pluralism, points of Halakha, Israel, gender equality or any other burning issue of the day. As such, we must add another *mitzvat aseih* to our list of commandments as Jewish educators: *Thou shalt blog*.

This call to blog profoundly challenges conventional understandings of what Jewish learning is and how it is supposed to unfold. We educators are used to being experienced, knowledgeable and proficient in the classroom dynamic. We school. We do not get schooled. We regard control of the lesson to be almost as important as the lesson itself. The institutions in which we teach regard control of their image and messaging to be almost as important as the learning they are supposed to encourage. However, the blogosphere is messy and beyond anyone's control. It is often filled with anger and spite, and, as the internet provides an opportunity to speak with impunity, individuals often relapse into infantile invective. Just check any comment section or talkback and read for yourself.

Nevertheless, we must learn how to blog. We must commit to blogging regularly. We must make time to read other Jewish bloggers. We must leave comments and engage the com-

ments left for us. We must grapple with our own ideas about Jewishness and Judaism through this medium, crafting our thoughts carefully and elegantly. We must also confront the ideas of others and hammer on them (as they hammer on ours) until what emerges can withstand the crucible of public scrutiny and critique. We must not censor or submit to be censored. Let all those who have something to say, come and speak.

Most importantly, we must do all this not as thinly veiled representatives of our particular institutions, for our savvy students will call us out and expose us as shills. We must blog as individual Jews, committed to the future of the Jewish people. What we say (and what will be said to us) about the Occupation, intermarriage, sexuality, our leaders, our institutions, our parents, our children, our Torah and our tradition might be painful to hear, but as Rav Joseph Soloveitchik said (and this should be the Jewish blogger's creed if Jews ever agreed to accept a single creed):

I may attack a certain point of view which I consider false, but I will never attack a person who preaches it. I have always a high regard for the individual who is honest and moral, even when I am not in agreement with him. Such a relation is in accord with the concept of kavod habriyot, for beloved is man for he is created in the image of God.

Can we dare to live
by this creed?
Can we afford
not to try? ז



Innovate to Educate: Maximizing Students' Potential Through Online Learning

by **CLAYTON CHRISTENSEN** and **MICHAEL HORN**

ACADEMIC research from neuroscience and cognitive science increasingly supports the notion that everyone learns differently. But there is considerable uncertainty about what those differences are, although researchers are making advances in this understanding all the time.

Just as it is intuitive to us that we learn differently from each other, it is also intuitive that because of this, each of us needs a different, customized learning approach to maximize our potential.

Yet schools—Jewish day schools, secular schools, and independent schools—are typically structured to offer far more standardization than customization in the learning opportunities for students. Schools teach using a monolithic batch system. When a class is ready to move on to a new concept, all students move on, regardless of how many had mastered the previous concept (even if it is a prerequisite for learning what is next). On the other hand, if some students are able to master a class in just a few weeks, they remain in the class for the whole semester. And when a teacher teaches long division in the manner that corresponds to how she best learned and understood it, it does not matter whether a student grasps it and grows bored with the repeated explanations or sinks deeper into bewilderment, unable to grasp the logic; the student sits in the class for the duration. In this model, both the bored and the bewildered see their motivation for achievement shredded by the system.

Why is this? It's not that teachers, administrators, and other school officials do not appreciate the need for customization. They do. It's the system in which they work, however, that constrains their ability to customize.

To see why, picture Microsoft Windows. It, like many schools, is highly *interdependent*—you can't build or change one component unless you build or change the others because each component affects the way the others function. Changing just a few lines of Microsoft Windows's code would necessitate rewriting thousands of other lines. It would therefore cost millions of dollars to custom-configure Windows to meet your needs. The economics of interdependence mandate standardization.

Contrast this with a *modular* product or service architecture. Here, people can change one piece without redesigning the others. This, in turn, allows for affordable customization. Linux is a great illustration of this. Once Unix technology had matured sufficiently, an open-source operating system such as Linux became feasible. Linux's architecture is modular and therefore can be customized—different people can use different kernels of the code in order to create the operating system that best fits their needs.

Schools are laced with interdependencies. For example, a student can't study one concept in ninth grade unless he or she had covered another one in seventh grade. Even the physical architecture of



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schools prevents teachers from offering their students different learning opportunities. This prevents simple, affordable customization. Instead, the economics compel standardization in the way schools teach and test. For evidence, simply look at how much it costs to tailor an education for special-needs students.

If the goal is to educate every student to their highest potential and provide a secular and Jewish education that is meaningful, rich, and motivating, Jewish day schools need to move away from this monolithic classroom model and, instead, move toward a student-centric model with a modular design that enables mass customization.

Online learning is emerging as a disruptive innovation across the spectrum of education, and it represents a promising opportunity to make this shift. The proper use of technology as a platform

for learning offers a chance to modularize the system and thereby customize learning. Students can take different paths through the learning material and can proceed at different paces as they move on to the next concept only once they have mastered the current one.

But if this is the case, how can we explain the minimal impact computers have had in the classroom? Despite spending enormous amounts of money equipping schools with computers and technology over the last two decades, countless studies and most routine observations reveal that they have not transformed schools nor has their use boosted learning as measured by test scores.

That schools have gotten so little back from their investment comes as no surprise. Schools have done what virtually every organization does when implementing a potentially disruptive innovation. An organization's natural instinct is to cram the innovation into its existing operating model to sustain what it already does. But if transformation is truly the goal, employing the innovation in this manner won't work.

The way to implement an innovation so that it will transform an organization is to implement it disruptively—not by using it to compete against the existing paradigm and serve existing users, but to target those not being served—people we call non-consumers. That way, all the new approach has to do is be better than the alternative—which is nothing at all.

Disruptive innovations transform sectors characterized by expensive, complicated, and inaccessible products and services into ones where simplicity, affordability, and accessibility reign. At the outset, they tend to be not as good as the existing products and services as judged by the historical measures of performance. But little by little, disruptions predictably improve and at some point become good enough to handle more complicated problems—and then—armed with their new value proposition around simplicity, affordability, and accessibility—they take over and supplant the old way of doing things. It happens in all sectors—from computing, where per-



sonal computers transformed a sector by disrupting mainframe and minicomputers, to postsecondary education, where community colleges and now online universities progressively make education more convenient and affordable.

For online learning to bring about a disruptive transformation in Jewish education, it must be implemented where the alternative is no class at all, or where students and their families have no access to a Jewish Day School but would jump at the opportunity to attend one.

In secular schools, there are many areas of non-consumption where this is already taking place. For example, online learning is gaining traction in the advanced courses that many schools are unable to offer; in small, rural, and urban schools that are unable to offer breadth; in remedial courses for students who must retake courses in order to graduate; and with home-schooled students and those who can't keep up with the regular schedule of courses. Online enrollments have soared in recent years from 45,000 in 2000 to 1 million in 2007. Most estimates report

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The Rationale for Educational Technology

for General and Jewish Studies

by **TZVI PITTINSKY**

ONE problem that has plagued students for generations is boredom in the classroom. This is illustrated in a famous clip from the classic film *Ferris Bueller's Day Off*. The teacher, played to perfection by Ben Stein, is trying to teach his high school history class about the Smoot–Hawley Tariff Act of 1930 and its connection to the “voodoo economics” of the early 1980s. The students are each portrayed by director John Hughes in different and unique stages of boredom. Although the teacher continuously attempts to engage in a conversation with his students by asking repeatedly “anyone, anyone?” there is little connection between teacher and student. Boredom not only leads to a lack of student engagement, but studies indicate that student boredom often leads to greater problems such as truancy and poor academic achievement. These problems are not unique to public school education but have pervaded our day schools, as indicated by a recent lengthy online discussion on this topic on Lookjed, a forum for Jewish educators.

One would expect technology to be the panacea to solve student boredom. However, recent studies indicate the opposite to be true. In a study of college students in North-west England (*British Educational Research Journal* 35:2), 59% of students reported that they were bored in at least half of their classes. The same study found the professor's use of PowerPoint to be a contributing factor to student boredom. This is because teachers often use PowerPoint to merely post their lecture notes and then read directly from the slides. In this case, students feel little reason to attend the lecture since they can better read the PowerPoint slides on their own. It should be noted that the same study indicated that when teachers gave out handouts together with their PowerPoint presentations it tended to mitigate student boredom. This and similar studies have led to a movement by some university professors to “Teach Naked” by removing all technology from the classroom.

Computer-based instruction and lab time fared even worse in the study referenced above. This was determined to be based on the nature of the lab time, which focused primarily on activities involving rote memorization and reviewing exactly what was al-

ready covered in class, with little higher order thinking. As Clifford Stoll noted over a decade ago, “Computers in classrooms are the filmstrips of the 1990s. We loved them because we didn't have to think for an hour, teachers loved them because they



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didn't have to teach, and parents loved them because it showed their schools were high-tech. But no learning happened.” The study concluded that in order for technology to be effective it has to be open-ended and/or students need to be allowed to create something new using the technology. To use technology merely to post one's notes on slides or for drill and skill activities like the old “Math Blaster” games where students blast the aliens by solving math problems is ineffective at best and might even lead to the very student boredom that the technology is attempting to prevent.

Noted technology skeptic Larry Cuban studied the implementation of the computer in education by comparing it to other previous attempts to adapt new technologies for the classroom such as radio, TV, and the film strip. With each of these technologies he found a similar cycle. The technology was introduced together with promises that the new technology would transform education and make the lessons come alive. A great deal of educational funds was spent on the new technology. However, the teachers failed to adapt the technology to their classrooms. Instead of

blaming the technology, school administrators and technology enthusiasts blamed other factors like a lack of sufficient funding or lack of teacher training and the cycle repeated itself. Larry Cuban found a similar problem with the introduction of computers into the classroom. In a 2001 study of high schools in Silicon Valley, he found technology use limited to early adapters with 60-70% of teachers never using the computer labs. Even when technology was utilized it was primarily to reinforce existing teaching practices rather than transform them.

At this point, a couple of comments are in order to counter this pessimistic view of technology. First, it must be noted that technology has changed a great deal even in the last 10 years. Usually new technology takes 20-30 years from its invention until it becomes mainstream in the consumer marketplace. Since the personal computer only started to come into common use in the early 1980s, we are just beginning to see the fruits of its effective adaptation into education.

Also, as Larry Cuban noted, a primary problem with teachers utilizing technology is a lack of teacher training. Teachers report that professional development for the effective integration of technology into instruction is their greatest need. The old model of occasional professional development days for the faculty does not work for teachers trying to utilize new computer technology. What is needed is “just on time” professional development where there are members of the staff whose primary responsibility is not to fix the computers but to help the teachers use them. This position of technology coordinator or director of educational technology is becoming commonplace in public and private schools and is beginning to be introduced in Jew-

ish day schools as well.

So what are effective uses for technology in the classroom? I like to talk about the 3 Cs of successful technology integration: Communication and Collaboration, Constructivist and Cooperative Learning, and Compelling Course Content.

The first and most important use of technology in the classroom is to encourage Communication and Collaboration. We need to give our students opportunities to communicate with the teacher and their classmates and collaborate with each other. As Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik mentioned in many of his seminal talks and essays, Jewish education is primarily a dialogue. This dialogue is with teacher and student, between students, and with all of the previous generations of our Sages throughout the generations. We should seek to encourage this dialogue both in our class through active discussions and the use of the *shakla vetarya* method of questions and answers that is so common in the Talmud and rabbinic sources. Nechama Leibowitz was a master at promoting this dialogue through her use of open ended questions, her encouragement of debate, and her posing questions in which every student was required to write an answer. Technology is the ideal method to enhance this by hosting asynchronous discussion forums in which every student has the chance to reflect and then compose responses on blogs or wikis and through the use of micro-blogging tools like Twitter to encourage 100% student participation in real-time during class.

Studies indicate that online asynchronous discussion fo-

ums allow students time to think about what they will post and to craft thoughtful responses. Students find that online discussions are less stressful than being called on in class. Students are also willing to discuss much more sensitive topics online than they would ever discuss in class and they work much more carefully on what they will post since “if it’s going to be for everyone to read, I want to feel good about they way it is going to represent me.” Students also utilize much greater higher order thinking skills online than in a classroom discussion. On the high school level, students made more connections between current events and class content online, they developed historical thinking skills and online discussions gave students the chance to reflect and draw on prior knowledge before posting.

In The Frisch School, we have encouraged online discussions by creating a 9th grade and 10th grade wiki. In this forum, teachers from various subjects post course materials revolving around a common theme, Identity for the 9th grade and Exploration for the 10th grade. These materials can be of all types of media including text, pictures, audio, video, and links to websites. The students compose messages in the Discussion section of each page dealing with these materials. This had led to many of the same findings discussed above with students able to reflect and pose more thoughtful responses online than they usually gave in class. The wiki has also helped students make connections between different subject areas that are featured on the same page, achieving true curricular integration. For example, students referenced what they learned in Talmud class when discussing a piece of English literature, and what they learned about slavery in American history class helped shed light on the issue of slavery as

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it appears in the Chumash.

The wiki has also broken down the walls of the classroom, allowing students not only to comment on the teacher's question, but to comment on other students in their class, and even to comment on students from other classes in their grade who have discussed the same question online. It is when students start talking to each other online that the most thrilling moments occurred. It was no longer a mere homework assignment for the students; rather, they became actively engaged because they wanted their voices to be a part of the conversation.

For example, in one heated discussion, students were asked to comment on the article on Parshat Korach by Rabbi Soloveitchik, "The Common Sense Rebellion Against Torah Authority." The assignment asked students to comment on the article, comment on each other, and then comment on a student from a parallel track that had already hosted a wiki discussion about the article. We found that instead of posting three messages as the assignment required, many students posted five or more responses because they were a part of this "war of ideas." In addition, the discussion went far afield from the material studied in the Chumash class about Korach and the topic of rabbinic authority mentioned in the article, with students engaging in an insightful conversation on an issue that they cared deeply about, spontaneous prayer vs. prayer from the siddur. The students genuinely enjoyed this give and take of ideas. As one student noted in the beginning of one of his messages, "Get ready for an argument. This is gonna be fun."

This year we have expanded this "classroom without walls" to include two sister schools in Israel. On the 9th grade wiki, our students are participating in discussions together with a secular Israeli public school in Nahariya, Israel, while on the 10th grade wiki we have invited a religious Zionist school in Gush Etzion to come on board. Since all of these discussions are hosted online, the geographical distance between the students no longer matters with the difference in time zones mitigated by the asynchronous nature of these discussions. These discussions have allowed our students to broaden their

perspectives by meeting others who might come from different cultural backgrounds or different levels of religious observance but who share many Jewish values and who are studying the same texts as they are.

The second approach to effectively using technology is using it to promote Constructivist and Cooperative learning. This is the natural outgrowth of the first approach. Students need to be given activities in class in which they work with each other to construct their own meaning of the text. This is most effective through chavruta learning with the teacher scaffolding the material so it is on a level to challenge the students without being overly daunting. Technology greatly enhances this. Some tools that can be used are project-based activities like Webquests, where students use online resources to create a finished product, and open-ended software programs like Gemara Berura that assist students in learning through a sugya with a chavruta. In Gemara Berura, students learn how to read a text of Talmud on their own through a color and shape coded system and through the use of databases of keywords, definitions, and biographies of all of the rabbinic sages. Students involved in these types of programs and web-based projects actively engage with the text, allowing the teacher to transition from being the "Sage on the Stage" who is the source for all information to being the "Guide on the Side" who helps students interpret and evaluate the information that they find on their own.

Finally, technology can be utilized to create Compelling Course Content to directly address student boredom. These are the bells and whistles that make learning "fun." While this cannot be a primary focus of technology integration, it can be used to great effect as a part of a well constructed lesson. Technology supports this through showing audio and video clips (never more than a few minutes in length), through art, and through interactive resources that are especially effective when used with a Smart Board. Studies indicate that the use of the Smart Board increases student motivation through the seamless integration of technology into the lesson. Students also enjoy touching the board to manipulate text and images and the board easily facilitates student-led presentations.

