

הידיעון

HaYidion

SUMMER 2019 קיץ תשע"ט

I'M THE LEADER WHO

IS BUILDING BRIDGES
in my community

wants to take
MORE RISKS

believes Jewish education
ISN'T WHAT IT USED TO BE
and isn't what it's yet to be
OUR DREAMS RESIDE
in that gap

is investing in becoming
1% BETTER EACH DAY
so that I could be
365% BETTER
next year

supports
OTHER LEADERS
in the making

is becoming the
BEST AT KNOWING
what others
ARE THE BEST AT

**DEEPENING
TALENT**



PRIZMAH

Center for Jewish Day Schools

HaYidion

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Advertising Information

Please contact Elliott Rabin at elliott@prizmah.org or by phone at 646-975-2807.

Prizmah: Center for Jewish Day Schools

254 West 54th St., 11th floor, New York, NY 10019 • 646-975-2800 • info@prizmah.org • www.prizmah.org

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DEEPENING TALENT



ELLIOTT RABIN

The word “talent” derived from a Greek term meaning *balance* or *weight*, and in Latin a talent came to mean a significant weight—some 60 to 80 pounds—of silver. Only in the Middle Ages did the current meaning of *innate ability* become standard. Talent is like an amount of money received at birth, the idea being that different people are endowed with different talents, and different amounts of talent. The word suggests that talent is an inheritance for its possessor to use.

The Hebrew term for talent, *kisharon*, reveals a different emphasis. It comes from the word *kasher*, fit, capable. (The word first appears three times in Kohelet.) A Hebrew talent is less an endowment given in the past than a fitness for accomplishing something in the present or future.

Of course, people *are* born with talents, and a few are endowed with extraordinary talents. But modern brain science has demonstrated that the traditional notion of talents needs revision. People are born with an enormous capacity to grow in many ways and areas. The talent that people reveal is generally one that they have pursued and cultivated with passion, intensity and diligence.

This issue reflects Prizmah’s belief that Jewish day schools are populated by stakeholders who possess immense talents, and that all people at Jewish day schools deserve opportunities to deepen their talents. Moreover, day schools thrive on the model of professional growth. A school best helps its students grow by supporting the growth of its educators. The authors in this issue of *HaYidion* describe different methods, programs and practices that day schools employ to deepen the talents of faculty and leadership.

The first group of articles explores the power of relationships and teamwork. **Cappell** presents Prizmah’s work and vision for strengthening lay leaders, while **Oberman** describes opportunities that boards have for development both individually and collectively. **Brown** posits the critical role that mentorship can play in a teacher’s mid-career. **Farbman** relates a case study in which teacher teamwork powerfully transformed the delivery of education, and **Raider-Roth** shares her work in fostering collaborative learning environments. **Applebaum** observes the ways that both agreement and disagreement among teachers can spur growth.

Articles in the next section consider culture as the pivotal factor for teachers to thrive as they join and remain on the faculty. **Lurie** is inspired by the idea of a “culture of excellence” that many corporations look to create. **Wise** explores five levels, five types of culture, that school leaders establish through their leadership style. The next three articles show the importance of induction in unlocking teacher capacity: **Katz and Lerner** chart the process from hiring through the first year; **Rabinovitch** presents scholarship on best practices in mentorship; **Grebenau** explains the benefit of strong induction for teacher recruitment, especially in smaller Jewish communities. **Haber** tells of his experience in a Teach for America-type program for Jewish day schools.

The school spread presents a variety of ways that day schools foster student talent. In the final section, authors consider the impact of programs of study and methods of reflection, both in-service and beyond the school. **Hassenfeld** assembled a program for experienced teachers to perform research on questions of practice. The next two focus on Hebrew education: **Benjamin’s** school devised a unique solution to faculty recruitment challenges through a university partnership, and **Shapiro-Rosenberg** helped a school tackle deficits in achievement and motivation through the adaptation of best practices in second-language acquisition. **Shire and Skolnick Einhorn** scrutinize the impact of a master’s degree in Jewish education. In response to issues of teacher stress and burnout, **Levey** describes the creation of a health and wellness program, and **Wechter** surveys school leaders who practice mindfulness meditation. **Schorr and Davis** discuss their research on *haredi* women who are highly talented heads of school.

Finally, this issue represents a new beginning for *HaYidion*. Just as print media is evolving and experimenting with new ways to deliver content online, so too have we decided to take the leap across the digital divide. Starting with this issue, we will explore the potential of digital platforms to bring you information about day school education and leadership in innovative, exciting ways. For those of you who still enjoy holding the issue in your hand, you have the option to print a high-quality copy at a reasonable price through blurb.com. We’d love to hear your feedback at editor@prizmah.org.



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MEET THE AUTHORS



Ilisa Cappell is the vice president of leadership development at Prizmah. ilisac@prizmah.org



Rebecca Lurie is head of school at the Solomon Schechter Day School of Boston. rebecca.lurie@ssdsboston.org



Dr. Jonah Hassenfeld was assistant director of teaching and learning at Gann Academy and is now a program officer at the Jack, Joseph, and Morton Mandel Foundation. jonah.hassenfeld@gmail.com



Alicia S. Oberman is the executive director of the Jack and Goldie Wolfe Miller Fund. alicia@tbgfoundation.org



Rabbi Dr. Joshua Wise is general studies assistant principal in the middle school at Magen David Yeshiva in Brooklyn. joshuadovwise@gmail.com



Tali Benjamin is the director of strategic marketing and planning at The Epstein School. tali.benjamin@epsteinatlanta.org



Dr. Erica Brown is an associate professor in curriculum and pedagogy at the George Washington School of Education and Human Development, and the director of the Mayberg Center for Jewish Education and Leadership. ericabrown@email.gwu.edu



Dr. Darin Katz is the director of the upper school at Jack M. Barrack Hebrew Academy in Bryn Mawr, PA. dkatz@jbha.org

Dr. Rachel Lerner is the dean of the Graduate Center for Jewish Education at American Jewish University in Los Angeles. rachel.lerner@aju.edu



A veteran elementary Spanish teacher on Chicago's North Shore, **Alisa Shapiro-Rosenberg** also supports Jewish schools, organizations and teachers as an instructional consultant. cmovan.edublogs.org, cmovanhebrew@gmail.com



David Farbman PhD is the senior director of education at Gateways: Access to Jewish Education in Boston. davidf@jgateways.org



Rabbi Dr. Michael Shire is the chief academic officer and dean of the Shoolman Graduate School of Jewish Education at Hebrew College, Boston. mshire@hebrewcollege.edu

Dr. Deborah Skolnick-Einhorn is the associate dean for academic development at the Shoolman Graduate School. deinhorn@hebrewcollege.edu



Miriam Raider-Roth EdD is the director of the Mandel Teacher Educator Institute and a professor of educational studies and educational/community-based action research at the University of Cincinnati. raidermm@ucmail.uc.edu



Dr. Deena Rabinovich is the director of the Legacy Heritage Jewish Educators Project at Stern College for Women and the director of the MafTEACH Fellowship at the Azrieli Graduate School of Jewish Education. deena.rabinovich@gmail.com



Dr. Steven Levey, director of counseling for a Modern Orthodox yeshiva in New York State, has a thriving private practice counseling individuals and families, providing continuing education webinars to professional social workers and giving parent and senior seminars on a variety of topics. www.drstevenlevey.com, dr.stevenlevey@gmail.com



Dr. Lauren Applebaum is co-director, with Dr. Sivan Zakai, of Project Orli: Research and Leadership in Israel Education, and the director of DeLeT at HUC-JIR. applebaum@huc.edu



Rabbi Maury Grebenau is the head of school at Yavneh Academy of Dallas. mgrebenau@yavnehdallas.org



Carl Haber is currently a Machar fellow at the Abraham Joshua Heschel High School and is about to enter a master's program in teaching social studies at Columbia Teachers College. carlha@heschel.org



Jenny Wechter is Prizmah's administrative assistant for leadership and development. jennyw@prizmah.org



Zipora Schorr is the director of education at the Beth Tfiloh Dahan Community School in Baltimore.

Barbara Sheklin Davis is the retired head of the Syracuse Hebrew Day School.

FROM THE CEO

DEEPENING JEWISH DAY SCHOOL LEADERSHIP



In 1997, McKinsey & Co. published a groundbreaking study of corporations that led to the 2001 book *The War for Talent*. The book created a buzz (not without some controversy) and changed common parlance; whereas “talent” once described Olympic athletes or Hollywood actors, employees at all levels were now seen as valuable. Companies and organizations transformed their personnel or human resources departments to offices of “talent management.” As demographics changed and markets became increasingly competitive, companies elevated their commitment to attracting, developing and retaining professionals.

One of McKinsey & Co.’s insights about companies “winning” the war for talent related to what they called the “employee value proposition,” the ways companies rewarded employees not only through salary and benefits but also through a sense of passion for their work, opportunities to advance and being inspired by a sense of mission.

We talk a lot at Prizmah about the value proposition of Jewish day schools. Usually we are thinking about parents of potential students or donors we would like to solicit. We know there are people for whom we need to “make the case” for a Jewish day school education, even in communities where day school education is the norm. Yet we can also think in these terms about the professionals and lay leaders who devote careers and precious time to making our schools actually work. Working at a Jewish day school connects our “talent” to deeply held passions and provides what I would argue is an unrivaled link to the mission of building our Jewish future. This is a priceless asset.

As Prizmah’s strategic plan emerged, we knew that of the four areas of focus, it was critical that Deepening Talent come first. It all starts with people. Prizmah invests in leadership because great leaders create the conditions for educators to succeed.

I have had the pleasure to meet with many school leaders as we developed, and now begin implementing, our strategic plan. We have been listening to the needs of the field in order to ensure that our programs respond to these needs. In the area of talent, three needs stand out:

- Supporting leaders at all stages of their leadership journey. Time and again, we have seen and heard evidence of how critical services like training, coaching and mentorship are, as well as ongoing peer-to-peer learning, through connections to colleagues in Jewish day schools everywhere. Our

focus is on supporting heads of schools, training the next generation of leaders, and encouraging the many wonderful programs and entry points for those interested in careers in Jewish education. We work to leverage these platforms and help schools create the conditions where talent can thrive over time.