One example of an interactive technology that I have used together with the Smart Board in my Tanakh classes is Google Earth. Google Earth not only helps one to navigate to any part of the globe and manipulate it with a finger, it allows for overlays with other materials as well. For example, when we are learning about when Nehemiah rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem in the beginning of the 2nd Commonwealth in the book of Nehemiah Chapters 3-4, one can overlay modern Jerusalem with a map of ancient Jerusalem that references all of the places mentioned in the Tanakh. In another example, we can study the eclipse of the sun predicted in the book of Amos by opening a Google Earth file created by NASA of the total eclipse of the sun over the Middle East which took place during the time of Amos on June 15, 763 BCE. This model shows the precise time to the second of this eclipse and exactly how much of an eclipse occurred (around 92%) at every location in Israel.

It is important to consider even when creating exciting and entertaining course content that it be open-ended in order to encourage questioning and higher order thinking. Activities where the answer magically appears after a few moments have little educational value because they only encourage rote memorization while stifling thinking.

In summary, technology is a powerful tool for Jewish education but one that must be used carefully in order to utilize its benefits. It can greatly improve communications between teacher and student and among students that is the hallmark of the dialectical approach of Jewish study throughout the ages. It can also greatly enhance chavruta learning by creating the scaffolds students need to learn on their own. Finally, it can help create exciting course content to engage students in the lesson. Great care must be used, as technology when used ineffectively can be detrimental to the learning process. Technology coordinators or directors of educational technology who are teachers knowledgeable in good pedagogy in both general and Judaic Studies as well as expert in technology can greatly assist their fellow educators in unlocking the great potential that technology offers for our students.

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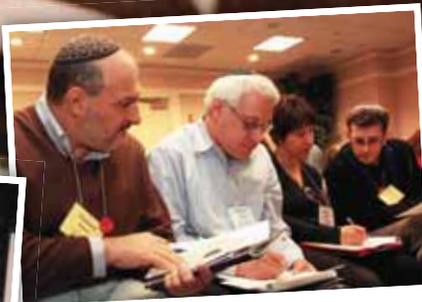
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The opportunity to learn from and network with such incredible leaders in the field was so exciting! In this time of austere budgets and challenges in recruitment of students and staff, the conference was a chance for us all to “recharge” and think from new perspectives.”

Judy Miller, Head of School, Milwaukee Jewish Day School



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This was one of the best conferences I have ever attended, and I would bring more staff next year. Doing it with all four networks was a great accomplishment on behalf of Am Yisrael, it was wonderful to have such diverse voices speaking together, I hope this format continues even into good economic times.”

Rabbi Eric Grossman, Head of School, Frankel Jewish Academy



The organizers of the conference (RAVSAK, Pardes, Yu and SSDSA) merged together forming a diverse group of leader and practitioners tackling challenges as well as learning about new approaches that intersect through denominational lines. I returned home from the conference infused with greater Jewish learning, inspired with Jewish values and with a plethora of new curriculum ideas.”

Dr. Lee Binder, Head of School, Greenfield Day School



Best Practices for Technology Development

by AVI GREENE

TECHNOLOGY is important because it has the potential to substantially impact and positively transform education. Technology can make the work of teachers, parents and administrators faster, easier, and more effective. In addition, employers and society-at-large expect students to have the skills and knowledge that are directly or peripherally related to the use of technology. While the implementation and application of technology to the classroom is time-consuming and resource-intensive there are best practices that schools can employ to maximize their assets.



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I recently conducted a study focused on discovering which educational technology Modern Orthodox yeshiva high schools are providing to students to enhance the curriculum, as well as to understand what “best practices” make schools successful at implementing student-based educational technologies. Through evaluating surveys completed by the participating schools, observing technology use at three of the institutions, and analyzing the websites of the same three schools, seven areas emerged as noteworthy. Each of the seven areas relate to findings in the research regarding student achievement. The seven areas are: technology development, technology plan, instructional staff, decision-making process, administrative support, faculty training, and hardware and software systems.

THE SPECTRUM OF TECHNOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT

The first thing a school requires is an awareness of its place on the spectrum of technological development. Schools can be categorized according to a three-tier scale: early/developing tech, developing/advanced tech, and advanced/target tech. Schools in the early/developing tech category are often collecting hardware without putting significant resources into training or integration. Developing/advanced tech schools are characterized by the fact that they train tech savvy teachers and become experts in specific areas of technological use or pedagogy. Advanced/target tech schools are generally characterized by the ability to integrate technology into all subject areas and all aspects of the curriculum smoothly across the spectrum. Schools will develop fastest if they are self-aware of their abilities and limitations.

TECHNOLOGY PLAN

Schools that have a technology plan and follow it are able to develop faster technologically. Technology plans advance technological development for three primary reasons. First, schools purchase hardware and software more intelligently, saving money and time. Second, teachers are more invested in the process because they

believe that there is a clear plan and goal. Finally, schools with a technology plan are more prepared when equipment needs to be upgraded and replaced. Subsequently, these schools receive more grants and are able to invest in more re-

sources. Pursuing the plan, updating it regularly, and making other stakeholders aware and invested in the plan increase its effectiveness.

ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT

Most technologically advanced schools describe their administrators as being the driving force behind the push toward technology. These leaders are always interested in staying on the cutting edge of technology. Administrators show support through implementing policies that force the staff to use specific technologies. These mandates often include the use of e-mail for the distribution of announcements and schedules, the use of the student management system for grading, and the use of the school website or domain name for all formal communications with parents, students and the community. Supportive administrators give technology teachers time to implement new products and recognize that new software may take two or three years to be used optimally. These administrators also continue to fund programs that have the potential for success and to find funds for new technology. In one school a five percent pay cut was issued

to all staff, but the school continued to invest in six new interactive white boards because the administrator felt that it was an important part of the school's infrastructure.

While technology staff members generally lauded administrators for "forcing" certain issues, the administrators believed that they are successful because they are able to create a culture where technology use is "cool." Administrators at the most technologically advanced schools admit that they implemented required technology changes but state that they are only

prepared to do this after 80% to 90% of the staff has already accepted the change.

DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

The decision-making process regarding the purchase of hardware and software also seems to correlate with the developmental process. Schools in the early tech stage do not have an organized method of purchasing technology. This often leads to items being purchased as they are needed or acquired because they are free or impressive. This stage often correlates with the fact that there is no technology plan in place.

As schools develop their technology plan, the technology and education staff discuss the direction that the school should go. Following the development of the technology plan there is greater opportunity for the faculty to decide and implement what hardware and software should be purchased. This often transitions to a position where the faculty gives input regarding the technology that should be purchased but a small group makes the final decision. As trust builds and the technology staff realizes what items are successful and how the technology is being implemented, the technology staff is allowed to make nearly all technology decisions.

The most technologically developed schools have full-time technology staff members with clearly delineated positions. Two schools that were visited delineated positions so that one staff member focuses on hardware and another on software. The other school had one staff member dedicated to technology integration and the other staff member to systems.

HARDWARE AND SOFTWARE SYSTEMS

Schools, generally, acquire and implement technology that is familiar to teachers first. This includes: televisions, VCRs, DVD players, digital cameras, and computers. This may be because these items take the least amount of staff training and teachers are able to implement the technology quickly and easily. The majority of schools are not purchasing less familiar hardware such as mp3 players, text readers, and student response systems. These products are unfamiliar to teachers and schools and only the most technologically advanced teachers are prepared to change their lessons to implement these products.

The one notable exception to this is the acquisition of interactive white boards. The interactive white boards are being acquired in large numbers by day schools, and teachers are being trained in their use. This is driven partially by the potential they have for transforming instruction

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and partially by parents and donors judging the school's attitude toward education and technology based upon the number of interactive white boards in the classroom. Schools may also be hesitant to purchase hardware for student use that can be broken or abused easily. Student hardware is also more expensive since a product must be purchased for each student as compared to the purchase of one item per teacher or per classroom.

Students are most often given access to software that supports the "business" of the school. Thus, word processing, e-mail, web browsing, spreadsheets and even multimedia are used regularly. However, schools are not investing in software or systems that focus on critical thinking skills such as simulations, data interpretation, accessing databases, and programming. Even the most advanced schools have not reached this stage. This may be because critical thinking has always been a difficult skill for schools to teach and measure. Additionally, it may be because schools focus so much on content matter that the concept of critical thinking has not been a priority. It may also be because many of these programs and devices require the greatest expertise and training. It is therefore not surprising that schools have been hesitant to venture into using technology in this arena.

INSTRUCTIONAL STAFF

Another important factor that emerges from the research is continuity among staff. Schools that change staff often need to train the new staff members in the available resources and have more difficulty reaching a critical mass of teachers who can master specific hardware or software. Another staff issue is that some older, more experienced, teachers are hesitant to use technology in part or at all. While some older teachers at the schools that were visited are uncomfortable or unwilling to use technology, none of the younger teachers who were visited are unwilling to use technology in the classroom.

In general, Judaic staff members seem to be more hesitant to use technology

for instruction than the General Studies staff. This may be due to the fact that there are fewer existing resources for Judaic Studies classes. Almost all of the Judaic software produced is reference content, e.g., texts with translation (Soncino Talmud or Stone Chumash with Rashi), texts without translation (Bar Ilan database and Machon Mamre website), or entertainment material with Jewish content that has limited educational value above the preschool level (*Who Stole Hanukkah* and *Torah Tots*). Judaic studies



teachers may also be more hesitant to implement technology in

Administrators at the most technologically advanced schools state that they are only prepared to implement technological change after 80% to 90% of the staff has already accepted the change.

their classroom because they have often been taught to be subject matter specialists and lack the pedagogical training to implement new things in an effective manner.

Teachers are most effective in transitioning to the use and integration of technology when they are comfortable and experienced with their content material. Teachers are generally more comfortable reworking or recreating materials for courses they have taught several times than for new classes. In one example, a teacher was excited to stop purchasing the vocabulary book that she had used for many years because "I was also supplementing it anyway. Now I can put the whole thing on the web and save the school money." The teacher felt that this was a way to "publish" her material, something that she had always wanted to do but never had an opportunity to do through a publishing house.

Faculty Training

Schools often begin to realize at the beginning of their "Developing Tech" stage that training smaller, more technologically savvy groups yields better results than trying to teach the entire faculty at once. "Advanced Tech" schools often teach a

group of three to five early adopters how to use a new technology. These early adopters often find success and share this success with their colleagues, who in turn get the entire staff excited about the new technology. Many technology directors describe their method of "starting with success" as critical to getting the staff to accept new products.

When meeting with early adopters, the technologist in charge of integration found that the most successful method of training teachers is to give practical examples of how the technology can be

used within a particular curriculum. Early adopters are able to see how the technologist envisions the use of the new technology and can ask questions. The early adopters have access to the original lesson for reference and have the opportunity to experiment and create their own lessons. Teacher training for early adopters will often take one to three days, depending on the complexity of the technology introduced. This is the same model of guided instruction followed by discovery learning that is found to be most effective for teaching students.

CONCLUSION

The good news is that as schools develop technologically there is a common pattern found in their technological progression. Schools that follow a technology plan, have administrators who prioritize the use of technology, allow technologists to make purchasing decisions, have continuity in their staff and administration, invest in hardware and software that develops students' critical thinking skills, begin technology training with small groups that are technologically savvy, and train teachers and students using guided instruction followed by discovery learning will develop technologically faster than those that do not.

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Jewish Day Schools עתידנו Our Future

Alternative Assessment Models to Empower Youth-directed Learning

by **BARRY JOSEPH**

YOUTH are no longer learning in schools the skills they require to compete and succeed in the classrooms, workplaces, and town halls of the 21st century. Expectations are being shattered about what learning is supposed to look like, when it should happen and where. As learning becomes 24/7, ubiquitous, and lifelong, it is turning the traditional academic environment into simply one node within a broader learning network traversed by its students.

what they learn and communicate it to future employers and college admission staff who won't learn of their strengths on most school transcripts?



Barry Joseph directs the Online Leadership Program at Global Kids, Inc. He can be contacted at info@globalkids.org.

The opportunity, however, is for schools to lose, should they fail to rise to the challenge, as they still monopolize the accreditation systems. For most institutions of higher learning, learning experienced in extracurricular activities is still considered an extra, and few, if any, think seriously about an applicant's YouTube videos or level achieved in the video game Halo 3. Course transcripts (plus standardized tests) still rule. Meanwhile, civic and cultural institutions are aware of the shifting winds. They are starting to develop alternative assessment models and moving towards an accreditation system which can challenge school's hegemony. For schools to stay in the game, they need to keep abreast of these early efforts with alternative assessments in our digital age.

At Global Kids, we approach the situation from the youth perspective. Take Tashawna, for example. Tashawna is a high school senior in Brooklyn, New York. In the morning she leaves home for school listening to her MP3s, texting her friends about meeting up after school at Global Kids, where she participates in a theater program, or FIERCE, the community center for LGBT youth. On the weekend she'll go to church and, on any given day, visit MySpace and Facebook as often as she can. While she misses television and movies, she says she just can't find the time.

This describes what we can call Tashawna's distributed learning network, the most important places in her life where learning occurs—not just at home, school and church but also through digital media, like MP3s, SMS (text messaging) and social networks, and at youth-serving institutions, like Global Kids and FIERCE. Some are places that require her presence, like school, while others are self-directed, like MySpace. But the learning she gathers across the nodes in her network are preparing her to succeed in ways no one node could do on its own.

And Tashawna is not alone. In part due to the changes in education, in part due to the effects of digital media, youth have a wide array of options for learning knowledge and developing skills. But how many youth feel in charge of their networks, or are even aware they exist as an interconnected whole? How do they learn to synthesize

Global Kids, an afterschool program in New York City that supports youth like Tashawna to be global citizens and community leaders, has begun to explore just these questions. More specifically, we are increasingly asking the following: What do youth need to understand and strategically navigate their distributed learning networks? And how can youth-serving institutions support youth to document the associated learning that address 21st century skills that so often go unrecorded?

We are far from alone in raising these concerns. A number of recent initiatives supported by the MacArthur Foundation (from which we too receive funds) are concerned with the distributed nature of learning experienced by today's young people and the challenge for both youth and learning institutions to integrate and assess it. While digital media has been a disruptive force supporting the fragmentation of learning environments, it yet remains a potential source for coordinating and synthesizing the experience.

One approach to empowering youth to be more in charge of their learning and make more sense of their distributed learning

network is to focus on youth's existing assets through both digital tools and offline activities to help them see the contours of their networks, understand their role as they traverse their learning nodes, and enhance their abilities to make connections amongst them. The following describes artifacts from three approaches Global Kids has undertaken to further explore these important issues.

Distributed Learning Maps

I was able above to describe Tashawna's distributed learning network because she showed it to me, on paper. It looked like this:



Actually, this was her second drawing. She didn't like her first because she was concerned it wasn't original. The first one looked like this:



When I first viewed these I paid attention to how she chose to group certain nodes. I noticed the distinctions between informal learning institutions and the formal, between portable digital media and online.

Of course, Tashawna doesn't walk around with a drawing of her learning network. I don't think she'd even thought about all the places she learns before I'd asked her

to draw these pictures. But when I did it was easy for her to list on a sheet of paper places like home and school. I had to push her, however, to list all of her portable media devices, web sites and after school programs. She wasn't used to thinking about them all as sites of learning. After each one I asked her what she learned from that node:

Me: What do you learn from texting on you cell-phone?

Tashawna: How to spell bad! (laughs)

Me: What else?

Tashawna: How to use technology more effectively to communicate.

At the end of the process, as a representative of one of her learning nodes, I was left with a broader understanding of Tashawna's network, of the resources she brings into our program, and where her learning with us might affect other sites of learning. From Tashawna's perspective, I hope she began to think, perhaps for the first time, about herself as a participant within her network, as the final source creating meaning by synthesizing the collected learning, and as the one ultimately responsible for learning how to best design and navigate her network, now and in the future.

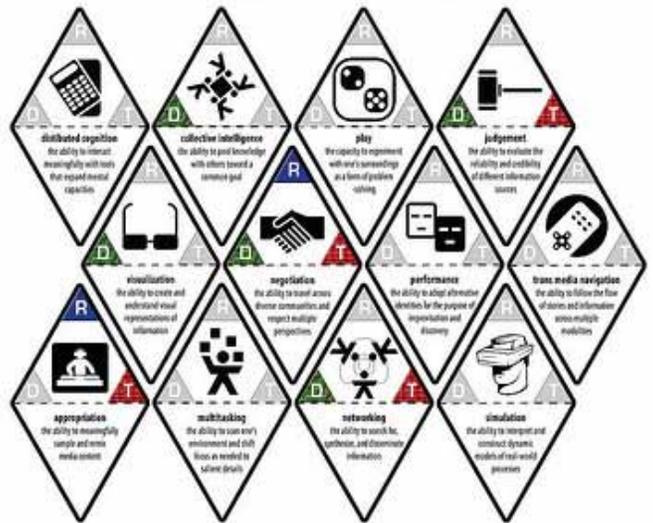
How might your school position itself different in relationship to your students if you understood their time with you as simply one stop on their learning train? How could your academic programs tap into their interests and strengths being pursued and developed outside the walls of your institution (or behind your library firewalls when they break through them during lunch)?

DIGITAL LITERACY TRANSCRIPT

Even if Tashawna could fully articulate the

Media Masters Digital Transcript

The transcript marks your progress in developing new media literacies. Each diamond represents a literacy, which can be filled with up to three possible badges which represent your ability to utilize, recognize and describe a given skill. Over the course of Media Masters, different things you do in the program will cause the page to fill up with badges.



Legend - Status Triangles

- Do it - the ability to utilize the given skill.
- Recognize it - the ability to point out examples of the given skill.
- Talk about it - the ability to describe to others the given skill.



learning she receives outside of the standard school curriculum, how can she communicate it to others, in a capacity more official than a college essay? Last year, we worked with Henry Jenkins' Project New Media Literacies to create something which might do just that: a Digital Literacy Transcript.

Henry Jenkins has identified and described the core literacies afforded by new media tools that are essential for full participation in our new digital age, such as Simulation, Negotiation, and Multitasking. Last year, Global Kids developed and implemented a curriculum that used social media to sharpen their literacies while assisting youth to understand how to think about them.

Below is Tashawna's transcript by the end of the school year (see picture above).

The Transcript turns each literacy into a triangle-shaped badge. Each corner represents a different relationship with the literacy: I can recognize it, I can talk about it, and I can do it. At the beginning of our program, each youth's Transcript was blank. Over

[CONTINUED ON PAGE 53]

Open Learning, Open Content: Emerging Trends in Education

by **CAREN N. LEVINE**

OPEN LEARNING AND SOCIAL MEDIA

SOCIAL media and Web 2.0 resources can facilitate the ways in which we create and share educational resources. There is a developing trend towards a new openness in learning regarding access to people, content, and other resources. The power of new social media lies in its ability to help forge connections between people and other people, ideas, resources, and content. Characteristics of this new learning culture include transforming information and resources, creating one's own resources and building on others, developing and participating in personal/professional learning networks, and personalized learning.

The 2010 Horizon Report projects that open content will hit a critical adoption point within the next year (nmc.org/pdf/2010-Horizon-Report.pdf). However, open content is just one piece of the equation. It is part of a larger culture of choice, customization, and participation in one's own learning.

Learning is becoming more custom tailored to the individual learner, and it is becoming more social and collaborative. Open learning supports this type of collaborative learning and teaching.

Below are different types of resources that day school educators can take advantage of to further their own professional development and learning, as well as that of their students.

CURRICULUM AND CONTENT SHARING SITES

More people than ever have access to information and resources that had once been secluded behind the walls of classrooms. Institutions of higher learning like MIT are making their course content available online for free through their Open Courseware initiative (ocw.mit.edu/OcwWeb/web/home/home/index.htm). This content is often bundled in ways that make it more usable for learners. For example, MIT developed a pathway designed specifically for high school students and teachers. Other institutions such as the University of the People (uopeople.org) were created specifically to level the global academic playing field.

In addition to resources from schools of higher learning, there are content sharing sites developed for educators and learners. These platforms support the development and

distribution of content modules. Examples include:

Connexions (cnx.org): a place to view



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and share educational material made up of small knowledge chunks that can be organized as courses, books, reports, etc. Anyone may view or contribute: authors create and collaborate; instructors rapidly build and share custom collections; learners find and explore content.

Curriki (curriki.org): a website where the community shares and collaborates on free and open-source curricula.

MERLOT (merlot.org): collects peer-reviewed teaching and learning materials, and where educators can find peer reviewed online teaching and learning materials; share advice and expertise about education with expert colleagues; and be recognized for contributions to quality education.

PEER TO PEER LEARNING PLATFORMS

New resources are becoming available that facilitate peer to peer learning. Some of these are free (with limitations) while others offer premium services at additional cost. These services can be used for online teaching; typically they include a webinar presentation tool and the ability to conduct online discussions. They target both

those who would like to teach as well as those who would like to learn.

Often these platforms serve as a “shadchan” by providing ways to match up those with an interest in teaching specific content to link up with participants who are eager to learn it. These platforms encourage educators who have expertise to share with a broader group and offers support to students seeking new challenges or reinforcement of their learning through tutorials and supplemental study or peer teaching.

Examples of these learning platforms include:

Learn Central (learncentral.org): a new social learning network for education sponsored by Elluminate. More than a social network or a learning community, this free, open environment represents the next logical step of combining asynchronous social networking and the ability to store, organize, and find educational resources with the live, online meeting and collaboration provided by Elluminate technology.

Supercool School (supercoolschool.com): Supercool School is an all-in-one education tool that allows participants to create live on-line classes, record them and then distribute them virally. Students can join the live sessions, watch recordings and even request classes themselves.

WiZiQ (wiziq.com): WiZiQ is a web-based platform for anyone and everyone who wants to teach and learn live, online. Teachers and students use WiZiQ for its state-of-the-art virtual classroom, to create and share online educational content and tests, and to connect with persons having similar subject interests.

CONTENT PUBLISHING AND DISSEMINATION

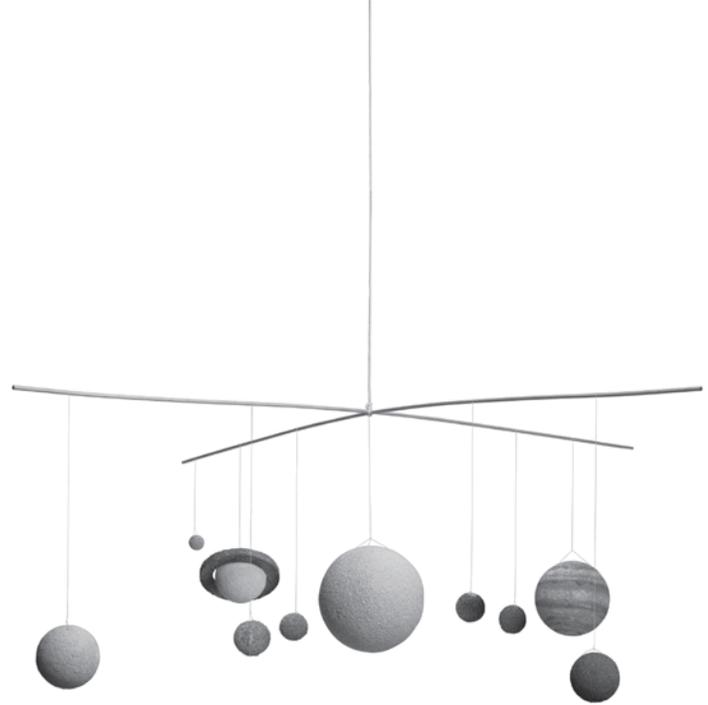
Educators and learners can also create, publish, and distribute their own textbooks. Sites like CK-12 Flexbook (ck12.org/flexr) provide tools for creating customized textbooks which are available for download on demand. Other more generic resources, like wikis, can help support the creation of educator and student-generated content. For example, a wiki can serve as the infrastructure for a “living textbook” developed by students and built on year to year by peers.

JEWISH OPEN LEARNING RESOURCES

There are a number of emerging open learning resources and projects created to support Jewish learning. These include:

Chinuch.org (chinuch.org): Chinuch.org began as a project to digitize over 15 years worth of collected materials from the Torah Umesorah Creative Learning Pavilion, which had been collecting and categorizing materials shared by thousands of educators. Materials now come from principals, teachers and lay leaders from the hundreds of Torah schools across America and around the world.

[CONTINUED ON PAGE 63]



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Digital Tools for the Classroom

by **SHOLOM EISENSTAT**

It's too late to make the case for classroom use of the tools of the 21st century. That's been done over and over in many other places. We're already 10% of the way through this century and we need to acknowledge that there are powerful modern tools that are here to stay and available to the vast majority of our students. Many of the most powerful tools are available at no cost, and the developer communities are creating ever more powerful and more robust tools for learning.

The tools of the Information Age enable even the youngest of students to greatly increase their reach and enhance their grasp of all that they are interested in knowing. There has never been a time since Creation when students and teachers have had more powerful tools and resources, quantitatively and qualitatively, available to them.

Technology is demonstrably disruptive to all aspects of the environment into which it is introduced. In recent decades, we've seen that everywhere from entertainment to the encyclopedia; education is not immune from this disruption. Thus, it is necessary to say that many of the technologies mentioned here are best integrated into the classroom by using them in conjunction with constructivist collaborative, inquiry and project-based techniques of curriculum delivery. If you can't give up "chalk and talk," then stop reading now!

Moodle

Moodle (modular object oriented dynamic learning environment) is a system that enhances and expands the classroom as it enhances the power of teachers and students to build knowledge together. Much more than a "content management" or "learning management" system, Moodle is a set of dynamic tools which provide for the delivery of documents in any digital media directly to any networked computer, anywhere, anytime. Assignments can be submitted, graded and returned all via moodle. Text-based discussion forums, glossaries, calendars, quizzes and much more are integrated parts of the package.

One of the best aspects of Moodle is that it is open-source and free. It is constantly under development and improvement and can even run in Hebrew (more information and the platform can be found at moodle.org). Schools that can't manage such

a server-based product in-house can take advantage of many vendors who supply moodle services.



Sholom Eisenstat has an MA in Parshanut HaMikrah and spent years teaching in Jewish day schools. He is currently a Computer Resource Teacher in the York Region District School Board near Toronto. He can be reached at sholom@rogers.com.

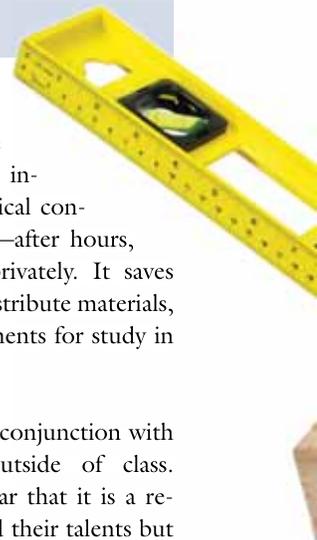
Moodle enables the teacher and student to interact beyond the physical confines of the classroom—after hours, digitally, publicly or privately. It saves money when used to distribute materials, assignments and documents for study in digital format.

Moodle is best used in conjunction with classroom activities outside of class. Teachers should not fear that it is a replacement for them and their talents but rather as a powerful addition to their toolkit. Many students thrive when they are able to use the power of moodle.

One example of a Moodle site constructed for Jewish learning is available at ilearn.sfsu.edu/login/extlogin.php (Username: JHVC01 Password: FILMFAN!).

Digital Storytelling - so much more than the pencil

There are many guises that digital storytelling can take. At one level this is merely the latest version of what we called "slide-tape" presentations 30 years ago. Powerpoint presentations are a poor cousin. Digital storytelling tools enable the creation of high quality linear narratives



using images and audio voice or music tracks. These can be varied as news reports of Joseph's brothers' arrival in Egypt, the expression of the facets of a talmudic argument, a report on the progress of peace negotiations or interviews or a report on a recent science experiment.

There's the free Microsoft application Photostory which enables the creation of very high quality presentations of images from any digital photo collection. It's easy to add an audio track to the "photostory" and the application itself can actually compose music to accompany the images.

Apple's iMovie and Microsoft's Movie-maker enable students to enter the world of digital storytelling using video.

A very comprehensive introduction to

can be very creative when interviewing one another as reporter and expert or creating a radio news item or documentary. Of course, this audio technology can also be used in digital storytelling. Popular applications for audio processing are Audacity for Windows users and GarageBand for Mac users. Both of these applications can create audio files that can be transferred to portable mp3 players. In that way, students can listen to audio files recorded in class for review or preparation.

Many teachers have found that struggling students who are able to listen or watch a teacher's lesson or demonstration a number of times till they "get it" are more likely to achieve the expectations.

Moving beyond simple audio "casts," many teachers and students like Voice-

choosing, with tools that enable contribution from the user. Blogs, whether available only within the classroom community or to a wider audience provide avenues for expression of opinion. Online blogs are powerful ways to expand comprehension and develop expression. What would Joseph be blogging about from his Egyptian Viceroy office? or Shlomo HaMelech or Moshe Rabbeinu himself?

A wiki is a collaborative, participatory website. Wikis enable the collaborative building of information archives where student learning is demonstrated. The collaborative participation in such activities is a perfect model of the social constructivism that is the foundation of the new web.

For an introduction to the concepts of Web 2.0 see commoncraft.com. Moodle, and wikispaces (wikispaces.com), each provide various flavors of blogs and wikis. A Google search will find many more services for free or small fees.

Handhelds / Wireless

Schools will be enabling teachers and students to connect to their networks wirelessly to take advantage of the power of the computers that are the cell-phones, smartphones, ipods, etc., that most students carry with them. Use of these powerful and very portable computers is a new and very exciting avenue of technology integration. Many of these ideas are being developed by Liz Kolb, whose research can be seen at cellphone-learning.com.

Each of these tools is able to provide the teacher and the student with appropriate enablers for differentiated instruction.

While on the topic of smaller more portable computing devices, I would be remiss to not mention the just announced Apple iPad computer which might become a perfect classroom computing tool enabling text reading, video and other multimedia, internet access and various applications.

At a fraction of the cost of an interactive



digital storytelling can be seen at teachersfirst.com/getsourcesource.cfm?id=7094.

Podcasting / Audio Recording

Podcasting at the beginner stage is simply using the audio recording capabilities of most computers to record voices. This can be used as a powerful assessment tool where students create a digital recording as an assignment completion; reading and music are obvious choices but students

thread (voicethread.com), which provides for sharing images and video and comment "threads" about them. A very easy and powerful interface is behind this mashup of video podcasting and blogging—"vlogging."

Blogs, Wikis

The rise of Web 2.0 technologies has replaced the "one way web," where information was broadcast for the seeker's

Leading by Example: Teacher-Led Professional Development

by **GINGER THORNTON**

EVERYTHING I know about professional development, I learned in an auditorium at a small school in Texas sometime in the 1980s.

Teachers from several rural school districts were meeting together for some sort of in-service day, and I vividly remember returning to the auditorium with several hundred teachers and sitting down for the next hour-long session. A heavy-set man in an ill-fitting suit walked to the podium, glanced down at the table next to him laden with a pile of textbooks, smiled a bit nervously, and spent the next forty-five minutes discussing, in excruciating detail, the best methods for covering the various sizes of publicly-funded textbooks issued to students in our schools, complete with a diatribe on the sundry evils of glue and tape. Within ten minutes, nearly everyone there was either fast asleep or sporting the vacant look of the terminally bored. Over the ensuing twenty-five or so years, those forty-five minutes of my life (that I'll never get back) have come to embody everything that can go horribly awry with professional development.

Teaching English in the wilds of West Texas (and instructing students in the finer points of book covering) is a long way from directing Instructional Technology at the Charles E. Smith Jewish Day School in Rockville, Maryland. It's the distance from a very young teacher to someone well past the middle of her career, from a small lab full of those old Texas Instruments computers to a Jewish day school leading the charge toward technology integration in Jewish education.

A Brief History of Technology at the Charles E. Smith Jewish Day School

When I came to CESJDS to teach English in 2003, there was technology—more precisely, desktops in standing labs and one in each classroom around both our Lower and Upper School campuses. Teachers used the classroom desktops almost exclusively to check attendance, and one computer lab, wired as a language lab, was the home of the school's only digital projector. None of our labs were used for much other than typing, and the ceiling-mounted projector was turned on four or five times a year (usually for a small staff training of one kind or another—never in the presence of students).