- A clear sense of what makes for successful leadership in practice. We have studied the challenges in day school leadership to ensure we can best support leaders through a focus on “leadership capacities” (what leaders can do) and “dispositions” (who leaders are). We seek to nurture positive leadership-learning frameworks to enable day school leaders to develop their capacities. Moreover, at the heart of school success lies a strong partnership between the head of school and lay leaders, notably the board chair. Fostering that relationship is key.
- Attracting talent to the field, and retaining great leaders. Schools of all sizes and in all types of Jewish communities report challenges in identifying, recruiting and retaining educators and administrators. We are building partnerships with many organizations working on talent pipelines throughout the day school world, and increasing access to professional development and support that enable leaders to survive and thrive in their critical roles.

Prizmah’s programs and services are designed with these needs in mind. Whether it is the curriculum of YOU Lead, our nine-month leadership development program for school professionals at all levels, dramatically increasing access to professional coaching, supporting board members to succeed in their roles through Board Self Assessment, coaching and training, or leadership search services, input from the field informs everything we do.

This issue of HaYidion reaches you around the time we celebrate Shavuot, what I consider our most “forward-thinking” holiday. On Shavuot we celebrate receiving the Torah and the first fruits of our harvest. Even as the school year draws to a close, we are looking ahead, revisiting our core values and storing the bounty that will provide for us in the months to come. The Torah tells us in Exodus 20:15 that “all the people saw the thunder and lightning, the blast of the shofar,” וכל־העם ראים את־הקולות ואת־הלפידים ואת קול השפּר. Looking ahead to the future, even creating a new future, starts with people—all the people—who are equipped to see all the wonders yet to come.

FROM THE BOARD CHAIR

BOARD CHAIRS: LEADING WITH MEANING, LEADING WITH CONFIDENCE



Let all those who occupy themselves with the business of the community do so only for the sake of heaven, for the merit of their ancestors will sustain them and their devotion, too, will endure forever. Pirkei Avot 2:2

Many years ago I came across a book by Gerald B. Bubis titled *The Director had a Heart Attack and the President Resigned: Board-Staff Relations for the 21st Century*. First I laughed at the title, and then I ordered the book immediately. For the first time, I had just become president of a local Jewish organization. And although, thank God, our director did not have a heart attack and I (as president) had not resigned, I understood the sentiment all too well. As the new board chair, I was facing an issue that at the time seemed insurmountable, and I couldn't help but think, "They didn't teach me in school how to deal with this!"

I know many people are like me, successful in their careers and leaders in their respective fields. They are passionate about the Jewish community and their children's day school. When asked to become chair of their school's board, they think about the time commitment, they consider some of the challenges of the position—but their love and passion convinces them to take on the responsibility. Perhaps they even say to themselves, "What could be so hard?"

I'm happy to report that the insurmountable problem was solvable; I was just too new and inexperienced to know right away how to move forward. By the time I became board chair of my day school a few years later, I was certainly better educated. But quite honestly, I felt like I went to the school of hard knocks and, like many before me, learned on the job.

I learned that leading with meaning takes vision and strength. It takes political savviness and patience. It takes humility and transparency. It takes optimism. It takes infusing Jewish values in every decision made, which is not always easy to do when a crisis occurs during your term. And most importantly, it takes building positive, honest and *professional* relationships with your board, your head of school and the school community—who are, of course, also your friends, relatives and neighbors, further complicating matters.

I also learned that there is no such thing as a natural born leader. Leadership is learned. Even the most dynamic personalities have a lot to learn as they step in to lead a new community.

In the past, the Jewish day school field has had many wonderful coaching and professional development opportunities for heads of school, and I remember longing for my own coach and mentor. Unfortunately, mentoring and coaching for lay leaders, and in particular new day school board chairs, was not common.

Until now!

In Prizmah's recently published strategic plan, the first area of focus is Deepening Talent. We know that talent, both lay and professional, drives excellence in Jewish day schools. For the first time, Prizmah will support board chairs with coaching and mentoring opportunities similar to those for heads of school. We will continue to promote strong governance and accountability practices across the field, and we will connect school board chairs to enable them to learn from one another. We will help schools grow the talent pipeline through best practices in succession planning so that educated lay leaders join boards and committees. We will train our lay leaders to articulate a compelling case for supporting Jewish day schools and to build powerful fundraising networks to support their schools and the field.

Learning on the job will no longer be a lonely, one-person affair for any incoming board chair. I'm envisioning a new world, with Prizmah's multifaceted support, where every day school president feels confident, educated and strengthened during his or her term. I see them leading their schools and communities with meaning and inspiration.

I hope I have been able to do this for the field, even just a little, as I finish my term as Prizmah's board chair. As I welcome and pass the baton of leadership to our incoming chair, Yehuda Neuberger, I wish him *hatzlachah*, and I promise to provide any support and mentoring he'd like as we move forward. I offer my heartfelt thanks to the entire board and staff of Prizmah for their support, and for their hard work, devotion and generosity to the organization and to the field.

And to the field, there are no thanks big enough to express my gratitude to everyone who is engaged and committed to Jewish day schools. It is day schools that will strengthen and secure our Jewish community for generations to come—and we value your partnership in this most holy endeavor.

SUMMER GATHERINGS

Prizmah offers in-person and virtual gatherings to help you, your school, and your community thrive.



Development Gatherings

Development Professionals Institute

Monday, June 24th–Tuesday, June 25th

Hillel Day School in Detroit
Contact: Traci Stratford
tracis@prizmah.org

GFA and Generations Development Institute*

Monday, June 24th–Wednesday, June 26th

Hillel Day School in Detroit
Contact: Traci Stratford
tracis@prizmah.org

**There is still limited space in these cohorts - to join or find out more, contact Traci Stratford*

Senior Development Professionals Retreat

Tuesday, July 23rd–Wednesday, July 24th

Beth Tfiloh Dahan Community School in Baltimore
Contact: Traci Stratford
tracis@prizmah.org



Learning Hubs

At Prizmah, we are working to create the space for promising ideas to shine that can enhance student learning and experience. This summer, we are delighted to launch a new initiative - Learning Hubs - to grow and support you and your teaching teams. The goal of these hubs is to highlight the work in our schools and support them in sharing their expertise and practice with the rest of the field. We hope you will consider sending a small team to one or more of these hubs to ensure implementation of ideas and strategies that have been tested and successful in the host schools. After each hub, we will be running online meet-ups for each group to continue the conversation, collaboration, and growth.

Positive Discipline

Thursday, August 1st

Netivot School in NJ
Contact: Yael Steiner
yaels@prizmah.org

School Culture: Practical Tools for the Educational Leader

Sunday, August 4th

Prizmah Office in NYC
Contact: Rachel Levitt Klein Dratch
racheld@prizmah.org

Problem Based Learning

**Tuesday, August 13th (3pm - 8pm)–
Wednesday, August 14th
(8:30am - 12pm)**

Lippman School in Akron
Contact: Amy Wasser
amyw@prizmah.org

Design Thinking and Innovation

**Tuesday, August 13th–Wednesday,
August 15th**

Akiba-Schechter in Chicago
Contact: Daniel Weinberg
danielw@prizmah.org



The Jewish Day School Educational Innovator Summit*

Wednesday, June 26th, 12pm - 5pm

The National Museum of American Jewish History in Philadelphia
Contact: Daniel Weinberg, danielw@prizmah.org

**In collaboration with Jewish Interactive, after the ISTE conference*

For more information, visit prizmah.org/gatherings



PRIZMAH

Center for Jewish Day Schools

ILISA CAPPELL

Cultivating Relationships, Within Schools and Across the Field

At the end of a recent board retreat, a school vice president approached me with his frustrations. A CEO in his professional life, he felt like he understood exactly what work the board needed to do and was aggravated at the disconnect between this vision and what was actually happening. The new resources and tools that he learned at the retreat helped him articulate what should happen next, yet he was stymied by how to navigate the board dynamics to bring it about. How could he hold his peers accountable? How could he have difficult conversations with fellow volunteers? As a successful CEO, he felt like this volunteer role should have been easier; yet it turned out to be more challenging and more demoralizing than anticipated.

Volunteer leadership, like professional leadership, can be incredibly meaningful—and intensely vulnerable. What works in the corporate suite doesn't always work on the school board. Setting up the proper structures, committees and responsibilities is an important first step, but when the board members make commitments—to fundraise, lead committees or fulfill other roles—and fail to follow through, the ensuing conversation with one's peer can be extremely uncomfortable. When those board members are big donors or well-connected in the community, discomfort often gives way to complete avoidance. Decisions and conversations are fraught with politics even under the best of circumstances and with good intentions. In day schools, they are both political and personal.

Heads of school know this well. I remember a conversation with a new head of school, whose hire brought energy and excitement to the school because of his potential to effect change and background as a strong educator. Eager to make an excellent impression, the head also feared making a mistake. His board chair was surprisingly harsh, and

his willingness to make changes became subsumed by his unwillingness to err. Though the head and the board chair both believed the expectations were fair and transparent, they didn't invest in developing norms for their relationship, and the head didn't feel safe being open and vulnerable with the board chair about his decisions and the areas in which he wanted support. Actions that fell between the expectations frayed a relationship that had not even had the chance to develop properly.

As day school leadership gets increasingly complicated, lay and professional leaders are faced with navigating new territory, setting new policies for unprecedented issues, and developing productive relationships under stress. None of this comes easily or naturally, not for the successful CEO who volunteers as board chair and not for the dynamic educator who is now charged with running a more complex operation than most companies of much larger size.

We need to invest in our lay leaders to help them understand their unique roles in school. And we need to invest in our heads to give them the tools, resources and capacities to lead

complex organizations. And perhaps most importantly, we need to invest in the sensitive, critical and multifaceted lay-head relationship for our schools to thrive and for our leaders, both lay and professional, to experience the kind of success and satisfaction that will continue to attract others to these otherwise unenviable roles.

At Prizmah, we recognize that in order to deepen talent in the field of Jewish day schools, we need to keep people and relationships at the core. Our vision for deepening talent is about strengthening and supporting critical relationships among school leaders and creating conditions where individuals and the schools they lead can thrive.