In the spring of 2006, something wonderful happened. The school received a sizable gift from a long-time benefactor who wanted to do something “transformative” at the school. Faced with a new landscape of possibilities, the administration made a crucial choice. They formed a Technology Task Force of teachers from both the Upper and Lower Schools that began working together to test equipment and to advise the school as to which of the many options would work best in our classrooms. The eleven Task Force members, of which I was one, tested various laptops and tablets,

a variety of projectors, interactive whiteboards, and document cameras. We met several times over the coming months to compare our findings and share the



Ginger Thornton, a twenty-five year veteran of the classroom, is now Director of Instructional Technology at the Charles E. Smith Jewish Day School in Rockville, Maryland. She can be reached at GThornton@cesjds.org.

lessons we'd developed, and we visited other schools. Soon, a Tanakh teacher was teaching a fourth grade General Studies teacher how students could collaboratively ink annotations on text; an Upper School history teacher showed a fifth grade Judaics teacher how to move seamlessly among a graphic organizer, a website, clips from a video, and a primary text within the same lesson. By the end of that school year, CESJDS put a wireless projector in every classroom and began to make tablet laptops available for classroom use.

What's striking about this process—and about the professional development that it quickly required and engendered—is the prominent role of teachers. During the first year of introducing new technologies, the Technology Task Force took the lead. For our first whole-school training day, we borrowed an idea called the Dart-n-Dash from the Cincinnati Country Day School, where a number of members of the Task Force had visited the previous year. Teachers moved sequentially through several classrooms of colleagues and gave the same five-to-ten minute demo of a particularly successful lesson to each group. By the end, each

class had seen six lessons they could adapt for their own classes. A one-hour session followed, led by the Dart-n-Dash presenters, where teachers chose to explore one of the tools or strategies hands-on. Teachers left that first Dart-n-Dash eager to try what they'd seen.

Our subsequent professional development sessions have taken a variety of forms, but all have been led by teachers who often got the germ of the idea they're showing from an earlier session led by a colleague. We've offered longer workshops focused on particular kinds of software or projects in which teachers explain and show samples of student work, followed by time for participating teachers to discuss using the lesson or project in their own classrooms. We've offered lab-style sessions where teachers familiar with a particular technique or tool help colleagues who come interested in learning or with a project already in mind. One of our teachers discovered SpeedGeeking at a conference. Two or three teachers move from one five-minute presentation to another around a large room, learning about technology that's worked in a colleague's classroom. After

our first SpeedGeeking, Judaics teachers asked General Studies teachers about the blogging project or the chat tool they'd shown, and General Studies teachers began asking Judaics teachers about Ning and Drop.io.

Arguably, in fact, this is the most crucial byproduct of teacher-led professional development. When I first arrived at CESJDS, Judaics teachers and General Studies teachers had little contact, and our Lower and Upper School campuses might as well have been in different states. But the model that first took hold in the Technology Task Force, and then spread out to the faculty, prized community and rewarded collaboration. As teachers began to learn about technology from each other across what had historically been hard and fast separations, a remarkable thing happened—we began as a faculty to collaborate in other ways and to become a closer and more collegial community.

THE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT LESSONS OF BOOK COVERING FOR

DUMMIES

So in what ways might Book Covering for Dummies be a primer for what not to do in planning professional development? Most of the lessons for successful professional development are obvious: excite teachers, privilege process over content, emphasize practice rather than theory, focus on the audience more than the speaker. Nothing surprising there. But what might surprise some is the real lesson of that experience, a lesson crucial to our professional development strategy at CESJDS—that what doomed Book Covering for Dummies is what dooms many of our classrooms. Put another way, teacher-led training works because successful 21st-century professional development looks exactly like a successful 21st-century classroom.

EXCITE TEACHERS

Teachers, like students, are bored by useless talk and by that which is universally required. So a first principle: at every opportunity, offer teachers choice about

[CONTINUED ON PAGE 42]

Alexander Muss High School in Israel (AMHSI) is dedicated to engaging teens and helping them discover, explore and embrace their connection to the heritage, culture, and land of Israel. AMHSI works together with Day Schools and community groups to customize their Israel experience bringing Israel's living history into the hearts, minds and souls of all that attend.



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[CONTINUED FROM PAGE 41]

what they spend their professional development time doing. That said, it's not enough to make professional development opportunities informative or even useful. Success has to be fun. During our visits to the Cincinnati Country Day School, our hosts repeatedly emphasized the idea that professional development needs to be an event. Give the professional time a theme, create a logo, make the snacks more interesting and varied—mark the time teachers are being asked to spend as special. These small things matter in making the statement that we value the teachers and the technology we're teaching them.

PRIVILEGE PROCESS OVER CONTENT

That substantive professional development is not so much about content might seem counterintuitive. But beyond an hour on any one subject, most people begin to lose focus, and few technology tools can be explained, much less mastered, in that amount of time. Teachers are much more likely to see the potential of technology in their classrooms by seeing the success of others rather than the details of a particular tool. It's much more effective to create excitement and an appetite for further study (tasks, to be fair, that my old friend the bookcover whisperer probably could never have accomplished), and then provide later opportunities for supported play and continued work with other teachers to master what's been introduced.

Think of it this way: I can explain how to use a tool or strategy and only scratch the surface. Or I can show a teacher how that tool has already succeeded, provide support when needed, and soon get out of their way. A crucial move at CESJDS has been the transformation of three teachers, who taught pullout technology classes in the Lower School, into Instructional Technology Specialists. They meet regu-

larly with teachers throughout our Upper and Lower School to help plan lessons and coach technology integration, and they visit classes both to model and to mentor. This means we're about the job of professional development every moment of every day throughout the year.

Emphasize practice rather than theory

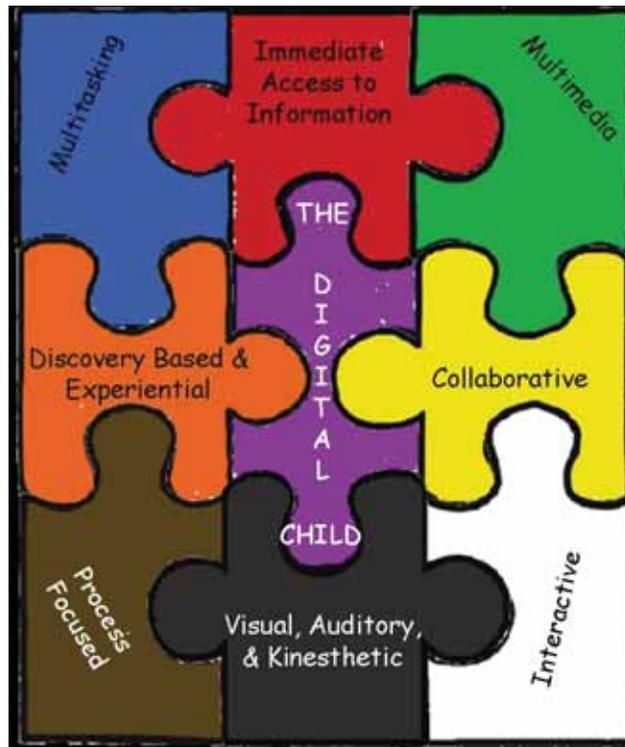
Despite the barrier of time, the aim of every professional development opportunity we provide is that teachers walk away with something they can use in their own classroom. We show as wide and differentiated

that afternoon.

Focus on the audience more than the speaker

Ah, the much-lamented demise of the "sage on the stage"—nowhere is that model more dead than in professional development. We chose the wireless tablet/projector model in part because it frees the teacher from the front of the classroom and makes the classroom a collaborative space, where peers work together and learn from each other, where success results from the harnessing of different skills. It's the perfect model for professional development; teachers are more likely to buy in to learning that they help plan and for which they are in some measure responsible. This is not to say that speaking from the stage, or the front of the classroom, has no place. But the purpose of such speech is to inspire rather than teach. Put another way, professional development is not about being led. Teaching is what happens once we leave center stage and step out among the desks—a truth as much in teacher training as in the classroom. As with students, nothing is as powerful as teachers speaking to and learning from other teachers.

In these ways, we've begun to change the way we educate at CESJDS. Not that it's been as fast or as seamless as we'd like.



a sampling as possible of lesson/project ideas and the student work created, and emphasize ways a tool or strategy can provide opportunity for differentiated learning or creative problem-solving. We push our teachers to think like teachers—to make connections or find alternate applications. We include supported hands-on practice as part of every session we offer. And we ask our teachers to be practical. It's unrealistic to suggest to teachers, or for a teacher to expect, that they can spend one session in September learning how they might use Ning in the classroom and then wake up on November 16th and decide to introduce Ning to their students

But we have learned important lessons. If the goal of your professional development is to have teachers simply learn to be better with the technology or use more technology in their classrooms—if, in other words, you're satisfied to use technology to do the same old things in new ways—you'll win the battle and lose the war. The goal of teacher-led training is both to model and to create opportunities to transform the way we teach, to make classrooms more innovative, more student-centered, more collaborative and learning more project-based and problem-solving. Do this and we become better teachers. Do this and we become better schools. ז



Interview with Lesley Zafran, Member of RAVSAK's Board of Directors

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

Before I had children I was strictly academic in my approach to education. When it became time to enroll my children in school I interviewed at all the best independent schools. It quickly became apparent to me that Jewish day school education offered the only opportunity for a Jewish values-driven education that puts *menschlichkeit* in the same ranking as the 3 Rs. It is a partnership tool not only for those families who are already enjoying living a Jewish life, but also for those parents who need the support of encouragement and knowledge.

I cannot think of a better gift for the future of our country than to have young people who approach their decision making and goals through a Jewish lens. Our Jewish day school graduates intellectually grasp the importance of the bridge to their Jewish past, and thus history in general, giving them the present-day prized advantage of learning to think globally. And their connection to their own Jewish identity is strengthened through day schools' curriculum of Jewish living, connection to Israel, Hebrew and Torah.

These are life skills of incomparable value as they head off for college to face the challenges of campus life and the choices of young adulthood—and only Jewish day school education offers this.

What strengths do you bring to the RAVSAK board?

For 12 years I have been intimately involved in day school education. As a parent, I have learned to listen to what matters to other parents. As a trustee, I have learned about good governance, finance, fund-raising and the issues of independent school education in general. All of this will I hope be of value to RAVSAK.



strength of any board. I was deeply involved in writing our school's five-year strategic plan and am currently involved in our Board's current strategic planning process. As RAVSAK begins its journey with this new board we will also be re-examining our goals and creating a strategic plan—I hope my experience will be of benefit. I also hope that my own experience regarding the transformative power of day school education will be of use as RAVSAK strives to widen its membership and fulfill its mission.

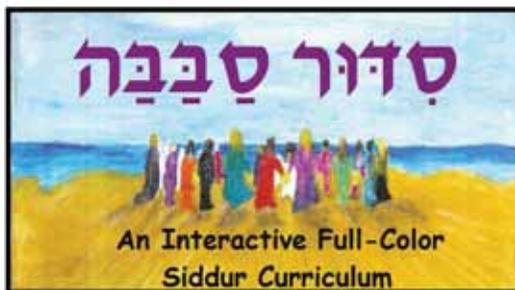
Do you have a favorite Jewish teaching?

I am not knowledgeable enough to have a favorite, but I'm very partial to the text from Tanchuma VaYakhel: "The Names We Are Given."

I have had the opportunity to learn about the difference between a school for Jewish children, and a Jewish day school. For five years I ran a project at my school (Donna Klein Jewish Academy) called Jewish Day Schools of the 21st Century which focused on Jewish values and bringing them to life at every level in the school.

Strategic planning is crucial to the

I am endlessly fascinated by the concept that we have three names: one that our parents call us, one that our fellow human beings call us and one that we acquire for ourselves. The idea that the one we acquire for ourselves is better than all the others is an inspiring way to live one's life and gives endless opportunities for renewal and reinvention of self (more education!).



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The Public Library as a Center for Technological Creativity

by **KELLY CZARNECKI**

ONE of the tenets we learned in library school is that “the library is a growing organism.” Far more than just books are moving around at the library. With challenges in the economy and technology always changing, libraries are not the same place they were when we were growing up.

I am a Technology Education Librarian at a public library branch for youth in Charlotte, North Carolina, called *ImaginOn*. It is also a partnership with the Children’s Theatre of Charlotte. Our link together is our mission statement which is “bringing stories to life.”

There are many ways that we bring stories to life through technology on a daily basis. While some schools come to see a theatre performance, others visit the library to learn about our services with contemporary technologies.

One of the well used technology resources at *ImaginOn* is Studio i, where youth can create a video using Pinnacle, Stop Motion Pro, iMovie, or Final Cut software. They can also create music using GarageBand or Sony ACID music. The library owns a portable station that is called the ReadyANIMATOR (readyanimator.com), which has software on it for people to create movies and music. Making movies—whether live action, 3D or stop motion—develops important skills to bring stories to life. Learning about storyboarding, presentation, and filming, using appropriate music, and mentoring each other are activities that fit into many of the courses they are currently taking.

Sometimes schools that visit Studio i already have a project in mind that they would like their students to work on. Others come just wanting their students to be aware that this place is a resource they can use as part of their school work or as a place they can use free resources to explore a hobby. We have an annual Film Festival and Music Bash (two separate programs) that are a culmination of what was created in the Studio i or in the community by youth, throughout the year. These celebrations give youth an opportunity to emerge from behind the microphone or the camera and connect with other youth who share the same passions. They also help motivate them to create something they would like others to see. We invite filmmaking professionals to work with the youth on an aspect such as sound design or acting that they might want to further pursue through courses or other library programs.

In addition to music and video creation, video gaming is also very popular at *ImaginOn*. Game design programs using such software as Kodu, Little Big Planet, Scratch, GameMaker, Alice, or MultiMedia Fusion help bring stories to life through a different medium. Several of these programs are free, and youth who are familiar with playing video games are usually quick to pick up the basic mechanics of us-

ing the software. Peer mentorship really takes the lead during these workshops as students learn how to improve their knowledge of the program.



Kelly Czarnecki is a Technology Education Librarian at ImaginOn in Charlotte, North Carolina. She can be contacted at techedlibrarian@gmail.com.

Game design is another great program for parents to work alongside their child and learn the software together. We of-



fer game design workshops and have the software available on the computers or consoles so that the youth can play at their convenience (without having a staff-led program). Open play gaming is an even more popular activity, offered as part of an after-school program with a local public school in the library. It has brought many non-library users to the library, encouraging youth who might not have been familiar with all that the library had to offer to start using the resources (beyond just gaming) more often.

This past summer was our first time for using the LEGO Mindstorms robotics. One teen said that he was glad this was going on at the library; otherwise, he would have just sat at home and done nothing. He was new to the area and ended up meeting other teens that attended the program. Together they built a robot within an hour that was able to kick a ball! A companion website that has step-by-step photos of putting a robot together

is nxtprograms.com. The computer program to run the software is already written and just needs to be transferred to the robot once it's built.

“ Together students built a robot within an hour that was able to kick a ball!

There are countless modifications that can be made to force the youth to think beyond following the instructions. Teamwork and skills such as math, science, and physics are naturally a part of their experience. Since we have two robotics kits, we often build a robot with one kit and then have the youth model their robot on the one that was created, a more effective guide than mere 2D photos.

While we do have a lot of technology resources at *ImaginOn*, we are always learning how to make it more interesting and secure for the youth and the library. We've had our share of resources “go missing” or get broken. Since many youth (like

many adults) may only stay in their comfort zone—for example, by connecting to their favorite social networking site rather than taking part in a workshop—we've

tried to bring our classes to them. Instead of locating the game design workshop in the computer lab, we move it to the gaming corner. If anyone wants to game at that time, they have to take part in the program or just wait until open gaming starts up again for the day.

The library of the 21st century is a resource for youth to try out technologies they enjoy and might want to get better at. Coming away with a product, whether an edited photo, a burned DVD, or a game they created (and can access online to edit when they get home) is an exciting experience that can live beyond their visit to a physical location. 2



iSchool in Our Schools

One thing is to feel wowed by technovisionaries. It's another thing altogether to experience the benefits of a new technological platform firsthand. *HaYidion* asked schools to write about one program of technological development and innovation that made a discernible improvement in the classroom. Below are four examples, ranging from a schoolwide plan for technological overhaul to the use of one new tech product in the revamping of Zionist education.

Empowering Teachers with Embedded Professional Development

י **GREENFIELD DAY SCHOOL**, Miami, Florida

Greenfield Day School participated in the initiative Project Day School Excellence, funded by the Center for The Advancement of Jewish Education and The Greater Miami Jewish Federation. The goal was to create teacher learning communities, embedding daily practice for more meaningful school-wide improvement. The National Staff Development Council provided a two year learning opportunity for our leadership team. Our team shared what was learned with our staff. All of our faculty participated in reading research articles, making peer classroom visitations and formulating an overall goal for our school.

Since we are a laptop middle school, our middle school teachers are very proficient at incorporating technology. The elementary school teachers needed to improve their technological skills. During brainstorming sessions we reached consensus and expressed our goal as follows: "Elementary school teachers will become proficient in the use of computers and other technological tools to augment daily instruction, provide a richer learning experience, and facilitate smooth integration between academic and Judaic curriculums while improving student performance." This goal also aligns with our school mission to integrate secular and Judaic studies as well as enhance technology in an ever expanding global community.

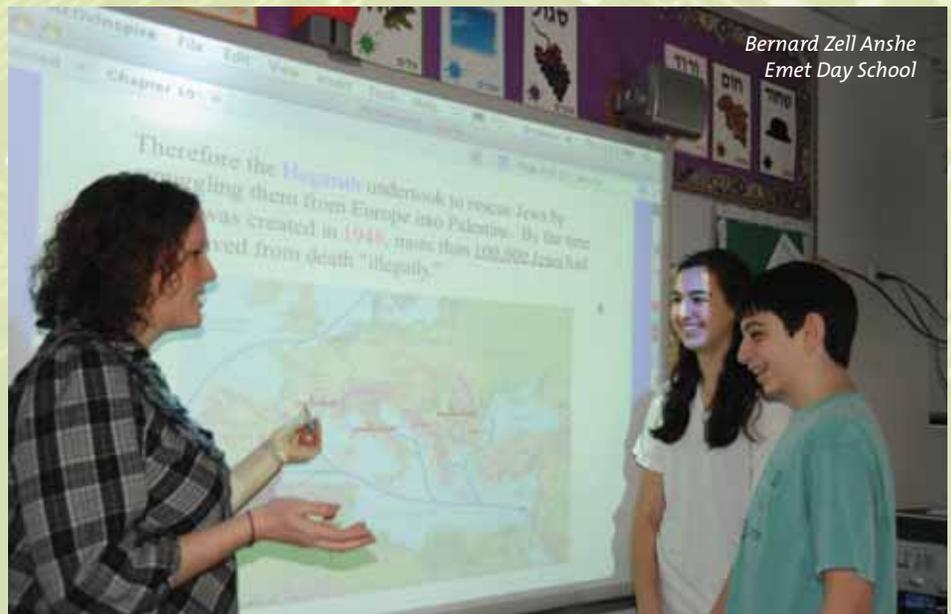
The NSDC Standards Assessment Inventory was used to determine which areas of teacher training were required. The

leadership team created a teacher computer skills inventory using input from the teachers as well as the assessment inventory completed by all teachers indicating their knowledge and proficiency with technology. The teachers and the leadership team analyzed data from the computer skills inventory. A similar survey was administered to students in Grades 3, 4 and 5. The data from the surveys demonstrated the overall gaps in student and teacher computer skills. These results were used to determine the specific teacher training needed by experts in technology over a two year period.

As a result of utilizing NSDC standards to create and implement professional learning communities, the following results indicate teacher mastery of learning:

midway through training, teachers' self-confidence improved as well as the kinds of activities students accomplished using technology.

- students viewed teachers as learners, and the Middle School students began mentoring teachers during professional learning opportunities.
- teachers became adept at producing professional looking materials.
- teachers who began with few technology skills increased their mastery by a range of 20 to 70 percent.
- teachers who had more mastery of technology increased their skills by 10 to 15 percent.



Bernard Zell Anshe
Emet Day School

Zionism – Then and Now

ז **BERNARD ZELL ANSHE EMET DAY SCHOOL,**
Chicago, Illinois

Our middle school students are growing up in a world much different than the one their teachers grew up in. There is a world of cell-phones, iPods, and Wiis. It's a world where technology is woven through their most favorite activities. This reality led us to wonder how we could bring that technology into the classroom and move the study of Zionism into the students' wired world.

Last year, we were awarded a technology grant from the AVI CHAI Foundation for a Promethean board which would allow us to recreate our eighth grade Zionism course, providing a technology dimension that would add to student learning through visual and interactive media. We selected Promethean, which has capacities similar to Smart and other whiteboards, because of its user community (Promethean Planet), an on-line tool with resources, lessons, and discussion groups for all Promethean users. The Zionism course explores the people and events that led to the creation of the state and tracks the next sixty-two years.

The addition of an interactive board has enabled the students to better understand Israeli history with the addition of maps, video, and audio clips. Interactive websites and

educational programs serve as tools for engaged learning. Imagine learning about the UN vote for the Partition Plan in 1947 and hearing and seeing it happen right before your eyes! In addition to these features we also have polling devices to use with the board. This feature allows students to individually answer questions posed by the teacher through a small pod. Beginning a lesson with a review quiz of the past week's lessons is both fun for students because of the novel technology employed, and useful for the teacher to see what material has been grasped and what needs to be reviewed. It also allows students to voice opinions about decisions to be made and project "what happens next" in a dramatic historic moment.

The addition of a Promethean board in the classroom has been valuable not only because of its technology; it also addresses the needs of diverse student learning profiles through its visual and interactive components. Students have enthusiastically welcomed this use of technology in our classroom. A future task will be assessing student learning in this version of the course in comparison with student learning in the pre-technology version of the course and interpreting the results. Stay tuned. ז

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iSchool in Our Schools

Great Challenges, Great Rewards: A School's Journey Towards Technology Integration

ז **VANCOUVER TALMUD TORAH**, Vancouver, British Columbia

As educators, our mission is to create learning environments where students are challenged to think critically, collaborate meaningfully and communicate effectively. With the remarkable increase in the growth and use of technology, how do we incorporate these powerful tools to meet our learning objectives when the teacher is no longer the primary owner of information? We are living in an age where students capably navigate the many social networking tools of the digital age while those charged with instructing them often lack the know-how to keep up. With children continuously “plugged in” and “tuned out,” traditional methods of instruction need to be enhanced to better connect students and to engage them in more authentic learning.

Like many schools, early efforts at Vancouver Talmud Torah focused on acquiring the necessary equipment and resources. We measured our success by the number of computers we owned, how many students and teachers used the lab and how effectively our infrastructure worked. With a state of the art media lab in place, we soon came to realize that the machines were being utilized, but their power to transform the learning experience was not being harnessed to its fullest potential.

To begin the process of change, we began to educate the faculty and leadership team. We hired a consultant to help us understand the wealth of possibilities that exist to innovate the curriculum through the use of technology. This “pitch” was by no means easy. With a large and diverse faculty, both in terms of experience and philosophy, the message required multiple revisions to enlist the engagement of all stakeholders. One of our most successful achievements was offering no-interest loans to anyone who wanted to purchase a laptop. Having teachers own their own computers transformed what was initially

perceived as threatening to something fun and challenging. Putting tools directly into teachers' hands facilitated a paradigm shift more than any professional development or encouragement from administration.

We offered teachers the opportunity to join a summer tech cohort, led by our technology consultant, to immerse themselves in the “sandbox.” This was a stress-free, non-judgmental time of “play” where the teachers could learn, experiment, and make mistakes. The cohort, which still meets monthly, produced some impressive results. A first grade Judaic teacher filmed every one of her 30 students reciting Tal Am lyrics and dialogue. She then sent a video to each family to demonstrate her students' remarkable progress. Several teachers created Wikis and Blogs, not only to communicate with parents, but to enhance the learning experience for students.

Our school rabbi has made it a mission to restructure the paper and pencil tasks that are given to students. Students comment on the weekly Torah portion online and are also encouraged to critique and evaluate their peers' commentaries. Not only can Rabbi Bellas assess his students' work at any time from any place, but parents are welcome to observe as well. Our kindergarten teachers have begun to create weekly literacy books using photos of the children. Imagine the experience of learning about spiders when you and your friends are the stars of the lesson!

One unforeseen outcome of this journey has been the strong teacher-leadership that has emerged. Teachers have gained confidence and have a renewed sense of pride in their craft. The impact on student learning is immeasurable. Many on our team are joining with their students to learn together. This indeed is a giant leap toward 21st century learning. ז



Technology as an Ally to Support Inclusion

י **HEBREW ACADEMY OF MORRIS COUNTY**, Randolph, New Jersey

With the introduction of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, educators have devoted their efforts toward the academic advancement of all American students. It is not enough to simply revise the curriculum, but instead to incorporate within it problem solving, creative thinking, technological know-how, and interpersonal skills. The administrators and faculty of the Hebrew Academy of Morris County (HAMC) strive to achieve these goals for each and every student. This positive approach is also the impetus to switch our educational model from a pull-out program to an inclusion-based one where students who require remediation (or enrichment) are educated in the typical classroom setting. Without the support of technology this transition would be much more challenging.

The teachers at HAMC use technology as an ally. Interactive whiteboards, one laptop for each middle school student, software recognition programs, and sophisticated scanners are just some of the tools that even the playing field for a wide variety of students. For our students with auditory processing difficulties we transmit information via the Smart Board in a visual and tactile manner. A software program such as Smart Sync enables the teacher to closely monitor a student's work on his/her laptop and to instantly send notes, providing immediate support and constructive information. A simple voice recognition software program helps to remediate students with fine motor /written expression difficulties who may otherwise feel unable to begin a challenging writing task. A webcam can be used to assist students who require extra reinforcement of concepts by making it possible to review a lesson multiple times.

Technological assistance gives teachers instant access to electronic resources and makes information come alive. Educators using such technology also find that because it is so interactive in nature, it appeals to all types of learners with varying degrees of skills and knowledge. Additionally, lessons can be automatically saved, printed, emailed and posted on websites. Technology allows all of our students to become more active participants in a lesson.

The creative use of technology to support students with diverse needs poses economical and pedagogical challenges to our school and our teachers. There is a heavy price tag associated with technological accommodations, both for the equipment and for the training. Our teachers must utilize technology without compromising the benefits gained from more traditional teaching methods. We have come to realize that through these challenges come optimal outcomes for our students. Technology is a tool that positively supports differentiated instruction and inclusion and is of great value to all the members of the HAMC student body. י



Sound, Camera, Web! Animating the Parsha

¿ Interview with **SARAH LEFTON, FOUNDER OF "G-DCAST"**

TELL us about your background—how did you go from “nice Jewish girl” to “producer/director of ‘G-dcast’”?

Well, I went to NYU to study film and interactive media. That led me to work in the advertising world for six years, creating web sites and videos for entertainment brands and celebrities. I didn't love what I was doing all the time, but I learned a ton. Later, I took my marketing skills and went to work as the Outreach Director for Camp Tawonga, a Jewish summer camp just outside Yosemite National Park. Although I was very involved in the community already—belonging to a synagogue, going to a lot of events, volunteering—working as a “professional Jew” really opened my eyes to a lot of ways in which my professional skills could make the Jewish world a better place.

Describe how you came up with the idea for “G-dcast.”

As someone who didn't grow up with much of a Jewish education, who has learned a lot about Jewish practice as an adult, sometimes stories from the Torah and midrash and everyday minhag strike me as wildly foreign, or funny, or strange. It is precisely this point of view—feeling like a stranger sometimes to the tradition—that helps me to make work for people who didn't grow up with a strong Jewish education.

I love learning from all kinds of sources—teachers, books and definitely from friends with wild stories. I heard a story once about a man about to go into surgery pondering what the best thing would be to do about his amputated limb. It went sort of like this:

My uncle was in the hospital for a diabetes-related leg amputation. As he was prepped for surgery, a nurse asked, “What shall we do with the limb?”

What?! he cried. What should I do?! Play softball with it? Compost it in my garden? Build a coffee table out of it?

The nurse explained that she knew my uncle was Jewish, and that sometimes, Jews want their limbs preserved to be buried with the rest of the body when the time comes....so that when the messiah comes, the body can be resurrected fully intact.

When I heard this story, first I thought, “What?!” And then, I immediately thought, “I have to make an animated film about this.” It just sounded like a cartoon to me! I did some research about amputation and the body in Jewish tradition and learned a lot from classical sources as well as some modern responsa. I realized that my funny animated film could be a film that you could actually learn something from, sort of an animated documentary about halacha, rabbinics and minhag. This became increasingly exciting to me as an avid documentary-goer and ravenously interested Jewish learner.

One thing led to another, and the “G-dcast” project was born. I recruited an animator, and together, we realized that teaching Jewish ideas through funny



Sarah Lefton is the executive director and producer of “G-dcast,” an animated Jewish series on the web at www.g-dcast.com. She can be reached at sarahlefton@gmail.com.

little films was a solid idea on a number of levels—as education and as entertainment; we decided to start with stories from the Torah. We'd still like to make films like the one about the leg!

What did it take to get the funding and team together to make your dream a reality?

This was the hard part. I love making films. I hate asking people for money.

The team came together easily. I am blessed to know and work with many, many creative people. I collaborated with a talented animator friend and a brilliant writer who I've known for many, many years. We had always dreamt of making a project together, and in fact had been brainstorming about doing an online Talmud project when the “G-dcast” idea started to come together.

I ended up personally putting the money out to make a pilot, and we got that done as a sort of proof of concept. I took that episode, Parshat Balak, to conferences, parties, networking events – anywhere that someone influential might see it. Eventually, the right *shidduch* was made to the right wonderful funder who believed in the concept, added her wisdom to our ideas and sent us on our way to

G-DCAST

make our first season. Since then, I've spent a lot of time developing a professional, forward-looking business plan, writing follow-on grants and learning from my more established peers in the social entrepreneurship world.

How does an "episode" get made? How many people work on it? How expensive and complicated is the technology behind it?

Our first "season" is a full cycle of Parshat Hashavua cartoons, and they all worked according to the same process.

First, we identified a guest writer/narrator who we thought would do an amazing job telling the story. For instance, Rabbi Lawrence Kushner was a wonderful choice for Bereshit; because he's a mystic and a master teacher, he was able to give a beautiful explanation of the elusive story of Creation that delights people young and old. Using the same logic, we selected a furniture designer to talk about the design of the mishkan in Parshat Terumah, and an artist to sing an episode about the design of the objects inside it. We try to make magical matches whenever we can.

The contributors write a short dvar Torah, with the guidance of our editor Matthue Roth, and then we record them in a professional studio. We take their audio track, and start animating according to their words. We start with a moving storyboard, called



an animatic, and fill in the details as we go along. The four people on the animation team work a lot with me on creative ways to interpret the transcripts. Finally, we create a companion curriculum guide for teachers, encode the whole thing into a web-friendly format and post it online each Sunday night!

Do you have a favorite episode?

Oh, definitely Parshat Shemini. This is a musical episode, written and performed by Dan Saks of the indie Sephardic rock band DeLeon. It starts out with the terrible deaths of Nadav and Avihu, but ends up with a rollicking romp through the laws of kashrut. You cannot help but get it stuck in your head, and the animation is so much fun too!

Is there someone you especially wish would narrate a parsha for "G-dcast"?

The most common requests we get from the audience are always for famous Jews in entertainment. People write in asking for dvar Torahs from Jon Stewart, Sarah Silverman and Adam Sandler all the time! I would love to have Matisyahu write a song for us, and I'm really dreaming of working with Natalie Portman, Daniel Handler (Lemony Snicket), and Daniel Jacob Radcliffe, who plays Harry Potter.

But in the non-entertainment world, we have a lot of people we'd like to work with too! I think it

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would be incredible to work with people who don't get a lot of recognition on a daily basis in the community—the people who grow our food, who advocate for the poor. I'd like to record some much older people, and I'm also curious about the idea of working with some very young writers. Finally, we would like to include more international voices—particularly from Europe and South America.