Strong relationships require the implementation of norms and practices that affirm constructive partnerships. From our survey of more than 700 board members from 50 Jewish day schools, we discovered that, while over 80% of board members and heads rate their work in developing a climate of trust with one another and developing a constructive partnership as good or excellent, 33% of board members didn't know whether their school had a formal head support and evaluation committee or process in place, and only 42% of board members reported having a formal structure in place. Feeling good about the lay-head partnership without structures and systems devoted to the practice of relationship building, giving feedback and working towards shared strategic priorities is like building on quicksand.

Prizmah is committed to moving the needle to ensure that our schools are able to leverage better governance practices to improve school outcomes. We will work to ensure schools have strong head support and evaluation committees and strong processes for delivering feedback, both of which can serve as a foundational tool to advance healthy and strong lay-head partnerships and ultimately strong school outcomes.

A sense of isolation contributes to feelings of vulnerability and can lead to individuals feeling disconnected or alone in the work. Prizmah provides access to networks, knowledge and data to strengthen our leaders and enable them to make their schools vibrant centers of learning and Jewish community. As part of our new strategic plan, we will continue to:

- Connect leaders through role-specific communities. The Prizmah Reshets are designed to meet the needs of leaders who are seeking a safe space to turn to peers around the challenges that come up in their unique roles.
- Develop a cadre of lay-leader mentors who can provide one-on-one support for volunteer leaders.
- Share knowledge, expertise and research through our Knowledge Center. In partnership with Rosov Consulting (thanks to the generosity of The AVI CHAI Foundation), we will publish our latest study on the Lay Leadership Landscape (coming Fall 2019).
- Convene lay-professional leadership teams to work on building trust and strengthening their effectiveness as partners in leading their schools, deepening knowledge in leading governance practices and developing shared strategic outcomes for school success.

- Use the leadership framework developed in the Learning Leadership Landscape study (prizmah.org/prizmah-leadership-study) to develop shared understanding and ignite conversations sector-wide around the capacities and dispositions needed to lead Jewish day schools.
- Work with boards to utilize Board Self-Assessment as a tool for growth and development.

While individual leaders bravely step into their roles, we recognize that as a field we need to develop a strong pipeline of leaders. There is often high turnover in the headship, and this year alone has witnessed an increased number of veteran heads transitioning out of their roles. Jewish day school boards are not yet boards of choice, and deep understanding of what effective governance looks like is not the norm. It is often challenging to find individuals, especially those who are not also current parents, to serve.

Prizmah has committed to growing the talent pipeline for school lay and professional leadership through the following initiatives:

- Support the rising stars in our schools and promote their continued growth and education through our YOU Lead program, designed to provide highly personalized support and professional development to address leaders' most pressing priorities.
- Launch a Coaching Institute to provide coaching for heads of school and school administrators by well-trained veteran heads and senior leaders. The Coaching Institute utilizes a unique approach to coaching that recognizes the complex ecosystem of schools and builds capacity for professional leaders to succeed.
- Partner with BoardSource and the Board Member Institute for Jewish Nonprofits at the Kellogg School of Management at Northwestern University to ensure lay leaders develop the knowledge, skills and tools to lead effective boards.

And we know we cannot do this work alone. In partnership with other national organizations, we aspire to:

- Support heads of school across the field to create successful school cultures and ensure our day schools are great places to work and attract top talent. Our partners at Leading Edge, the Alliance for Excellence in Jewish Leadership, administer an employee experience survey to day schools. This year, in partnership with Prizmah, over 25 schools elected to participate. Through this data, we will learn about school culture, the professional workplace and how educators feel about their work and work environments. We will work together to identify the gaps and chart a course forward to meet the needs.
- Grow a pipeline for careers in Jewish day schools, ensuring our students today can see themselves pursuing meaningful careers in our schools. This aspiration will require the partnership of schools, funders and agencies across the Jewish community who are committed to strengthening Jewish day schools as the critical incubator of Jewish knowledge and leadership.

Prizmah envisions strongly connected and networked school lay and professional leaders who feel equipped to succeed in their roles, who understand the relational context that governs their leadership and who invest in deepening those relationships and practices characteristic of healthy schools.

ALICIA S. OBERMAN

How Would your Day School Board Perform on a Stress Test?

An exercise stress test reveals how your heart functions during physical activity. The purpose of a stress test is to measure how blood pumps through your heart when it is working its hardest. It can reveal benign irregularities, or it can indicate a severe and fatal condition that requires immediate and emergent treatment.

What does cardiology have to do with day school boards, or boards more generally for that matter? While boards may appear to be functional from the outside, appearances are often deceiving. Unfortunately, an organization too often does not assess the overall health of its board until it is suddenly stressed. As in the medical field, such stress tests are not conducted on a routine basis, and in the board context, they are also not “ordered” by the chair when he or she senses that there may be vulnerabilities or areas where the board could better perform.

According to a 2015 study conducted by the Stanford Graduate School of Business, in collaboration with BoardSource and Guidestar, 69 percent of nonprofit directors say their organization has faced one or more serious governance-related problems in the past 10 years.

When boards are not adequately prepared, stressful incidents can lead unnecessarily to crises. In the day school arena, a common example of this is an issue involving a student or a concern about a teacher’s behavior, which can open up a fracture in the complicated relationship between the head of school and the board. This breakdown can lead to abrupt decision-making and can tear at the very fabric of the board if they have not taken the time to build its foundation, exercise

thoughtful and strategic leadership, and form meaningful and trustworthy relationships among its members.

There are three optimal points of intervention, when boards are either establishing a routine or forming a new routine, for boards and professionals to reflect and assess board health.

BOARD BUILDING

Generally speaking, few boards invest the time, effort and energy to construct both the governance systems and invest in the human capital necessary to set a board up for success from the very start. Yet “board building” is not a one-time exercise; rather, it should be an intentional process that takes place at any stage throughout the work of the organization. True, it is much easier to begin with a functional base than to conduct a major course correction later, but it is difficult to do when an organization is just getting started and needs to be nimble.

While “board building” is often used to describe the process one undertakes when actually forming a board, it can take place as an organization moves through different phases of its life cycle. Typically, boards move from a founding board, to a strategic or governing board, and ultimately to a generative board. In moving from one phase to the next, the board is “building” on its

previous foundation. Only boards that are intentional and deliberate in moving through these stages are able to get to the ultimate generative mode of operation.

BOARD RESTRUCTURING

There are moments in the life cycle of some organizations and schools when there is an understanding that a restructuring of the board is necessary for a myriad of reasons. Often the board has become unwieldy, and the organization needs to shed “dead weight,” so to speak. Other times the organization is reinventing itself, especially in these complicated times, and the board it has is no longer the board that it needs. The third situation occurs when there is a significant change in the senior professional team that establishes governance as a priority. In all cases, there is likely some catalytic event.

ORGANIZATIONAL CRISIS

Unfortunately, we are seeing this more and more. The crisis is often so significant that it could ultimately take down the entire organization, and the board is forced into a position to lead and make extremely difficult decisions at moments of intense pressure, public scrutiny and when the very viability of the institution or school is at stake. There is no question that these situations are not just

messy, but they can tear boards, institutions and long-held relationships to shreds.

So what is the prescription? There are options to institute more regular and rigorous exercise regimens into board culture so we can better predict how boards will perform under stress. Some focus on the overall board, while others cultivate individual board members or staff. In all cases, the goal is to find weaknesses and fortify boards so they are better prepared to perform in various circumstances.

BOARD HEALTH ASSESSMENTS

According to the Stanford study cited above, 36 percent of nonprofit boards never evaluate their own performance. While this statistic may actually appear higher than we would expect, the study does not go on to elaborate what is meant by evaluation. There are in fact several types of board assessments, and they vary in depth, breadth and quality of administration. Some assess individual board members, some evaluate the board as a whole, and others provide 360-degree evaluations of the board.

It is important to note that these assessments are merely diagnostic tools. They are not curative. Therefore, accompanying facilitation and analysis by someone with extensive experience working with day school boards is highly recommended.

The day school movement is ahead of the curve on this front. An example is Prizmah's partnership with BoardSource and the development of the Board Fitness services, which include a customized board self-assessment for Jewish day school boards. Prizmah is currently working with dozens of schools across the country since they have made this a leadership priority.

INVESTMENT IN BOARD DEVELOPMENT

According to a 2016 study by the Alliance for Nonprofit Management entitled "Voices of Board Chairs: A National Study on the Perspective of Nonprofit Board Chairs," 51 percent of respondents indicated that they did nothing specifically to prepare to become a board chair and only 56 percent stated they followed some intentional process. In fact, only 19 percent of respondents indicated that "becoming a chair was a natural progression." Chairs generally identified online resources (42 percent), local workshops (37 percent), and books they had purchased (33 percent) when asked about what sources of information were helpful.

While investment in board development is on the rise, there have been few cross-sector, cross-experiential and cross-generational solutions brought to the sector. The foundation where I work, the Jack and Goldie Wolfe Miller fund, partnered with the Kellogg School's Center for Nonprofit Management at Northwestern to create the Board Member Institute (BMI) for Jewish Nonprofits. This holistic program aims to provide knowledge acquisition, skill refinement and practicable application of best, yet realistic, practices.

This year, the program partnered with other agencies, including Prizmah, to bring leaders across sectors to learn together. There were five board members from Jewish day school boards across the country in the national cohort and an additional three within the local Chicago cohort. There is growing interest from day school leaders in strengthening governance practices. The Prizmah partnership with the BMI enabled a group of day school leaders to learn with one another. These individuals came together as a cohort within a cohort and continue to share resources and gain support designed to meet the unique needs of day school boards.

There are a number of other board member development initiatives that exist in specific verticals in the Jewish space, including Prizmah's work with day schools, federations' work with their leadership, Slingshot's work with next gen and more, yet there are few robust programs specific to the Jewish community that take a sectorwide approach. Just as organizations and funders alike must make investments in board development a priority to support culture change that aligns with their programmatic interests, they must also understand that this is necessary capacity building for the field at large. As many board members move from one board to another throughout their leadership trajectory, we must prepare current volunteer leaders to serve in the next iteration of our boards, while also creating a pipeline for prepared and inspired leaders to elegantly replace them. If the entire field takes this on, because of the nature of the board service, the entire field will exponentially benefit.

INVESTMENT IN GOVERNANCE-RELATED PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR SENIOR STAFF

While there are a number of professional development opportunities for senior staff professionals and others who interact with boards, there are very few opportunities for

senior professionals to get development in governance or the nuances of working with a board. These senior professionals come from a variety of backgrounds, and they often have limited experience in successfully managing volunteer leaders or navigating board dynamics.