How many people watch each episode?

It varies hugely from week to week. Some of our contributing narrators have a lot of fans out there, and so naturally, their stuff gets a lot more views than other people's. We had a few hundred thousand people tune in this year, which is pretty exciting considering we did zero advertising.

But it's hard to say how many people are watching each episode. I could count "hits" out to you, but they don't mean a lot because so many people watch our videos in embedded browsers via YouTube, or on Facebook...and also we know that a lot of "hits" aren't one person watching a short, but could represent teachers showing the episodes to a classroom of 20 students.

What kinds of reactions have you received? Tell us about some of the more interesting feedback.

People love the site. It operates for some of them like a *Cliff's Notes* to the parsha. Watching the video makes it easier for them to read the original text. For other people, it's a fun and relaxing way to end the week. They already know a lot about the Torah portion, maybe, but we offer them a nice new spin on it that they hadn't thought of before, and an introduction to an interesting new voice in the Jewish world that perhaps they hadn't heard from before. Still other people use it as a tool in a classroom setting, or as a way to get their own kids excited about Shabbat. I know parents of kids as young as three who have found some of the episodes entertaining for their kids!

The most surprising feedback I've gotten, honestly, has been from the non-Jews who

watch the episodes. I have heard repeatedly from Christians that "Jews have so much to teach us about the Old Testament," and that this website is an amazing resource for them. I have also heard from prospective converts that it is a great way for them to sink their teeth into the Torah for the first time, and to hear from many different types of Jews.

My personal favorite piece of feedback came from an anonymous Hasidic Jewish viewer, who wrote in to tell me that although this content is considered "totally forbidden" in his community, he tunes in every week. He wished us *kol hakavod* on a great job. I was beside myself when I received this email, because we have worked so hard to be a website that is inclusive, and speaks to all different types of Jews—from different places in the world, on the observance spectrum, and of different backgrounds.

Now that "G-dcast" is into Season 2, what are your plans for it moving forward?

Our big audacious goal is to animate the entire Tanakh in five years. We finished the Torah last season, and we are working now on putting together Nevi'im (Prophets). It's hard to know what to do first, because we hear from so many parents and teachers about their priorities—how great it would be for them to have a film about the Book of Ruth, for instance.

Right now, we're preparing for the Prophets films by looking at the texts again, and thinking through how to best accomplish the storytelling, which is rich and complex and very visual. We have a lot to do—write, cast, animate and produce these new episodes—so the new episodes probably won't go live before the early Fall. In the interim, we are producing a few holiday specials. For instance we just posted a Chanukah episode that we're extremely proud of, and we hope to have something ready for Pesach and Shavuot, a holiday with which many Jews don't have a strong relationship.

We have some outrageously huge plans for the long-term future. Let's just say there's plenty in the tradition to keep us

busy for years to come.

What advice do you have for schools as they integrate technology with Jewish study and creativity?

I want to quote my beloved mentor Red Burns, who chairs the Interactive Telecommunications Program at NYU where I learned everything I ever needed to know about new media in her words, on one foot:

"Technology does not tell stories. Great authors tell stories."

If you find yourself using technology in your classroom just to use the technology, I think you're wasting your time. All the SMART Boards in the world are useless if there's nothing worth watching on them.

Will the Internet magically transform Jewish education for the better, or be just another channel through which some kids learn and other kids slide through the cracks, bored and disconnected? I think that it's up to teachers, and how they use the materials available to them. There certainly is more out there than ever before, thanks to the wired world and all the people posting things out there to share with each other. But can we sort through it?

If you find great stories and teaching materials, whether they be on Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, G-dcast.com, or elsewhere, then that's worth stumbling through the wires and the connections and the disk drives and such. I would just urge teachers to keep focusing on their educational goals and the outcomes they'd like to see for their students. If our cartoons help you spark a conversation, then great! If they don't, then stick to what does...be that chevruta study, DVD clips or field trips. There's probably a place for all of it in your curriculum. Jewish learning and connections are about people and stories and digging deeper into them as learning partners, year after year.

The technology is just another tool we can use to do that work. Don't get too hung up on it.

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Alternative Assessment Models to Empower Youth-directed Learning

[CONTINUED FROM PAGE 35]

the course of the program youth watched their Transcript grow as badges were earned through completing social media projects in the program while also submitting existing work (fan fiction, podcasts, etc.) that demonstrated evidence of their existing competencies. For example, you might note that Tashawna completed her “negotiation” badge, was working on her “networking” badge, and never began “performance.”

The Transcript served as both a feedback mechanism to motivate and guide learning and an alternative transcript to show colleges or prospective employers about abilities which would otherwise go unrecognized.

What might it look like within your school to recognize youth’s skill development across programs, to develop rubrics and represent them as badges to earn, and use a game-like system to provide not just summative but formative feedback over the course of their time with you?

Digital Media Portfolio

How could a college or potential employer viewing Tashawna’s Digital Literacy Transcript know that she actually learned the referenced skills? And for those new to the terms—which, to be frank, are most of us—what could she do to make these concepts clear and concrete? Enter the Digital Media Portfolio.

Each portfolio is personally curated by youth like Tashawna to offer an audio and visual tour of their social media productions that highlights the literacies developed through each social media project. This stands in contrast to the Digital Transcript, which is official and controlled by Global Kids. It also provides the opportunity and space for the youth to engage in a round of public meta-cognition, talking about what they learned, developing the skills required to do so in a job interview or college application.

Tashawna’s can be viewed here: tinyurl.com/tashawnasportfolio

What would it be like if youth in your school curated their own portfolios, viewed their peers, and made them available to their teachers, school administration, and their parents? Would they reveal achievements not captured by the school transcript and tap into unexplored motivations for learning?

NEXT STEPS

Global Kids is new to these three approaches—Dis-

tributed Learning Maps, Digital Literacy Transcripts and Digital Literacy Portfolios—but this year will expand them in a variety of contexts.

The new MacArthur Foundation-funded Edge Project (project-edge.ning.com) will allow us, as part of a broader initiative, to bring the Learning Maps into civic and cultural institutions that use digital media for learning. Meanwhile, the Transcripts and Portfolios will be rolled out in Winter 2010 in separate programs within the New York City Public Library, the American Museum of Natural History and the Bronx Zoo. And, in fact, we’ll be stepping into schools ourselves, working with a Jewish day school in the Gulf Coast region to explore what happens when the faculty and youth develop their own badge rubrics and incorporate the portfolios across their classes.

Ten years from now, whatever will serve as the standard models for assessing youth’s learning might very well look, from our modern expectation, rather strange. Whether your school is still around then might very well depend how well it is prepared to welcome the strange and co-exist with the discomfort of change. ?

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Video Conferencing

by ESTHER FELDMAN

VIDEO conferencing technology for schools has been readily accessible for many years, but there are few Jewish day schools that employ this technology. In addition to the classic distance learning lessons, today there are countless students in educational institutions around the world who regularly benefit from these video conference platforms in their schools. On a daily basis there are hundreds of museums, universities, community centers, science centers, art institutes and cultural centers offering ongoing video conferences and lessons—as well as contacts and collaboration with artists, scientists and other experts—to schools and their students.

The potential benefits from the use of video conference in Jewish day schools are compelling. In outlying areas and smaller cities throughout the US, the typical day school's access to outstanding educators and/or educational programs is severely limited due to the dearth of qualified Jewish educators in such communities. Through the medium of video conferencing, day school students can be given the opportunity to study with premier educators from all parts of the world and from Israel in particular. Video conferencing with Israel highlights the schools' and students' connection to the land of Israel. "*Ki mi-Tzion teitzei Torah*": the learning is coming from Israel. The students get a powerful message about their relationship to the people of Israel and to the State of Israel.

Proper use of this medium succeeds in offering greater exposure to inspiring educators with the ability to motivate the students in their Jewish studies learning.

Over the past five years The Lookstein Center, with the support and generosity of the AVI CHAI Foundation, has provided 17 different day schools the opportunity to benefit from a master Jewish studies educator in Israel via an Internet-based video conferencing platform. In the current academic year, eleven schools are using the VC (video conference) platform to broadcast lessons twice or three times a week to their Jewish studies classes. This article discusses the various challenges involved in setting up and running a class over a video conference system as well as various educational best practices for insuring a reliable educational experience.

Four years ago the Lookstein Center began the program with streaming live classes two or three times weekly into three Jewish studies classrooms: grades 6 and 7 in N. E. Miles, Birmingham, Alabama, grade 6 in the Jewish Academy, El Paso, Texas, and to high school students in Jesse Schwartz in Phoenix, Arizona. In Birmingham the video conference teachers taught Bible, in El Paso, they taught Israel studies, and in Phoenix, the teacher taught prayer. Today, Lookstein Center educators teach a va-

riety of Jewish studies subjects, based on the unique needs of the different schools, including Israel studies, Bible, prophets, Jewish history, prayer, Jewish law and



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Mishnah, Bar/Bat mitzvah preparatory classes, etc.

In addition to the Lookstein Center "remote teacher," in every class there is always an on-site adult, usually a novice teacher. This person is responsible for insuring discipline as well as ongoing communication between the remote teacher and the school administration. Many of the teachers have developed the relationship into successful collaborative/supportive co-teaching partnerships, where the remote teacher takes the lead role and the on-site teacher rotates among students to provide support. The development of these relationships added an unforeseen professional development facet to the program, offering novice and/or inexperienced educators the unique opportunity to observe as well as collaborate with a master educator at work in a classroom setting.

Teaching over a video conference platform demands different skill sets and innovative methodologies from the teacher.

Classrooms must be physically well organized. The VC teacher's line of vision is limited, and the more dominant students are more likely to sit closer to the camera.

Teachers have to be careful not to let a few voices rule. They must implement

methods to insure participation from all students. The Lookstein Center educators use blogs and web platforms to promote equal as well as ongoing participation.

Classroom management is essential. The VC classroom is very structured and the remote teacher must be very organized and well prepared with worksheets and graphic organizers.

The remote teacher must be exceptionally creative and work hard at promoting both interaction with the students as well as integration with technology. The successful “remote classes” like those in this program utilize interactive educational methodologies such as multiple intelligences curricula and project-based learning.

Semadar Goldstein, a remote teacher in elementary schools in Vancouver, Birmingham and Philadelphia, uses multiple intelligences curricula and engages the children in many physical activities. She has the children acting out plays to better understand the battles of Joshua. They prepare the skits in the classroom, and then Semadar views them onscreen in Israel, on the other side of the world. The VC medium allows ongoing recording during the classroom session. Later the activities can be shared with the students, other teachers in the schools and the students’ families.

In the high school classroom, the successful VC teacher involves the students in lengthy discussions. These discussions do not end with the teacher logging off, but are continued after class, online, on the classroom blog designed for this purpose. The VC high school teacher’s use of other technologies such as blogs and websites to support the class work impacts positively on the students’ relationship to the teacher and the subject matter. Zvi Grumet, a member of The Lookstein Center evaluation team, observed one such class and had the following comments:

“[The VC teacher]...is a dynamic presence and invests considerable energy to elicit and maintain active involvement from the students. He asks provocative questions to draw the students into the learning...”

“The use of the blog was a valuable means of getting feedback and homework from the students, despite a community culture which may not be supportive of homework in Jewish Studies.”

Charisma is difficult to broadcast to an ongoing class over a screen. The teachers cannot rely on the strength of their presence in the classroom or their personal relationship with the students. They need to rely on sound classroom methodologies to help the students focus on each lesson, particularly as the year progresses and the fascination with the tech-

In outlying areas and smaller cities throughout the US, the typical day school’s access to outstanding educators is severely limited. Through the medium of video conferencing, day school students can be given the opportunity to study with premier educators from all parts of the world and from Israel in particular.

nology diminishes. Well organized classes with prepared work plans and short quizzes are helpful in keeping the students focused.

“Short quizzes are an effective method to keep the 9th graders focused on the materials and help them to summarize the ‘lessons learned’” (M. Rosenberg, a Lookstein Center VC educator)

After working with these classes for five years, The Lookstein Center has found that the following can be particularly helpful:

- Graphic organizers for the students
- Assessment tools
- Worksheets
- Highly Interactive lessons
- Ongoing group work

Eliciting discussion and supervising small group work is challenging but essential to the students’ satisfaction with the platform.

In conclusion, a successful video confer-

ence class provides a unique educational experience for both the student and teacher. It is very organized, extremely interactive, as well as educationally challenging and stimulating.

Mrs. Katz, a remote teacher, summarizes best her firsthand experience:

“I have been teaching at Addlestone Hebrew Academy in Charleston for the past three years. Twice a week I have been the face on their screen, teaching students from grades five through eight about Zionism, Israel, and current events. This autumn I

finally got to meet my students. Traveling to Charleston for the day allowed me to become a three-dimensional teacher as opposed to a cyber teacher. I was overwhelmed by how close the students felt to me. There certainly is a distance when I am sitting in Israel and they are in their classroom in the States that can’t be avoided. Yet they reacted and interacted with me as though there was no distance at all.

“In small Jewish communities, remote teaching is a wonderful opportunity to expand the educational horizons and opportunities for students. Simply by introducing them to a teacher from Israel, they were able to have a firsthand account of what Israel is like—what the politics are like, what Israel’s accomplishments are, even what day to day life is like. ... I believe that the excitement of connecting to someone online and someone far away motivates them to participate and engages them in a very concrete way. I’m looking forward to my next trip to Charleston, but in the meantime I am thrilled to be part of an educational experience that puts my face up on their screen.”

Experiments with Educational Technology

by **ELI KANNAI**

IN September 2006 The AVI CHAI Foundation sought to partner with innovative teachers who believed they could respond to a pedagogic challenge using technology. Hundreds of teachers submitted proposals for the foundation's consideration, and 16 teachers received a grant of up to \$10,000 each towards their idea. In the current school year a second group of 17 teachers received educational technology experiment grants, and they are in the midst of executing their ideas. In this article I describe some of the lessons learned by the schools and AVI CHAI during the course of these experiments, also thereby demonstrating some of the most troubling pedagogic challenges in Jewish day school education.

The following description is from my vantage point alone; the experimenting teachers may view things differently. Unfortunately I do not have an intimate understanding of each project and classroom situation, each of which is unique, so I can only speak of the broad trends that can be identified today. As the area of educational technology is constantly evolving and many of the experiments are still being implemented, this article should be viewed as a work in progress rather than a final summative evaluation of the field. All of our grantees are asked to blog about their experiences, and the blog can be accessed at edtechexp.blogspot.com; I will make reference to specific posts throughout this article.

It is clear that technology creates mixed feelings in schools. Administrators fear making bad choices such as buying immature technologies that cost a fortune and are barely used before becoming obsolete. Many teachers use the technology at home for day to day tasks but cannot find the pedagogic resources necessary to enable them to make good use of it in class. Meanwhile, the students make use of any piece of technology they can get their hands on, but not necessarily for educational purposes. The grant program constitutes an effort to stimulate the pedagogic use of technology in Jewish day schools, starting small, with a teacher-driven initiative. I heard a principal say that "technology is like oxygen for the students," therefore one must use technology in schools. These creative projects can be replicated with appropriate modifications in many additional schools, if they have support from the administration.

Some projects address more than one pedagogic challenge. For example, many initiatives try to address lack of student engagement in addition to solving some other issue. Some projects try to evoke more student interest in a non-interactive way using presentations such as PowerPoint etc., including pictures, maps and videos;

other teachers try their hand at interactive teaching using SmartBoards in the classroom or VoiceThreads for homework assignments. Those teachers who



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do not use their board interactively asking students to come up to the board during class, often find that using tablet PCs connected to a simple overhead projector does a good job.

There is much to be said about interactive white boards such as the SmartBoards. The board should be used as a vehicle to enhance classroom interactivity, not merely as a "cool" projector. An added benefit is the recording functionality which lets teachers post the lessons to a website, share it with students and fellow teachers as well as parents. In a dedicated wiki (jewishsmartboards.wikispaces.com), the Legacy Heritage Fund, the Center for Initiatives in Jewish Education, and The AVI CHAI Foundation are collaborating to advance the best use of interactive whiteboards, and most particularly SmartBoards, in Jewish education. Teachers are welcome to join the wiki and contribute based on their own experiences, as well as access the useful links to lesson plans that can help jumpstart their journey into full use of their boards. During the first round of our grants we learned about the challenges of using Hebrew with these boards, a problem also addressed in the wiki and blog.

Teaching Hebrew as a spoken language presents varied pedagogic challenges in-

cluding student engagement, the ability to practice individually, and the teacher's individual feedback. Some teachers chose technology to address these issues, making use of language labs and specific software packages (Rosetta Stone), MP3 recorders and players, and doing video interviews as well as original Hebrew plays. Audio and video technology are now much less expensive and much easier to use with no need for sophisticated editing software, and the results can be posted on the web for family and friends to view. Some teachers point to the fact that listening and grading each student's performance recorded on MP3 players is time consuming, but it seems like a promising mechanism to enable each student to practice and receive feedback on their way to proficiency.

Some teachers apply a "low-tech" solution to record students speaking and reading by having them call a phone number and record a voice message. This works well, especially with phone systems that send these messages as emails (consider Google Voice), but has its own limitations. VoiceThreads lends itself well to these types of pedagogic activities as the teacher can use the presentation functionality to prepare text or questions to be answered, letting students record their answers and interact with the teacher and with each other with audio.

Many teachers wished to create games for their students, to play and learn at the same time. There are websites that already allow teachers to create game-like quizzes, also called "drill and practice" software. These games tend to take a long time for teachers to prepare and implement, and are more appealing for younger students. AVI CHAI is planning to develop such tools in the future. Stay tuned...

The use of technology should not be limited to literacy-oriented pedagogic challenges. The experiments included a tefillah project in which students created siddur presentations (a sample can be viewed on the blog) and videos of Israel experiences (including video conferencing). Use of technology by the students enhances their feeling of control and ownership. We have learned that innovative use of student-

driven creativity is very effective. Schools can showcase the products in school and on their websites, sharing them with parents, families and friends.

Combining many of these technologies together creatively may develop powerful pedagogic tools, for example interviewing Israeli war veterans on video in Hebrew while speaking only Hebrew on the set, or using a website to post videos from the school's Israel trip. We find that once a teacher starts using technology for one thing, other uses present themselves as well.



Many teachers use technology to prepare for class and to stay in

It is clear that technology creates mixed feelings in schools. Administrators fear making bad choices such as buying immature technologies that cost a fortune and are barely used before becoming obsolete. The grant program constitutes an effort to stimulate the pedagogic use of technology, starting small, with a teacher-driven initiative.

touch with students in between classes, while using only presentation vehicles in class. They use mapping tools to plan their teaching, resource sites such as Chinuch.org and Mikranet to create their lesson plans and forums, wiki's or blogs to collaborate with the students.

Teachers tell me often how important it is to have the school administration support their efforts. This support is also crucial as these teachers try to export their learning experiences from their own classroom to school-wide efforts. Management buy-in means a lot to the teachers; it allows them to present their success stories to the whole school faculty, and lets the school benefit from the incredibly hard work of the teachers. Unfortunately I do not have the space to mention individual teachers and schools in this article, but their names can be found on the blog. I would like to thank the teachers that partnered with us in the experiments and worked to break the ice, as well as all the teachers who sub-

mitted applications. You are all creative and dedicated teachers and I wish us all success integrating technology in Jewish day schools.

Links and reference box:

One can navigate the edtechexp blog (<http://j.mp/EdTech>) using the label (tags) cloud located on the left.

PowerPoint projects can be found by clicking on the "power point" tag, or directly using the URL:

<http://edtechexp.blogspot.com/search/label/PowerPoint>. There is a label for SmartBoards (<http://j.mp/smartbrd>),

VoiceThreads (<http://j.mp/VoiceThrds>).

SmartBoards vs. Tablet PC's are discussed in the blog in <http://j.mp/SB-Tablet> and elsewhere.

Projects that involve Israel can be found at <http://j.mp/israel-ed>, those that deal with games are at <http://j.mp/games-ed>.

The Tefilah presentations can be found at (<http://j.mp/Tefilah>).

A wiki "book" dedicated to the use of SmartBoards in Jewish education can be found at <http://jewishsmartboards.wikispaces.com/>

"I have been there project" is discussed at (<http://j.mp/video-ed>).

Two sites worth mentioning that can be used to plan lessons and share materials are Chinuch.org and <http://www.Mikranet.org.il>.

Minds in Session: The Jewish Court of All Time

by **MICHAEL FAHY, JEFF KUPPERMAN, JEFF STANZLER**

So there we were on top of Masada when the conversation turned to the question of the Sudanese refugees who have made their way to Israel, and what Israel should do about them. Does Israel among all nations have a special humanitarian responsibility, even towards these people (who mostly happen to be Muslim)? Solomon Schechter thought that it was wrong for Israel to be held to a higher standard: “I think that people put Israel on a pedestal, just to watch her fall...we will truly only be the country we have dreamed of for so many years once we have the respect and treatment of a normal nation.” Albert Einstein agreed with him, but Irena Sendler did not: “I think that no country is perfect, no person is perfect, but some countries need to be held at a higher standard than others...being held at a higher standard, though it is more work, should be an honor not a burden.” Then Elie Wiesel said...

The fever dream of a Jewish history teacher? Not exactly. What we just described to you was an actual scene from the Jewish Court of All Time (JCAT), a web-based simulation for middle school students, developed at the University of Michigan School of Education by our Interactive Communications and Simulations (ICS) group. Designed in collaboration with RAVSAK, JCAT was piloted in 2008 with the participation of Jewish Education students in Michigan, Ohio, Illinois, Alabama and Mississippi, and the “conversation” quoted above comes from that pilot.

In JCAT, we propose a way of studying history and current events that is dialectical and imaginative. Students weigh multiple sources of information, draw conclusions from incomplete evidence, stretch their ability to understand what it was like to live in a distant place and time, and struggle to find present-day meaning in the events of the past. They do this as participants in a dramatic narrative, whose outcome no one knows until the end. It is as far as one can be from the dry, “one damn thing after another” kind of history study that most of us experienced throughout our schooling, yet in many ways is closer to what professional historians do.

But are middle school students up to the task? Won’t they just “make stuff up” and end up with a distorted caricature of history and current events? That is always a

risk, but we have found, to the contrary, that students are more likely to dive into their task with impressive seriousness and sophistication. To find out what students are learning in JCAT and how, we must look at three separate, but interconnected “spaces”: (1) the virtual, web-based common space; (2) middle school classrooms participating in the simulation, and (3) a classroom of university “mentors” taking a seminar in which they work closely with the younger students, seeking ways to nurture and support deep thinking and expressive writing.

Figure 1: Interconnected spaces of JCAT

Let’s start with the virtual space of the Jewish Court of All Time simulation. In



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this space we ask, “What if the wisdom of history could be brought to bear on a problem of our day?” Specifically, the JCAT website creates space—imagined to be a restored fortress at Masada—where great women and men from across the range of human history gather to decide the outcome of a trial, connected to an event of our time. These great figures of history (brought to life by the students and mentors) come to Masada to help ensure a just resolution to the case, though part of what makes JCAT interesting is reconciling the different visions of justice held by the gathered luminaries. While the trial itself is fictional (in our scenario, a Sudanese man sues the State

of Israel in order to obtain refugee status), behind the scenario are complex, real-life moral and legal issues (e.g., does a Jewish state have a special obligation toward refugees from modern-day genocide?). Within the website, student-portrayed characters can make speeches, participate in public discussions, maintain blogs, and send private messages to each other in a password-protected workspace.

What goes on in the middle school classroom? Student participants learn about and ultimately portray significant historical and contemporary figures, most of whom are Jewish. Their first task is to write and share their “resume,” which is the means by which student-portrayed characters teach their colleagues about who they’re portraying, and it also serves the specific function of pushing the students to more fully “become” their character. Students write their resumes in the first person, and they must discover enough about their characters that they can represent them well, learning about that person’s life and beliefs. They must also begin crafting a vision of the kind of person they are, as

we see JCAT as partially an exercise of the creative imagination—we encourage the students to establish a distinctive “voice,” to be dramatic and, most of all, to imbue their participation with a spirit of play.

How about in the university classroom? Like the younger students, the university student “mentors” participate in character. As they learn about their characters, the university students receive a gradual orientation to the teaching and learning environment of the simulation, and from the outset they come to understand that their primary tasks are to help the younger students construct a bridge between historical times and the present day, and to gain a heightened appreciation for other ways of thinking. In the service of these goals, our mentors must draw upon their academic backgrounds and life experiences, and we are consistently engaged in thinking reflectively about where the teaching and learning opportunities can be found.

Philosophically, we start with the belief that students need opportunities to hone

their skills at engaging critically with the world of ideas, and this requires that they develop the ability to formulate and articulate their own ideas so that they can more thoughtfully examine those of others. We believe that doing this kind of work takes on greater meaning if kids see that people are paying attention to what they think: their words and ideas matter, so it’s worth investing the time in thinking about what they want to say, and why. We also believe that the thoughtful employment of story and drama can draw kids in, and can sometimes have the effect of making schoolwork seem a bit more like creative play.

In order to take full advantage of these possibilities, JCAT has a fluid storyline that grows out of what takes place at that particular trial, and that exploits the element of surprise, growing out of our belief that things become more compelling when characters act in surprising ways, and when things get “revealed” unexpectedly. Finally, we believe in actively maintaining a safe environment, and much of

[CONTINUED ON PAGE 64]

JCAT: Jewish Court of All Time Awarded Prestigious Grant from Covenant Foundation

For the second year in a row, RAVSAK is the recipient of the highly prestigious Signature Grant from the Covenant Foundation. This year’s award comes for the program JCAT: Jewish Court of All Times, a web-based educational project for students in RAVSAK middle schools.

“We are particularly interested in acknowledging creativity in Jewish education and traversing unknown territory where risk and innovation are married,” said Harlene Winnick Appelman, Executive Director of the Covenant Foundation. “Our new crop of grantees are generators of ideas and approaches of great promise for success, effect and transformative replication elsewhere.”

JCAT uses interactive media to engage

students in Jewish history and to teach them about significant moral, social and cultural issues. RAVSAK is partnering with The Interactive Communications and Simulations Group at the University of Michigan, where professors and graduate students will participate in managing the program and its website, and with the University of Cincinnati’s School of Education for teacher support and reflection.

Originally piloted in three RAVSAK schools in 2007-08, JCAT found tremendous enthusiasm among students and teachers alike. Students adopt a per-



son from Jewish history and interact with others in that character. In the words of Tzivia Garfinkel, Head of Jewish Studies at Bernard Zell Anshe Emet Day School in Chicago, the program invited students “to take on a different perspective and to see the world through a different set of eyes.” JCAT will be scaled up

over the course of the three-year grant, starting with 8 schools in 2010-11, 12 schools in 2011-12, and 16 in 2012-13.

RAVSAK is taking applications now for schools to participate. For more information, contact Elliott Rabin at erabin@ravsak.org.

i-Faith – Judaism in the Playlist of Young Jews’ Beliefs

by SHU ELIOVSON

THE fall of the record companies over the past ten years has been but a harbinger of the challenge rising within the world of faith-based institutions, Jewish schools included. For the relationship model of institutions of both music and faith to their clientele share striking similarities, and an understanding of what happened in the universe of music can shed urgent light upon the critical challenges now facing the Jewish community, and the importance of how we choose to respond.



Rabbi Shu is the CEO and Founder of In-Reach, a trans-denominational new-media youth organization that provides guidance to Jewish teens across North America through the online Jewish Discovery Portal, TheLockers.net, and conducts cutting-edge multimedia workshops on best-practices for today's parents, teachers, and community leaders. He can be reached at Shu@In-Reach.com.

Once upon a time, record companies dictated the terms of the relationship to their audiences. If you wanted a song, you had to buy the whole album. An album came with certain packaging that you had to pay for, too. If you wanted to discover new music, you could subscribe to record-company mailing lists or mail-order systems (remember Columbia House—12 albums for a penny!). And if you copied music from your friends, well let’s face it, the whole tape-to-tape copying was pretty inefficient and cumbersome.

But then came technology, the Internet, new media, and file sharing. Napster suddenly enabled people to upload and swap songs with amazing speed and freedom, allowing individuals to get the songs they wanted without paying for all the packaging and other songs they did not like!

The record companies cried “foul!” and called young people “thieves!” They went to court (and still do) trying to use their power (lawyers on staff) to control and intimidate young people back into line with their ordained-from-on-high policies and terms. And in time, they shut down Napster. Which in turn spawned more highly untraceable and less enforceable systems like Gnutella, eMule, BitTorrent and more. The record companies quickly went from being venerated institutions of culture and valued content to becoming viewed as the enemy—power-hungry, control-coveting, old, outdated oligarchs that needed to be taught a lesson by the masses. And rather than record companies fostering culture, it became part of the music-lover’s culture to hate the record companies.

But then came iTunes. Apple had an idea.

Apple said, “Maybe young people are not thieves. Maybe they are not driven by a desire to selfishly take without respecting the source of what they take, but rather wish to take on their own terms and at fair prices.”

“What if,” Apple wondered, “these ‘bandits’ were allowed to buy one song at a

time, rather than having to buy a whole album along with packaging that they apparently do not crave? What if rather than having to follow the institution’s leads as far as music taste, a person who liked one song could then find their way to similar songs that match their tastes across many different record labels?

What if persons who shared musical tastes could find each other, and then grow from their interactions with each other to form natural communities, and discover and enrich their tastes in a more social and authentic manner?”

In other words, Apple built a music-sales model based not on control and ownership of the listener-base, but rather upon social relevance and individual tastes and passion.

The response has been unmistakably clear: iTunes is now the largest reseller of music in the world, selling 25% of all music in the US (more than any other US music retailer, including Wal-Mart), and 70% of all digital music globally.

Returning to the world of faith, or “i-Faith,” we find that what happened to the record companies is now happening to religious institutions, including our schools.

Once upon a time, religious institutions dictated the terms of tradition to their constituencies. If you wanted to be part of a community, you had to accept the

whole theological package (at least on the outside). An affiliation came with certain rules and roles that you had to adhere to. If you wanted to explore Jewish values, you did so via your local synagogue, rabbi, youth groups, and religious schools. And if you wanted to explore religious values with friends from outside your immediate community, well let's face it, the scope of opportunity for diverse exploration beyond your immediate Jewish universe was pretty limited.

But then came technology, the Internet, new media, and file sharing. The Internet suddenly allowed our kids to explore other faiths and values (and a world of sex and sensationalism) with amazing ease and freedom, enabling our children to ask the questions they were curious about whether we approved of their questions or not.

And while rabbis and teachers and parents can cry "foul!" and wish for the days when adults set the terms of what kids would talk about at what age (after all, until the Internet the most radical thing you could do was go to the library or buy an adult magazine), those days are past.

Today, every religion, value, temptation, and pleasure is on the table before our kids. And the question is: *In a world where our kids can choose anything, why would they still choose Judaism?*

My organization, InReach, runs a clinically supervised online peer-counseling system called TheLockers.net. We refer to TheLockers.net as a Personal Discovery Portal for Jewish teens. It is a place where rather than promoting a specific 'brand' of Judaism, we begin the conversation by simply asking visiting Jew-

ish teens: "What is your question?"

And then we let other teens answer.

What ensues is a fascinating interaction on an organic level between young Jews of all denominations and backgrounds, with kids with zero Jewish education (but fierce Jewish pride) from the middle of the American Bible Belt sharing ideas and questions with kids from top Jewish day schools in New York, Toronto, or Israel.

Every word posted by teens is pre-screened by a trained facilitator according to a rigorous clinical methodology developed in consulta-

tion with Rabbi Dr. Abraham Twerski and Dr. David Pelcovitz (who supervises the program today). And most fascinating is that the number one topic of conversation on TheLockers.net is morality and faith.

Over the past seven years, we have heard from over 10,000 Jewish teens as they discuss their lives' most intimate and personal questions, ranging from family matters to social matters to self-esteem to partying to academic issues and, of course, to faith. We have been the proverbial fly on the wall as Jewish teen culture unfolds before us in real time.