While these critical skills often are lacking in even the most comprehensive professional development programs, this is yet another area in which the day school movement is leading. Two prime examples are Prizmah's leadership training programs and the Day School Leadership Training Institute; both emphasize the hard and soft skills related to governance and board engagement in their work with heads of schools.

INVESTMENT IN RELATIONSHIP BUILDING

Relationship building, among the board members and the CEO, and among the board members themselves, is greatly undervalued from both a time and money perspective. Yet it is not possible to lead, manage change or handle a crisis if the foundation of trust and mutual accountability does not exist.

Limited time in person and regular turnover does not help foster a solid board culture. Moreover, boards often face tension between devoting time and resources to serve the organization versus to serve board development. The "right" balance depends on the particulars of the organization.

There are no quick or easy answers in the world of board health. Like investing in our physical fitness, at first it may not be pretty, but if we are diligent and deliberate, we will see continued and measured improvement in our performance. While there are a number of ways here to define success, ultimately we want to activate volunteer leaders with the requisite knowledge and complex skills to guide, govern and steward our organizations. For that to happen, we must play the long game. Investments we make now may not pay off until much later. Consequently, patience, understanding and mutuality are key.

Taking all of these observations into account, we return to the original metaphor. Has your day school board been stress-tested lately, and if so, how did it perform? If it failed, consider how you fortify it before there is another cardiac episode. And if you are lucky enough to appear healthy on the outside for now, consider taking a physical before you are asked to run a marathon.

ERICA BROWN

Sit Next to Me: An Invitation for Second-Stage Mentoring

There is a brief, tender exchange in the Talmud about second-stage mentoring between two great sages. In a debate about the minutiae of purity and impurity, Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi offered a resolution of a dilemma before his colleagues.

Engaging in rigorous debate can result in praise. It also summons the risk of rejection or intellectual humiliation. R.

Zeira dismissed Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi, stating that his contribution to the argument was minimal. But Reish Lakish, the passage says, "honored him [R. Yehoshua ben Levi] and said to him: 'Sit next to me'"(Hullin 122a). Rabbi Yehoshua was already a scholar of note, yet Reish Lakish's gracious invitation for proximity was a gesture to mentor a younger colleague who still had room to grow.

We all have room to mature professionally but don't always have opportunities for mentorship. R. Yehoshua ben Levi was lucky that Reish Lakish saw his native talents and tapped him for second-stage growth. For many of us, this kind of intense observation occurred only early on in our teaching careers.

Remember your first year of teaching? It was a real challenge. An administrator popped into your classroom regularly, gave you mini-assessments, invited you to experiment with new teaching techniques and gently helped you with classroom management. Knowing that someone wanted you to be a better educator created a sense of security and support while navigating your professional strengths and weaknesses. Sometimes outside organizations, like the Jewish New Teachers' Project, are brought in to create an on-ramp by training mentors for first-stage teachers.

Now let's jump to year five. Chances are that outside supervisory visits are sporadic at best. This is because mid-career teachers are often ignored. It's rarely intentional. School resources may be thin. Administrators have to devote their attention to more inexperienced teachers, so mid-career teachers cannot necessarily rely on classroom visits to get better at their work. In Jewish day schools that do not have a culture of regular supervision, a visit from a principal at this stage in your career might even seem strange or unwelcome.

This is because by year five you're likely a trusted member of the faculty. You know the school's culture, tackle lesson plans with ease and have long figured out the rhythms and routines of the classroom, lunchroom and recess. You know the staff, the politics and the drama. You're still challenged when a new curriculum is introduced or there is a departmental change of focus, but you can handle these changes routinely now that you are settled and competent. As a teacher, you are comfortable.

Yet getting too comfortable in the classroom can get in the way of the deepest learning and growth in position. Some teachers stagnate at this stage. If we adopted R. Zeira's harshness, we might label such teachers mediocre. Most mid-career teachers have enough experience that they don't have to focus on the rudimentary aspects of education and school culture, and can concentrate on new teaching techniques and content delivery. With the right kind of coaching and mentoring, they can take their performance up several notches. It's precisely around the five- to seven-year mark when good teachers can become truly great teachers with the help of mentors—or not.

Many mid-career Jewish educators never benefit from outside mentoring. They may feel professionally isolated as they close the door to the classroom and come, over time, to deem the loneliness a normative aspect of teaching. Without second-stage mentoring, teachers may become less engaged in the work. Jim Loehr and Tony Schwartz (in *The Power of Full Engagement*) cite research to demonstrate that the majority of employees in any organization begin disengaging from work after just six months on the job and even more after three years, just at the time employees initially learn the culture and later master it. If this is true, then by year five a teacher who is not growing professionally may actually be regressing.

Without second-stage mentoring, teachers risk becoming stale or lodging bad habits in place that may not be serious enough to warrant attention in a performance review but are evident to colleagues or students (or their parents). The mental models

such mid-career teachers have developed may no longer be serving them well. As Francis M. Duffy writes ("I Think, Therefore I Am Resistant to Change"), "Left unexamined and unchallenged, mental models influence people to see what they have always seen, do what they have always done, be what they have always been, and therefore produce the same results." This is when you want the veteran teacher equivalent of a Reish Lakish to say, "Sit next to me."

Growth at this stage is more likely to come from a mentor than an actual supervisor. Laurent A. Daloz in his book *Mentor: Guiding the Journey of Adult Learners* shares extensive research that "mentors are especially important at the beginning of people's careers or at crucial turning points in their professional lives." At these interstices, Jewish day school leaders need to invest in building mentoring pairs to grow educators and to retain them. Daloz reminds us that mentors do more than recommend teaching strategies; they offer support: "The mentor seems to manifest for proteges someone who has accomplished the goals to which they now aspire, offering encouragement and concrete help." Tom Peters in *A Passion for Excellence: The Leadership Difference* describes such coaching as "really paying attention to people—really believing them, really caring about them, really involving them." He believes the job of a mentor is largely "to facilitate, which literally means 'to make easy'—not less demanding, less interesting or less intense, but less discouraging, less bound up with excessive controls and complications."

So what *can* you do if you want second-stage mentoring but are not receiving it in an official capacity? Here are three possible paths forward:

- If you don't ask, you don't get. So ask. Sometimes cultures of supervision come from the top down. But sometimes they come from a grassroots push from teachers within schools. Asking a principal to come into your classroom regularly and share observations is not an act of vulnerability but an act of responsibility and curiosity.
- Seek an outside mentor. In his article "The Good Mentor," James B. Rowley observes that "most teachers with 10 or more years of experience were typically not assigned a mentor, but instead found informal support from a caring colleague." Don't wait until year 10 when you might be courting burnout. Find outside guidance early. It can be essential to your success.
- Identify a peer mentor within your school and observe each other regularly. You'll both get better. Having an educational ally can help in processing challenging moments in the classroom and beyond.

New research produced by CASJE and Rosov Consulting identifies mentoring as one of the most prized contributions to teacher development: "Networks, cohort-based professional development, collaboration with colleagues, mentoring, and effective supervision were named as the experiences and opportunities that had been most valuable for participants' professional growth" ("On the Journey: Concepts that Support a Study of the Professional Trajectories of Jewish Educators"). Mentoring opportunities are most nurturing and valuable mid-career when teachers know themselves and their classrooms well. It is precisely at this stage that mentoring and support will help re-energize educators and help them reach the next level of professionalism. Attention, attention must be paid.



SUPPORTING A STRUGGLING TEACHER

I have a teacher I'm concerned about for next year. I believe he's capable of being a good teacher, but if he doesn't improve soon, I'm not sure I'll be able to keep him another year. He wants to do well, but sometimes he can't even see the problems in his classroom. It's so hard to find good teachers, and lots of turnover is both expensive and bad for morale. At the same time, parents are starting to complain and other teachers are taking notice. What can I do to set this teacher up for success next year without compromising the quality of student learning?

This is a difficult question, and you're right that it is a critical one. It also sounds like you have taken the first important step by acknowledging that there is an issue here with this teacher's performance. Now that you recognize the problem, there are a few ways you can respond.

You could pretend that it's not a problem, maybe blame the complaints on some other factor and sweep it under the rug. Based on the fact that you've written for advice, it's clear that some action needs to happen. Teacher quality is one of the most important factors in student learning. In fact, *collective teacher efficacy*—the collective belief of teachers in their ability to positively affect students—has been shown to be strongly, positively correlated to student achievement, which tells me that you are right to be concerned about the impact one teacher can have on his peers and his students. Ignore and deny are clearly not options.

You could simply let the teacher go. This could send a strong message to parents and fellow teachers about your high standards for teacher performance. Letting the community know that you demand excellence could boost parents' confidence in their decision to send their children to your school. It will also send the message to other teachers that poor performance will not be tolerated. On the other hand, such volatility can contribute to a culture of fear and anxiety. A revolving door of teachers can undermine the stability that parents seek for their children. Furthermore, if teachers perceive that they could be released without opportunity for improvement, it could seriously undermine the trust and transparency that is so critical to a constructive school culture.

If you're not going to ignore the issue, and you'd like to avoid immediate dismissal, the only thing left to do is to confront the problem head-on.

The first thing you need to do is to initiate an open and honest conversation with the teacher—right now. Even if it's summer break, call the teacher in to have this conversation. Don't let it wait until the fall. Open this conversation by naming the concern directly. You can use the prompt, "I have a concern about your performance." When describing the concern, it's important to ground it in relation to your

school's shared vision of good teaching: an explicit understanding of what good teaching looks like in your school. Be clear that you are calling out this concern because you want to work together to help bridge the gap between his performance and your expectations. Make sure to leave space for the teacher to respond. When he does, shut up and listen! You want to make it really clear that you value what this teacher brings and you are committed to supporting him.

If you don't already have a shared vision of good teaching in place, the Teacher Learning Toolkit, a project of the Mandel Center for Studies in Jewish Education at Brandeis University, has a module on Creating a Shared Vision of Good Teaching. You can visit teacherlearningproject.com to create a free account and access this resource.

Now that you've confronted the problem, *make a plan*. Begin with a goal. SMART goals are **S**pecific, **M**easurable, **A**chievable, **R**elevant and **T**ime-bound. Then identify the supports that you will put in place. Will you make regular visits to his classroom, with meetings to debrief your observations? Are there other teachers in the building that he can observe?

You mentioned that "sometimes he can't even see the problems in his classroom." This may be a good opportunity to use video in the classroom. Ask the teacher to record one lesson per week, and then watch the video together. It's easy to dismiss your observations when you debrief a classroom observation, but you can't disagree with what you see. Perhaps this is an opportunity to create a peer coaching cohort of teachers using video to reflect on and improve instruction. This can go a long way to support the culture of teachers working together to improve their practice.

If you are genuinely committed to supporting this teacher's improvement, the plan is going to require time and attention from you. Of course you are already stretched thin, but you are going to need to make this a priority in order to impact this teacher's performance. Whether that means blocking time in your schedule to visit the teacher's classroom or set meetings with him, you will have to figure out a way to make it happen.

Make sure that your plan includes frequent check-ins and touch-points. This will allow you to monitor the teacher's progress to determine early on if the trajectory looks promising or not. Remember, you may have to make a tough call later in the year. If you remain honest and transparent, it's more likely that you will be able to have that difficult conversation without catastrophic impact to your school culture, or your conscience.

DAVID A.
FARBMAN

Better Teaching Through Data

For several years, the Maimonides School, a Modern Orthodox PreK–12 school in Brookline, Massachusetts, struggled with a growing population of learners who had learning disabilities. In classrooms every day, some portion of students found it difficult to read (both in Hebrew and English) or, in settings that largely centered around frontal teaching, to process information or behave appropriately. As a result, many students either stayed and struggled or left the school. Indeed, for some administrators, especially those in the lower school (which serves Grades K–5 and about 170 students), the struggle seemed to represent a challenge to the school’s very mission. To their minds, if core classrooms accommodated only a certain type of learner, then the Maimonides School was not living up to its promise to make available a robust Jewish and secular education to all students in the Modern Orthodox community of Greater Boston.

Administrators understood that the school needed to strengthen its instruction to better accommodate diverse learners. They recognized the need to start by getting teachers to speak to one another about their own instruction. Spurred by a Jim Joseph Foundation grant funneled through the local federation (Combined Jewish Philanthropies) and Gateways: Access to Jewish Education, Boston’s central agency for Jewish special education, Maimonides administration and faculty experimented initially with so-called “action research,” a reflective process whereby teachers would collaborate to discuss particular problems of practice encountered in the classroom.

Each grade of teachers would meet regularly to share and discuss a particular pedagogical technique being tried in the classroom. While these discussions did begin to break down the old ways of teaching in the school—teachers gradually came to see themselves as part of a team, rather than a collection of solo practitioners—these early attempts at teacher collaboration still lacked real substance and accountability. Most significantly, “action research” was centered more on the educators and what they were teaching, rather than on the students and what they were learning.

THE EMERGENCE OF DATA

Only with the implementation of the Response to Intervention (RTI) structure did teachers begin to draw deep connections between instruction and the learning of every student. According to the RTI Network, RTI is a “multi-tier approach to the early identification and support of students with learning and behavior needs.” Using research-based assessments aligned to a robust curriculum, teachers can easily and quickly identify those students who are not learning to expectations and then can adjust their instruction to better meet each child’s specific needs. (In some cases, support must extend beyond the core classroom.) In the end, RTI “creat[es] a well-integrated system of instruction and intervention guided by child outcome data.” (For a more detailed summary of RTI, see rtinetwork.org/learn/what/whatisrti.)

The grade-level meetings shifted to analyzing the periodic assessment data and discussing ways to modify instruction to support students who were not meeting benchmark expectations. Maimonides started its data review and analysis of the DIBELS (Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills) assessment and then expanded to other instruments that measure different aspects of literacy skill development. The lower-school faculty now also has applied the RTI methods of assessment and data review to other subjects, most notably mathematics and Hebrew.

The commitment of school administrators has been critical to the consistent and effective operation of RTI. For starters, the school reconfigured the students’ schedule to ensure each grade team could meet for one hour every other week to review data, discuss student outcomes and review their instruction. (The school achieved this hour-long “carve out” by arranging for students to have weekly back-to-back “specials” or, in grades K–2, a special that backs up against lunch/recess.) Second, the principal, associate principal and other administrators attend and contribute to these meetings and, within the meeting setting, treat faculty as their peers, puzzling out with the teachers how to help specific students.

Third, to ensure meeting productivity, the school adheres to the agendas and protocols promoted by DataWise, a program of the Harvard Graduate School of Education. These three elements of the data meetings—dedicated time, strict protocols with delineated outcomes, and a multi-tiered and open discussion around instruction—together convey to teachers that their efforts to hone instruction to meet the needs of every student matter. Moreover, they come to see that by better differentiating their instruction, they can indeed elevate student performance for a diverse range of learners.

OUTCOMES AND LESSONS LEARNED

After five years of effort, what has been the impact? There are two categories of impact: teacher practice and student learning.

Teachers report that their concept of their role in the classroom has shifted to become facilitators of learning rather than deliverers of content. This shift is rooted in the sense teachers now have that each child may learn differently and thus needs to be exposed to and interact with content differently. The time spent discussing how to align teaching to boost student outcomes—not to mention all the informal discussions that have become the norm in the school—has created a paradigm shift in teacher self-perception. More concrete changes have come about as well, including the development and implementation of a richer curriculum that holds out high expectations for learning while being adaptive to different learning needs.

Meanwhile, the impact on student learning has been measurable. Not only has the percentage of students in Grades K–3 who met the end-of-year fluency benchmark (as measured through DIBELS) grown from 40 percent to 60 percent, the proportion of students who score “well below benchmark” has been halved (from 32 to 16). Perhaps even more important, the number of students receiving learning support outside of class has dropped significantly, meaning that teachers are simply better equipped to educate a broader cohort of students in the context of the core classroom.

Even with these successes, the school has room for improvement in both core instruction and in pinpointing student needs. Beyond the technical aspects of education, the educators still grapple with the balancing act of serving a diverse learner population and upholding high academic standards. The faculty may be more skilled at this balance, but the challenge still exists.

As for lessons learned, the school finds three in particular:

- Individual teachers and the faculty as a whole can improve instruction, with the right opportunities in place. In particular, the fact that Maimonides administration dedicates real time for professional learning, in the form of data meetings to analyze student outcomes and the intricacies of instruction, has been the engine to drive improvement in teaching and learning.
- Addressing the education of students with atypical learning needs must become part and parcel of the overall teaching and learning equation. If struggling students are separated from their classroom peers—either conceptually by not holding them to high standards, or physically by pulling them out for support services—then instruction lags for all students.
- Real improvement takes time. First, teachers must shift their self-perception to be team members and collaborators, rather than individual agents, and second, they must hone their practices in the classroom by responding to student learning outcomes. Both of these shifts, which often occur in tandem rather than sequentially, require frequent and sustained opportunities for learning among the adults in the building.

Inspired by their mission, the administrators and faculty at Maimonides Lower School are committed to expanding their efforts to educate all students who walk through their doors. After investing in the practices that spur and support teachers’ growth, Maimonides foresees the day when an even broader range of students will find success.

Information from this article was drawn from research developed as part of the Profiles of Inclusion initiative of the William Davidson Graduate School of Jewish Education-JTS.



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Developing Talent Through Relationships

MIRIAM RAIDER-ROTH

Talent is often thought of as innate, something you are born with. Either you have it or you don't. We think "talent" and we think of Yo-Yo Ma, stunningly able to play his cello from an early age, or Serena Williams, her limbs uniquely built for tennis. We know that even innate talent needs training: We think of the talented and earnest young person, diligently practicing and training for long hours. But our vision of talent and the accolades go to solitary performers, whose solo performances take our breath away.



While we will continue to be awed by the performances of remarkable individuals, the new field of social neuroscience is showing us that as a species, we are cognitively interdependent. We learn together, we create together. In *The Powers of Two*, Joshua Wolf Shenk argues that pairs produce a kind of creative generativity that has shaped the evolution of great ideas: Think of the interplay between Matisse and Picasso, Lennon and McCartney, Pierre and Marie Curie. Harvard Project Zero researcher Edward Clapp makes a compelling case for “participatory creativity,” demonstrating that social process is an essential component of thinking, creating and innovating.

In our work with educational leaders across the Jewish denominational spectrum at the Mandel Teacher Educator Institute (MTEI), our faculty embraces a collaborative and relational model of learning. We are especially concerned with developing the capacity, knowledge and talent of instructional leaders to support them in creating collaborative learning environments for the teachers in their institutions. Among our eight principles of practice, two are especially relevant to this discussion. The first is “learning rooted in collaborative inquiry.”

We highlight both “inquiry” and “collaboration.” Inquiry is at the core of studying texts, investigating teaching practices, learning about learning and learning from each other in community. Adopting an “inquiry stance” includes, among other things, engaging in an open-minded search for evidence upon which to build ideas and to explore multiple interpretations. We believe that collaborative learning has a variety of strengths that individual learning does not; that learning with colleagues deepens understanding, builds community, adds meaning and purpose, and improves practice. We take our place in the lineage of Jewish learning across time, which values a moral and practical commitment to our colleagues’ learning, through practices such as supporting and challenging each other’s ideas with sensitivity and intellectual honesty.

We believe the social construction of knowledge and talent requires forms of learning that are social, interactive and focused on deep inquiry into pressing questions regarding teaching and learning.

MTEI’s second principle is the “intentional creation of community.”

Creating a community of collaborative inquiry is ongoing, intentional work that supports and is supported by the relational environment we create. To “create a community,” we consciously set up structures aimed at helping participants have time to learn together, feel comfortable taking risks, be vulnerable, and develop trusting relationships. This kind of community environment — what we call a “relational learning community” — fosters learning. As a sense of community fosters learning, so, too, learning together fosters the creation of community. Thus, building a professional and relational collaborative learning community is both how we do our work as well as an outcome of our work.

The creation of a professional/relational learning community (RLC) is necessary for the building of knowledge that can transform the way we learn and teach. We have a very specific goal for such transformation: to improve and deepen the teaching and learning in our schools. Such work happens in the context of relationships. As relational psychologists Jean Baker Miller and Irene Stiver (*The Healing Connection*) argue, “Participating in growth-fostering relationships is both the source and goal of development.”