And we have watched the world of brand-based Judaism, where people defined themselves by the Jewish institutions they affiliated with, melt away.

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Like record companies, major Jewish institutions (the OU, JTS, UAHC) remain essential and valuable. They are the number-one producers of Jewish content, and they “own the library” of Jewish legacy content, particularly that

ceived “rightness” of their birth-given religious identity.

The challenge before us is clear, and it was presented to us by King Solomon in the book of Proverbs: to engage each child according to his or her individual

teaching Jewish studies as subjects, we should be teaching our texts as roadmaps of life, rich in timeless values and precious insights for coping with the greatest challenges of both personal and societal development.

“Once upon a time, religious institutions dictated the terms of tradition to their constituencies. If you wanted to be part of a community, you had to accept the whole theological package (at least on the outside).”

of 20th century North American Judaism.

But young people (and many adults, too) have stopped listening to them in order to define their Judaism. Today’s young Jews do not feel a need to define themselves according to a particular religious brand. Rather, they share ideas and questions as they bubble up from within across organically formed communities in cyberspace, be it on Facebook, MySpace, or TheLockers.net or any of MTV.com’s or AOL.com’s hundreds of teen message boards. And they build a playlist of faith in real time.

Young Jews are less concerned about the quantity of observances they might share with each other and other faiths, and more concerned about the *authenticity* and *relevance* of practiced rituals as they relate to real life—in a broad and meaningful manner.

nature. Just like iTunes. If the values we are teaching are not relevant to our children on a personal and social basis within a global community, we are going to lose our audience in numbers we have never seen to date.

What does this mean?

It means no longer teaching Jewish studies as a subject (“Bible,” “Talmud,” “Mishnah,” “Prophets,” etc.), but rather teaching them as a roadmap of life, which is what our Torah was meant to be.

When we teach Jewish studies as “subjects,” our kids will drop those subjects once they get to college, where such studies will become an elective topic of limited relevance to the high-pressured academic and social realities before them.

Imagine a class in the 9th grade, with all its adolescent challenges of self-esteem and a search for identity, where the classes in Jewish studies were a weave of components from Torah (the story of Joseph, or young Judah!), Talmud (the story of Amram Chasidah), and our endless books of Jewish thought and philosophy. Imagine a class in 12th grade which dealt with the questions of the role of a person within the greater society now before the high school senior, as our Jewish heritage is uniquely rich in its sensitivity to Tik-kun Olam and our responsibility to the greater world we are a part of.

And imagine taking the incredible elements from our Talmud on mathematics and the sciences, which include discoveries that are only being *rediscovered* in modern times, and preparing these components as addendums to the science and math classes in our schools, to be referenced by any teacher, even a non-Jewish teacher. Imagine the sense of pride a Jewish teen would feel to hear his or her non-Jewish teacher present, with wonder, how ancient Jewish scholars pioneered or were aware of groundbreaking ideas of physics, geometry, algebra, and the humanities.

It is time for us to teach Judaism as it *could be and once was*, as a rich and pro-

“We know so much about the psychological and emotional and And the question is: In a world where our kids can choose anything, why would they still choose Judaism?”

The i-Faith world has enabled our youth to explore religion as “individual songs” or values, and to follow threads of values *horizontally* across many Jewish (and non-Jewish) schools of thought, rather than the older *vertical* model that treated individual Jews within a particular column of Judaism (Orthodox, Conservative, Reform).

social stages of adolescent development, and are blessed with many revered and respected Jewish clinical experts who are also scholars of our texts.

found dynasty of timeless values and relevant wisdom. Given such an approach, our children would not ‘drop’ these subjects once they go forward to seek their fortunes in college and thereafter. Because their Jewish education will have been their best friend and Spiritual GPS through the formative years of their life. And in a world of i-Faith, Judaism will earn a permanent place in the playlist of young Jews’ lives.

Today, young Jews form community with Jews, Christians, Muslims, Buddhists, Americans, Asians, African Americans, etc, binding themselves by a sense of shared values among faiths and cultures, rather than by clinging to the self-per-

Imagine mapping out the four years of high school based upon the four stages of adolescent development that are unique to each of those years of life. And now imagine mapping our rich heritage of religious texts to those stages. Rather than

Open Learning, Open Content: Emerging Trends in Education

[CONTINUED FROM PAGE 37]

MediaMidrash (alpha.mediamidrash.org): MediaMidrash seeks to raise the quality of Jewish education by offering teachers easy access to 21st century multimedia technologies. Media Midrash is an online platform linking multimedia content to innovative curricula, providing Jewish educators the ability to bring art, animation, film and music directly into their classrooms.

On1Foot: Jewish Texts for Social Justice (on1foot.org): On1Foot is an online database of Jewish social justice texts designed to support and promote the teaching of social justice in the Jewish community. This educational resource allows users to search and browse hundreds of biblical, rabbinic and contemporary Jewish texts about social justice, upload new texts and create custom source sheets using the texts and suggested discussion questions. A project of American Jewish World Service.

Open Siddur Project (opensiddur.net): Open Siddur Project is creating an online workshop for crafting, publishing, and printing Jewish prayer books (siddurim). The intention is that the development of a free web application and digital library of liturgical texts (historic

and contemporary, familiar and obscure) will preserve the diversity of Jewish traditions worldwide, encourage creative engagement and understanding in Jewish spiritual practice, and provide an urgently needed resource for Jews sharing and crafting new siddurim.

SMARTBoard Jewish Educational Database (legacyheritage.org/SJED): A database of SMART Board lessons submitted by educators throughout the world. In this site, participants may download lessons through a search or by browsing the various lesson subjects and topics. Educators may also submit a lesson, after filling out the appropriate form; each lesson will be reviewed and then posted. A project of Legacy Heritage.

Tagged Tanakh (taggedtanakh.org): Tagged Tanakh is a collaborative platform that joins curated content and user-generated commentary around the Jewish Bible. The words of the Torah create the foundation of the database. These words can then be cross-referenced, annotated, and connected—tagged—to other forms of media like videos, maps or games. Individual words or chunks of text can serve as stepping-stones for dynamic conversations that can cross educational and techno-

logical boundaries. A project of JPS.

CONCLUSION

Through the Internet, educators and their students have access to content that can be used to enhance and transform their practice and learning. They also gain access to colleagues with whom they may not have had opportunities to interact. Along with this access comes the responsibility to provide guidance and skills for participating in these opportunities effectively.

These resources put learning in the hands of the student and the educator. New tools and resources available on the Internet are being designed to mitigate technological barriers, allowing users to focus on *what* they want to do, not *how*.

Open learning is a new paradigm that opens up opportunities for sharing ideas, collaborating between people locally and in diverse locations, and facilitating more meaningful engagement in learning. ז

Note: Additional resources can be found on delicious.com/jlearn2.0.

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Minds in Session: The Jewish Court of All Time

[CONTINUED FROM PAGE 59]

the work of the mentors is motivated by this goal. Students are taking risks as they express themselves in character, and it is essential that their efforts not be belittled. Feeling safe is also important because we have seen that character play can make it possible for kids to talk about important matters that would be risky to discuss as themselves, face-to-face. For many of our students, being able to speak in character, without the glare of a face-to-face conversation, gives them room to more fully articulate their ideas, building the confidence that can lead to success in other settings.

There is nothing magical about JCAT, and in each of our simulations some students struggle with the tasks required, or find them less than compelling. However, the idea of infusing the study of history with the

spirit of creative play and the power of an engaged audience has led to some gratifying outcomes. Elaine Kaplan, faculty member at Rockwern Academy in Cincinnati, Ohio, said that “my students responded to the JCAT program on so many different levels simultaneously that it is probably impossible to adequately describe their learning. Students were forced to consider how the times in which their characters lived affected their perceptions and assumptions about many things, including Judaism itself. In discussing the case of the family from Darfur, my students were deeply engaged in figuring out what Israel’s role should be, leading them to wonder and consequently learn more about Israel’s history, mission, and current politics. Participating in JCAT led my students to think, write and argue more intensely about moral questions than typical assignments. Ironically, the simula-

tion engaged them more thoroughly and authentically than learning about actual current events.”

One of the university mentors wrote of being “amazed at the ways that students took ownership of their characters and adopted their characters’ worldview. The project allowed students to test out new theories about the world and actively, openly debate these theories in a safe space.” We are pleased to report that, in partnership with RAVSAK and the Center for Studies in Jewish Education and Culture at the University of Cincinnati, we recently were awarded a grant from the Covenant Foundation to expand JCAT, and we look forward to exciting new learning partnerships with RAVSAK schools starting in the 2010-2011 school year. ז

Innovate to Educate: Maximizing Students’ Potential Through Online Learning

[CONTINUED FROM PAGE 23]

that enrollments are now around 2 million.

Although in its infancy, online learning possesses certain technological and economic advantages over the traditional school model that should allow it to grow and improve rapidly. Not only does it provide accessibility for students who otherwise would not be able to take a course, but it also enables one to scale quality with far greater ease so that all students can have access to high quality offerings no matter where they live. And as it scales and improves, its economic costs should fall. In the United States, on average, it already costs less to educate a student on-

line than it does in the current monolithic model. Furthermore, over time, online learning can become more engaging and individualized to reach different types of learners as software developers take full advantage of the medium to customize it by layering in different learning paths for different students.

We have already seen improvements. The original online learning courses tended to be mostly of the distance learning variety. Increasingly, however, students are taking online courses in hybrid, brick-and-mortar environments where they have access to a live adult. The content is also becoming much more engaging, as places like the Florida Virtual School have introduced

video game-based history courses and the like. Even though online learning is still young, the evidence at this point is that online learning produces better results than does learning in traditional face-to-face classrooms. And because time can be variable with online learning, we have the ability to pay only when a student successfully masters a course.

There are exciting possibilities on the horizon for education. Employing a disruptive approach that is mindful of children’s differences presents a promising path toward motivating students to maximize their human potential. And Jewish day schools can seize it so that they can deliver a better and more affordable education. ז

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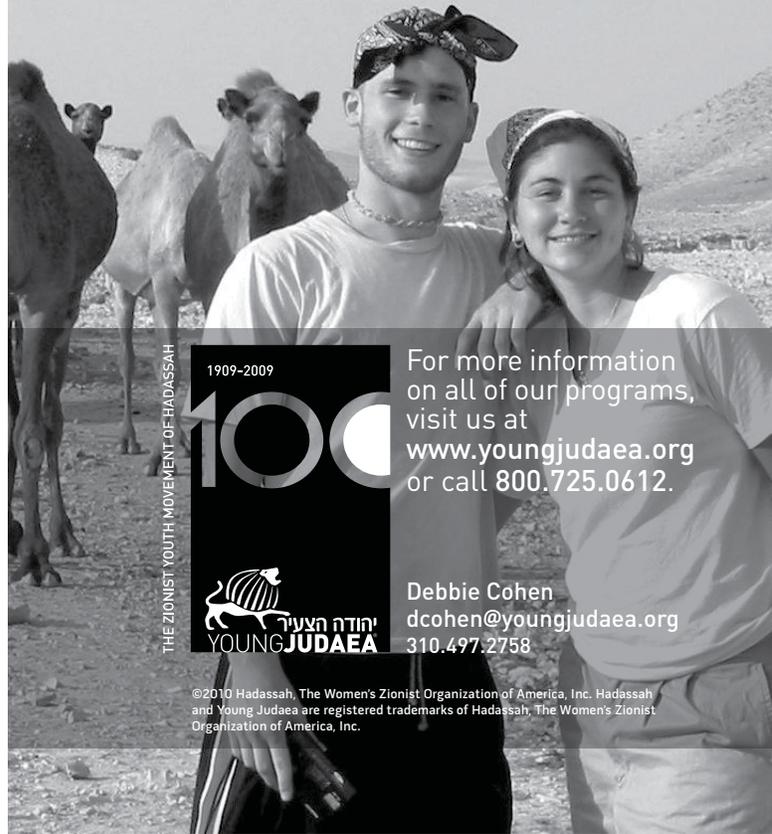
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Bookcase

THIS column features books, articles and websites, recommended by our authors and people from the RAVSAK network, pertaining to the theme of the current issue of *HaYidion* for readers who want to investigate the topic in greater depth.

Books / Studies

Cuban, L. *Oversold and Underused: Computers in the Classroom.*

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Richardson, Will. *Blogs, Wikis, & Podcasts.*

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Sousa, David. *How the Brain Learns.*

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Online Resources

Cet.ac.il
Ck12.org/flexr
Cnx.org
Commoncraft.com

Curriki.org
Drop.io
Globalkids.org
Google.com/cse
Ics.soe.umich.edu
Jingproject.com
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Learncentral.org
Mathtrain.tv
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Jewish Online Resources

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Ethereal.com/jlearn2.0
G-dcast.com
Jewishsmartboards.wikispaces.com
Legacyheritage.org/SJED
Mikranet.org.il
On1foot.org
Opensiddur.net
Taggedtanakh.org
Thelockers.net

Online Research Resources

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Cellphonesinlearning.com
Committedsardine.com
Innosightinstitute.org/practices/education
Teachersfirst.com/getsource.cfm?id=7094



Sulam Alumni Shabbaton: Personal and Professional Refreshment



In his book *Outliers*, essayist Malcolm Gladwell sees the seeds of student excellence for many in activities taking place outside the regular school schedule. After school and summer experiences focused on enrichment lead to student growth. A similar conclusion most certainly can be drawn from RAVSAK's Project SuLaM and its annual mid-year Alumni Shabbaton, which, as a Sulamite (SuLaM participant) I was fortunate to attend.

Amidst the roller coaster up and down excitements of school leadership, there is for many an isolation, a loneliness, that SuLaM's colleague-

ship penetrates. Coming together for two days enables us to share war stories and open up both personally and professionally. The participant led tefillot, coordinated by RAVSAK staff, represent the type of educational model we all embrace in which we learn by doing and we are strengthened by individuals sharing their own stories of Judaic struggle and growth.

This year Arna Pupko Fisher did a superior job as our scholar-in-residence, interweaving themes of pluralism, educational leadership, and spiritual growth, core elements of Project SuLaM. For me, the focus on establishing "the struggle" as a Jewish

value for educational excellence was particularly inspirational.

Thank you to AVI CHAI, RAVSAK and all the institutional support that makes this dynamic refreshment possible for school leadership during half-time of our school year.

L'shalom,

Dean Goldfein, Head of School, Contra Costa Jewish Day School, Lafayette, CA



Cohort III Shabbaton: Kedusha

I looked forward to enjoying our first mid-year Shabbaton: reconnecting, and sharing this year's triumphs as well as challenges with treasured colleagues. As difficult as it is to get away from our busy professional lives, I thought, it would be great to get revitalized and energized from each other. I had no idea how much more was in store for me.

Our focus for the weekend was Kedusha; I wondered, why that theme? "Sanctifica-

tion" is certainly an important concept, but a whole weekend on that topic?

It didn't take long to realize that this subject cuts to the heart of how we feel about our religiosity and our relationship with God. Personally, it proved to be a very meaningful, yet in many ways, challenging subject. What makes me feel "holy"? Do I experience "holy" times or places? Am I doing enough in these areas, or do I wish for more?

In his article "Why is God-Talk Impolite?" Rabbi Michael Safra explores how uncomfortable people are about talking about God. Even rabbis, he contends, avoid talking about God in their sermons. "We are neglecting this crucial piece of the communal conversation at our own peril. Too often, we focus on Judaism's 'how' and 'what,' while leaving out the all-im-

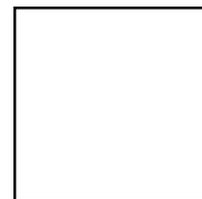
portant question of 'why.'"

Our learning and discussions of Kedusha really got us to think about the "why." I felt challenged to think about my relationship with God. Once again, my participation in SuLaM has continued to help me learn more about Judaism—and, more importantly, it has also facilitated my growth spiritually.

And of course, there were also plenty of opportunities to catch up with colleagues, network, and get re-energized professionally.

Nina Wand, Head, Lower School, Beth Tefiloh Dahan Community School, Baltimore, MD





2009 Annual Leadership Conference
Photos and Reviews
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