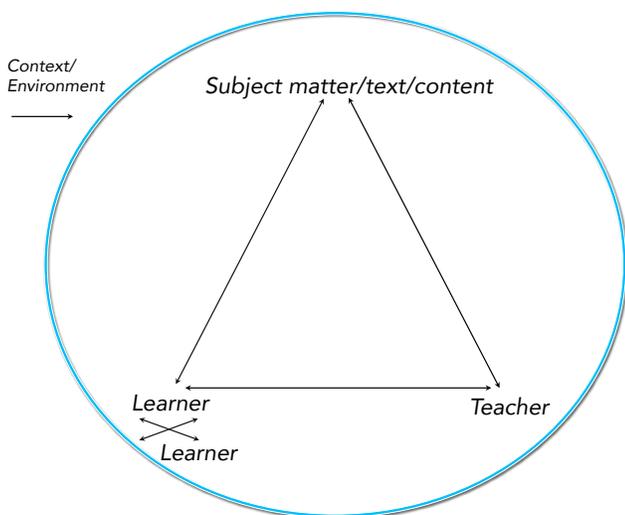
If we know that children’s growth happens within a web of relationships, can we create contexts in which adults learn in this way as well? At MTEI, we build “relational learning communities” with our participants. Relational learning communities, for both adults and children, have four distinct dimensions. The first is building a *holding environment*. Informed by the work of D.W. Winnicott and Robert Kegan, we understand a holding environment to be one that both welcomes individuals in all their complexity and fullness, and supports them to

change in fundamental ways. It is a place to take risks and try out a new idea or practice. Taking these leaps requires vulnerability, because trying out something new is often messy, and includes failure and practice. As Brené Brown argues in *Dare to Lead*, vulnerability is “the cornerstone of courage-building, but we often fail to realize that without vulnerability there is no creativity or innovation.” Such vulnerability can be destabilizing, causing people to feel off-balance or uncertain. To invite vulnerability, the holding environment must be a safe space, and this kind of safety requires trust among the members of the RLC.

It is a safety that encourages nascent ideas to be articulated, the safety to say hard things. As a colleague of mine once said, it must be “safe enough to be dangerous.” Building a holding environment requires careful thought about all the dimensions of a learning setting. For example, we carefully consider the ways we eat together, sing during the day and socialize during unstructured time. Building a holding environment includes practices such as articulating clear values and norms for how we work together, how we voice disagreements and how we learn to listen to one another. MTEI faculty member Kathy Simon works closely with our participants on practices of both attuned listening and speaking, underscoring another MTEI principle: “How we talk matters.”

The second dimension of an RLC is the development of *relational awareness*, “the capacity to notice, feel, reflect and respond to the dynamics of connection, disconnection and repair that can happen” in key learning relationships (see my book *Professional Development in Relational Learning Communities*). Those relationships include connections between teachers and students, teachers and the subject matter/text/content, students and the subject matter/text/content, and student peer relationships.

Originally, this triangular model of relationship was referred to as the “instructional triangle.” We have also called this model the “relational triangle” because attending to dynamics and wellbeing of each dyad in the triangle is central to developing relational awareness. When any of these relationships experience a rupture or disconnection, learning may be compromised. A hard reality of teaching (and learning!) is that disconnections are inevitable. A teacher-educator may make an offhand comment that offends a participant. A text may trigger a participant in ways a facilitator never anticipated. Detecting these ruptures is a vital capacity for the facilitator of RLCs. Careful,



nonjudgmental observations of RLC members and checking in with participants at the end of sessions (collectively or individually) are just two of many practices that can help facilitators notice ruptures. Once facilitators discover these ruptures, then they can carry out strategies for repair or reconnection.

The third dimension is enacting *relational pedagogies*. This kind of teaching pays close attention to key learning relationships described above. Examples of these pedagogies include havruta text study and descriptive processes (and some protocol-based discussion). Each of these pedagogies include practices that focus on rich and evocative texts—texts that can elicit multiple perspectives and interpretations.

This form of teaching requires staying present with each vertex of the relational triangle as well as the relationships between them. Two excellent examples of relational pedagogies were shared by members of MTEI cohort 8 at the recent 2019 Prizmah conference in Atlanta. Suzanne Mishkin, director of the Sager Schechter School in Northbrook, Illinois, vividly described the teacher learning groups she has launched. These groups use protocols that learn from, rather than judge, student work. Yael Krieger, director of educational support at Jewish Community High School of the Bay in San Francisco, described “teacher learning walks” in her school, where teachers collaboratively observe one another’s classrooms, share nonjudgmental observations and pose inquiry questions with one another.

The last dimension of an RLC is that of *supporting, challenging and voicing practices*. These practices are essential parts of relational pedagogies, but are so important that I highlight them as a dimension unto themselves. They help participants in the RLC engage with one another as “learning allies,” as MTEI faculty member Jeff Stanzler has termed this kind of relationship. Participants take responsibility for one another’s learning, helping each other to strengthen emerging ideas, challenge interpretations that need more evidence and articulate new perspectives that may be hard to voice.

With the guidance of MTEI faculty member Elie Holzer, we encourage MTEI participants to enact these practices in havruta text study. It can be difficult for participants to challenge a learning ally with questions such as “What evidence supports your interpretation?” or “How does your interpretation fit with a different part of the text?” But the challenge is lessened by understanding that it is part of their job is to help their partner strengthen their interpretation; it is what we call “role-sanctioned challenge,” and it is meant to be help participants take brave steps in learning.

Along with this kind of challenge, RLC participants also practice supporting and voicing, assisting their learning allies to voice new ideas, interpretations and questions that they may be hesitant or uneasy to articulate. They help one another find supporting evidence for a new interpretation or invent ways to implement a new professional development practice. As noted in our MTEI principles, these are profoundly Jewish ways of being in a learning relationship.

The four dimensions of an RLC set the stage for building new ideas, nurturing creativity and deepening talent that can truly change the way educational leaders and teachers learn together in schools. In contrast to traditional notions of K–12 schooling where “don’t look at your neighbor’s paper” is often the norm, learning in relationship is the “new normal” in many adult workspaces and industries. To help us build these kinds of spaces for children, we must experience them as adults and feel the way that learning morphs and changes when we build knowledge in relationship. Only then can we educate the next generation in ways that can nurture innovation and creativity to repair our world.

LAUREN
APPLEBAUM

When We Agree and When We Argue: How Does Dialogue Deepen Learning Among Colleagues?

When we carve out time for professional learning, teachers are often most eager to get the chance just to talk together. Many participants in professional development retreats and conferences name conversation with colleagues as the most valuable part of their learning process. As one high school teacher in a fellowship program put it, she looked forward each month to the opportunity to be in discussion with her cohort, whether it was for getting their support, their praise or their guidance. Participants deepened their learning both when conversations surfaced disagreements and when discussions highlighted areas of agreement.

In this article, drawn from my work with Israel educators, I identify and describe two types of collegial dialogue: dialogues of agreement and dialogues of disagreement. Each can contribute productively to individual and group learning in their own ways. Dialogues of agreement, where we speak to others with whom we share ideas, can reinforce our core beliefs and assumptions while adding greater nuance to them. Dialogues of disagreement, on the other hand, can build empathy and understanding of the perspective of others, in addition to helping us investigate and interrogate our own beliefs.

DIALOGUES OF AGREEMENT

Teachers crave the opportunity to speak and work with those they see as allies and peers. As one teacher explained, “What I desire right now is to work with people who are, I guess, like-minded and functioning in a way that we ‘get’ each other and we could really work together.” The chance to speak with colleagues who “get” you offers much appreciated comfort and affirmation along with new insights about that shared work. When we hear our ideas described by a colleague with whom we feel aligned, it can help us see our work with new eyes.

Dialogues that offer the opportunity to agree with colleagues provide a way for participants to feel seen and heard. Hearing how others see the world and describe it can offer new language for previously unarticulated assumptions. In one discussion, a participant was describing his approach to teaching, and another burst in, “I think you just articulated my philosophy of teaching Israel education! It is what I’m doing. I’m passionate about that!” She was energized because, while she felt strongly about these ideas and had been enacting them in her classroom already, she had not identified it fully as a coherent, recognizable “philosophy” until articulated by someone else.

A middle school teacher also shared her experience of the energy that comes from a sense of agreement in a dialogue when she reflected on her experience talking about an integrated curriculum project that another teacher had presented to the group. She had begun to work with colleagues at her own school to integrate Israel education into other courses, but it was a change she considered both significant and risky. After the discussion, she commented, “It was in the back of my mind all year, but then when he brought it, it’s just like, ‘Wow, that’s good. We really need to push for it.’ It gave us another shove towards the right direction.”

For each of these teachers, being in dialogue with like-minded colleagues was a supportive and energizing experience. It helped them each deepen their professional learning, guiding one to articulate a philosophy in a way that could lead to more focused pedagogical choices, and propelling another towards bold curricular changes she had been hesitating to make.

DIALOGUES OF DISAGREEMENT

Speaking with teachers whose ideas of curriculum or pedagogy clash with ours is more challenging. At first glance, it may seem not only unwelcome but unwise to urge teachers to engage in conversations that are deeply uncomfortable and may result in hurt feelings. But dialogues of disagreement can be productively unsettling rather than just upsetting.

Discomfort can promote learning in a variety of ways. A dialogue of disagreement can serve to build empathy for positions held by others. Alternatively, such dialogues cause teachers to reaffirm their own position on an issue, sometimes one that they didn’t even realized they held until it was challenged. Dialogues of disagreement

shake and challenge participants’ positions. When the conversations are respectful and thoughtful, speaking with those with whom we disagree is valuable for teachers. One teacher shared that she found it frustrating “to sit with people who clearly, if it really got down to the nitty-gritty, would not appreciate the way I teach about Israel and I might not appreciate the way that they teach about Israel. But I appreciate their integrity and I appreciate that they are open to growth and change and dialogue. I want to be that way, too. So we can be different and then we can grow from each other.”

If the facilitator clearly articulates that the disagreement is valuable and helps participants focus on learning from one another rather than trying to win a debate, teachers in a dialogue of disagreement can learn about one another and about themselves. A conversation that is frustrating can be one that is ultimately energizing and empowering.

Dialogues of disagreement can build empathy

Some dialogues of disagreement help illuminate opposing perspectives. One teacher explained that for him, hearing how other people think “is a huge part of the learning. I definitely felt like hearing the various perspectives just opened my eyes to the different ways to think.” Opening his eyes to different ways of thinking didn’t mean coming to agree with those ideas. Instead, those conversations offered new perspective on beliefs that had previously seemed wrongheaded or confusing.

Another participant noted that her conversations with teachers who held significant ideological differences had been particularly important for her. Initially, she had expressed hesitation about the value of working together with people who weren’t focused on the same goals, but eventually was able to articulate that “if there’s one thing that you need to have if you’re involved in Israel education, it’s the ability to be to the other person what you want them to be to you. If I want people to hear my ideas and not judge them, if I want people to listen, I really need to practice that.”

For many participants, the experience of listening respectfully and carefully to others was itself a powerful experience for expanding perspective and building empathy, irrespective of whether or not they changed their own minds. This ability to listen to difference without either forcing consensus or focusing too sharply on points of disagreement is a critically important skill for any educator who works in a diverse setting. Highlighting and naming difference without attempting to change it can form the backbone of a respectful pluralistic community, and this is especially true when Israel, or any other sensitive subject, is the topic. Building empathy is a crucial component of professional and personal learning for day school teachers, especially when they seek to have deep and meaningful conversations about their practice.

Dialogues of disagreement can clarify a participant’s stance

While sometimes participation in a dialogue of disagreement allows for understanding the perspective of others, dialogues of disagreement also serve to clarify participants’ own ideas. Reflecting on the experience of hearing the group discuss her curriculum in a Critical Friends session, in which several colleagues disagreed with her approach, one teacher nervously noted, “Some people really are coming from a very different place than I am, and they want to teach kids to feel the same way they do. I’m not doing that, and I feel a little in the closet, I think, now that we’re talking about this.”

It was uncomfortable for her to be “in the closet.” But it was also helpful in that it allowed her to see the boundaries (or walls) of her

closet. Naming what she was “not doing” was a helpful way to solidify what she was doing. Identifying the motivations of others helped clarify her own motivation when it forced her to realize, somewhat unhappily, that not everyone shared that motivation.

The experience of discomfort leading to personal clarification was shared by another teacher. A participant had shared an assignment that asked his students to reflect on various approaches to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and had included an option that the first teacher personally understood to be an anti-Zionist position. “His inclusion of that option shook me a little bit. It was hard,” she said, “and it kind of shook me, it was just like, wow... I didn’t expect that.” Even as her eyes welled up while telling her story, she affirmed the value of the experience. When speaking about the diversity of voices in the group, she shared that some opposing perspectives had the effect of “just like shaking my beliefs—which is good. I mean that’s the whole part, the whole thing.”

Hearing other people disagree with their deeply felt positions didn’t change everyone’s mind. Instead, it helped them see their own minds more clearly and identify their own boundaries. Sometimes, facilitators of professional learning focus on the moments where participants learn something dramatically new or shift their perspective. We think that deep learning needs to be paradigm-shattering, full of world-changing insights. But it can be equally powerful for teachers to challenge their own ideas and then feel greater clarity about them, emerging with renewed resolve and commitment.

AGREEING TO DISAGREE—AND AGREE

Both dialogues of agreement and dialogues of disagreement are powerful experiences for teachers and administrators. When we need to articulate shared positions or be strengthened in our commitments to the daily, ongoing challenges of teaching, engaging in thoughtful conversations with like-minded colleagues can be refreshing and grounding. Facilitators can deepen these sessions by asking teachers to articulate shared values and unpack their work in the service of conversations that go beyond praise and affinity.

When teachers need to deepen their empathy or push themselves to identify their own values and approaches, dialogues with those who are not natural allies are even more critical. When it comes to teaching a topic like Israel, teachers need both support and supportive challenge. In particular, facilitators and administrators can work to create spaces where disagreements are not shushed for fear that fights will break out but instead amplified as opportunities for deep learning. In Project Orli, an initiative that combines professional learning for Israel educators with research that contributes to the field of Israel education, we create such spaces in part by using resources from, among others, the Public Conversations project (www.publicconversations.org) and Resetting the Table (civility.jewishpublicaffairs.org/resetting-the-table), two organizations working to build skills and opportunities for constructive conversations among those who might disagree.

Teaching, even in supportive and vibrant day school communities, can be lonely. When teachers have a chance to talk together, each discussion is an opportunity for connection that can deepen their learning, whether they agree or disagree with the colleagues across the table.

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SPACE BETWEEN FLOORS: CONFERENCE NETWORKING

RABBI YAEL **BUECHLER**

*Lower School Rabbi-in-Residence, Schechter Westchester
(soon to be The Leffell School), White Plains, New York*



At the Prizmah conference in Atlanta, I was reminded of the midrash from Bereshit Rabbah 7:3 that praises God as an excellent interior decorator. According to the midrash, when a human king builds a palace, the king puts inhabitants into the upper and lower floors. God, however, was brilliant enough to use the space between the floors. The Prizmah conference was revolutionary in its design. Rather than entirely focusing on the formal presentations and presenters (of which there were many), the conference, like the midrash, was strategically focused on the space between the sessions as well.

The conference intentionally brought “networking” to the forefront. It capitalized on the types of connections and conversations that would typically take place in hallways, elevators and buffet lines at a conference. The networking that took place at Prizmah was strategically facilitated through a variety of mediums. Networking started even before the conference began, through an amazing app that included ways to connect with each conference participant directly, photos of each participant and presenter, and a Twitter-like feed for the conference itself. This app enabled networking to begin virtually and set the stage for the importance of networking throughout the conference.

Built into the conference itself was a variety of opportunities and tracks for people to come together through facilitated conversations by “network weavers” for professional peers, from admissions and marketing professionals to heads of school, Judaic studies administrators and lay leaders. These formal sessions enabled networking to occur as part of the sessions themselves and to spill over into the hallways and banquet tables. The creative dessert bars certainly helped to foster more opportunities for conversation as well.

There were also many kinds of presentations, from TED-style talks to lightning rounds (five-minute presentations followed by q&a), which enabled more individuals to have a chance to share their stories, propose best practices and make contributions to the field. Conference participants could then build upon these examples to share their own dreams for Jewish education.

I was so struck by the conference design that, following the conference, I reached out to Debra Shaffer Seeman, whose official title is “Network Weaving Director” at Prizmah. I noticed that, aside from facilitating the Eli Talks and lightning rounds (at which I presented), Debra played a more behind-the-scenes role of encouraging people to fill out Post-it Notes on a board in a hallway (for example: “My name is ___ and I have experience in ___”). Reflecting upon the conference, Debra explained that networking is actually “the fourth lever” of Prizmah’s strategic plan. This networking lever is designed to weave through all of the other content areas at Prizmah. Debra shared how she is invested in growing the “wisdom in the room,” rather than a “sage-on-the-stage” model, which is typical at many conferences and presentations.

It is clear that the Prizmah conference in Atlanta set a new stage for this model of decentralizing learning itself and empowering more individuals to share their wisdom with one another. By putting networking at the forefront, Prizmah inspired me and I hope many of the other 1,100 participants to intentionally think about how we, like the midrash, find the spaces between the floors. May we continue to build meaningful connections and opportunities to learn from one another as we engage in our sacred work.

**CULTURE
AND INDUCTION**



REBECCA LURIE

Building a Culture of Excellence

When I submitted my candidacy to become Schechter’s head of school, I was what some refer to as a “non-traditional” candidate. I had never worked in an educational setting, and while I am a parent of three kids, I did not have professional experience with elementary-age children. My prior experience was in the field of talent management, most recently at Staples, Inc. As I found my footing in the world of education, I surrounded myself with experts in the field, and I was also eager to find transferable concepts or themes from my for-profit experience.

I had spent over a decade thinking about how organizations work and the impact that culture and talent have on results, and was ready to apply theories about culture to the Jewish day school world. What I’ve learned so far is that culture and talent may have an even greater impact in schools than in for-profit companies. Great schools rely on great teachers, and a teacher is great when they are *proficient in their craft* and a *positive cultural fit for your school*. The key ingredient is to clearly articulate the kind of culture you strive for at your school—one that energizes and inspires current faculty and staff, and can act as a hiring standard to ensure that new employees embody your school’s cultural beliefs.

WHAT IS CULTURE, AND HOW DO YOU SET YOUR SCHOOL’S CULTURAL BELIEFS?

Jack Welch, former CEO of General Electric, once said, “Too many leaders think a company’s values can be relegated to a five-minute conversation between HR and a new employee.” In most organizations, cultural values include generic phrases like “be a team player.” To discover your school’s unique and differentiating cultural beliefs, take stock in what you and your team love and value most about your school. Push yourselves to embrace the nuance, avoiding any generic

terms or ideas. Culture is not putting ping-pong tables in the lounge to make work more fun. Culture is about defining the core beliefs and attitudes of your organization that guide daily decision-making and actions. If you can surround yourself with people who truly embody your cultural beliefs and are proficient in their craft, then I believe that a school is able to function at a high level.

At Schechter Boston, three of our core cultural beliefs are:

- Relationships are everything.
- There is no limit to better.
- Everyone is a teacher.

As I walk through our classrooms, I observe our cultural beliefs in day-to-day actions and interactions. For example, when a teacher sends a note home to parents that demonstrates how she really knows and understands their child, it demonstrates that relationships are everything. When after each and every Ruach Minyan (spirited, monthly prayer Friday morning service) the staff leaders huddle to debrief, process and list elements to “stop, start or continue” for next time, they model that there is no limit to better. And in our leadership meeting, when our development director is encouraged to offer insight into teaching and learning, it demonstrates that everyone is a teacher.

As you establish your school's cultural beliefs, test them with others to ensure that they really hold true. For example, two of Disney's core cultural beliefs are "no cynicism" and "fanatical attention to consistency and detail." Everyone who walks through Disney World will attest to the fact that these core cultural beliefs inform every aspect of the experience.

HOW DO YOU "LIVE" YOUR SCHOOL'S CULTURAL BELIEFS?

After you name and communicate your core beliefs, living them on a daily basis is far more important. The most critical way to live your school's cultural beliefs is for the leadership of your school to model them in their daily lives. One of my first decisions as head of school was to relocate the head's office from the second floor, where it was tucked away in the corner, to the first floor, right near the school's entrance. If "relationships are everything" is a core belief, I needed to be visible and present.

To model "there is no limit to better," we aren't just open to feedback, we proactively solicit it and act on it. When we have a really tough problem to solve, we assemble a group of people with diverse perspectives and experiences to form a *think tank* because we value the collective genius, demonstrating that "everyone is a teacher." How we spend our time, and what we spend it on, communicates to our faculty what we care about, and every moment is an opportunity to reinforce our cultural beliefs.

HOW CAN YOUR SCHOOL'S CULTURAL BELIEFS INFORM TALENT MANAGEMENT?

Whom you hire, what you recognize, how you approach professional development and even who you decide isn't a good fit for your school should stem from your school's cultural beliefs. When we assess people for openings, we consider them on two primary dimensions: performance (expertise in their field, proficiency at their craft) and cultural fit. Hiring people may be the most important aspect of any school leader's role, because the people you bring into your school communicates what you value as a school. For example, people who are not receptive to feedback or continuous improvement would not be the right fit for our culture.

Show appreciation, either publicly or privately, for current faculty and staff who embody your school's cultural beliefs. Add your school's cultural beliefs to your supervision and evaluation process so that they remain an ongoing discussion. Give feedback on culture just as you would on job performance. This may mean making tough calls if you think someone is counter-culture, working against the things you are trying so hard to create.

Jim Collins' concept of getting the right people on the bus and in the right seat is commonly referenced in both for- and not-for-profit organizations. What does it take to accomplish this? Begin by identifying your school's culture, living it daily and using it to develop and deepen talent at your school.

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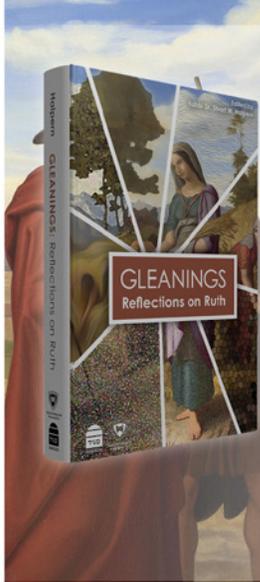
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COMMENTARY

LEADING WITH INTEGRITY

Bat Sheva Miller

Associate Head of School, Oakland Hebrew Day School:

In addition to integrity being an essential aspect of leadership, it is also an integral ingredient in the making of healthy relationships. One's integrity fosters trust in others, providing the crucial components for a leadership that is healthy, stable and confident. Knowing on what principles one stands cultivates a stronger understanding of our cultural, social and physical environment, at a time when change has become an accepted norm, and disruption has become a goal.

Integrity is being transparent about our guiding values, about the beliefs we cultivate, about the truths we consider absolute; it is living by them in spite of laws that might subjugate us, dogmas that might intimidate us or social norms that might be imposed upon us. Integrity goes beyond the transient characteristic of ever-shifting goals and purposes. The difference between successfully attaining a goal or failing to reach one should never impact one's sense of wholeness, of uprightness or of belief in particular principles.

In the daily recitation of the Sh'ma, one is reminded to love the Lord, your God "בְּכֹל-לִבְבְּךָ וּבְכֹל-נַפְשְׁךָ וּבְכֹל-מְאֹדְךָ" with everything we have, heart, soul and body. In pursuit of a conscious leadership, integrity is a universal prerequisite.

Daniel Weiss

Head of School, Bornblum Jewish Community School, Memphis:

According to the dictionary, integrity is "the quality of being honest and having strong moral principles; moral uprightness." One with integrity is a *mentsch*, an upstanding member of society. We are taught in Pirket Avot (2:5) ובמקום שאין אנשים השתדל להיות איש, In a place where there are no people, strive to be a person.

Three phrases have impacted my life as a parent and as an educator. Each is equally important for our students, our staff and our parents. "Make good choices" are the words of a parent in my school to their child each morning when they drop their child off at school. "Do the right thing" is the mantra of a colleague of mine, who would remind our students throughout the course of the day that everything that they do is a choice.

After an inspirational quote each morning, our announcements conclude with the words, "Make it a great day or not, the choice is yours." Integrity is how we build character values. It is how we create *mentsches*. When we make good choices, by doing the right things, we act human, full of integrity to make each day a great day.

Miriam Kopelow

Director of General Studies, Hillel Torah North Suburban Day School, Skokie, Illinois:

What happens when my version of integrity is in direct conflict with yours? What do we do when I'm in "complete devotion" to one approach and you're committed to its opposite? Maybe I believe in shared decision-making and you value accountability in a clear chain of command. Or perhaps you feel open conversations are the best way to ensure everyone has a chance to speak and I feel that prescribed discussion formats, such as protocols, are the only way to truly share the mic.

Who "wins"? The person with the highest rank? In spaces as dynamic as school buildings, how do we simultaneously foster a culture of individual integrity and shared identity? Where do we embrace diversity, and when is it too far of a deviation from our mission and values as a school?

As Jewish people, we are no strangers to asking questions and being in constant search of our answers. These are the questions I struggle with in this work, both as a leader and a colleague. Where do I stand firm in my version of integrity—knowing what I'm up to in the world and being in complete devotion to it—and where do I bend to the needs of my school and the styles of my colleagues? Perhaps the answer lies in being in complete devotion to asking the question, not just living my answer.

"Integrity is knowing what we're up to in the world and being in **complete devotion** to it. This purpose can change and often does. It doesn't have to be something great or grandiose, but it must be **clear and compelling** to leaders—clear enough for them to know at any moment whether they are on purpose and compelling enough that they **passionately align their energy** to fulfill it."

Jim Dethmer, Diana Chapman, and Kaley Warner Klemp, *The 15 Commitments of Conscious Leadership*

JOSHUA WISE

A Culture of Trust Deepens Talent

If you, like me, are a child of the '80s, it's likely that you will remember the many public service announcements that were aired over and over, especially during Sunday morning cartoons. We kids were exhorted not to take medicine that looked like candy, we were warned about "Stranger Danger," and we all knew to "Stop, Drop, and Roll." But there was another, more ominous PSA that has stuck with me for years. It featured a father confronting his son over drug paraphernalia found in the child's closet. The father kept pressing the son as to how this could have happened. Eventually, the son yells at the father, "You! I learned it by watching you!" And the scene ends.

The message could be applied as well to our schools. The patterns a school's administrators establish vis-à-vis our teachers is then copied by our teachers and used as their behavior towards the students. If we set a tone that hinges on blind conformity, that culture will play out in the classroom as well. Likewise, if we establish a system of rigid micro-managed routines with our faculty, we should only expect our teachers to establish rigid micro-managed routines with their students. If, on the other hand, we give teachers a meaningful voice in accomplishing their learning objectives, we could reasonably expect to see our faculty giving students a similar voice in their own learning.

John Maxwell, an international expert in leadership practices, created a model of how leaders are "made." These are his 5 levels:

- Position. People follow you because they have to.
- Permission. People follow you because they want to.
- Production. People follow you because of what you have done for the organization.
- People Development. People follow you because of what you have done for them.
- Pinnacle. People follow you because of who you are and what you represent.

This model, which has been used in a wide range of organizations, can be very effective in developing talented adults—teachers and future administrators—as well as with talented students in the classroom. After all, our teachers are the leaders of their classrooms, and our students will grow up to become future leaders.

Universally accepted as a first step to establishing a well-run classroom is that students must follow classroom rules, procedures and expectations. Best practice is to involve students in the establishing of those rules, with the teacher ultimately leading that process. In this case, that would refer to Maxwell's first level of *position*.

The next level, *permission*, refers to the leader creating an environment where the team members follow the leader because they want to, not because they have to. Maxwell maintains that while *position* is a critical first step in eventually becoming a true leader, it must be followed by *permission*. When a teacher runs his or her classroom by fiat, students might comply or even obey for a time—but unless that teacher learns how to move on to the next step of *permission*, they will not grow as a leader and will ultimately stagnate in the classroom. At the same time, the students won't grow either; they will remain forced to do what the teacher tells them to do and will not develop the critical skill of thinking for themselves. Both teacher and student are missing out on so much of the growth potential that could be in store for them.

INTRINSIC MOTIVATORS, PLEASE?

As adults, we have likely been in work situations where we have been told what to do and how to do it. With the right set of motivators—attractive salary (positive) or tight job market (negative)—we would likely comply with the expectation. One might rightly assume that a high salary might be a continued motivator, but a review of the research by Tomas Chamorro-Premuzic (*Harvard Business Review*) has shown the opposite. The newness of the high salary will wear off, and just like a hit of dopamine fades, the high salary earner will begin searching for more as the weight of essentially having no input to his day-to-day tasks begins to take a heavy toll. But in that case, the worker has the option of looking for a new job.

Children, on the other hand, typically do not have this kind of mobility. For the most part, they go to the school of their parents' choosing, and even within that school, children are typically not given the choice of which class or teacher they are assigned to.

In light of the reality that students do not have much freedom (if any) as to which classroom they find themselves in, the field of education has increasingly become focused on ways to give students more voice in the way in which they learn. Rather than relying on extrinsic motivators, such as gold stars and honor roll designations (positive) or detention and red Fs (negative), we have begun to look for ways to intrinsically motivate student learning. Such an initiative will likely founder when we fail to foster the intrinsic within our teachers. How can teachers change the way they motivate students and model this mindset if they themselves are stuck in extrinsic factors and not self-motivated through positive means?

To refer back to Maxwell's leadership model, administrators grow as leaders when their teachers *want* to follow their lead.

When an administrator gets stuck at level 1—*position*—the teachers follow out of fear, not any intrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation only takes hold once the leader has satisfied the requirements of level 2. Typically, this happens only through developing positive relationships with the faculty.

So too with the teacher/student relationship. A teacher who is always using threats of phone calls home to ensure compliance is stuck in level 1. Students in this situation might complete their classwork, but they are not engaged in their learning and the odds of them retaining much of the course content is low. For the learning to really stick, the students must be motivated intrinsically, which requires a teacher to advance to level 2. This, of course, requires teachers to actively develop their relationships with students.

It is important to note that level 2 *must follow* level 1. A teacher who doesn't rely on his position at times (“That's how we do things in this class”) will not be able to grow to a level 2 leader. The teacher who builds rapport on a foundation of “position” will more likely see success in both dimensions.

“WHAT” OR “HOW”

Like other fields, educators seek to establish standards of practice for our profession. However, administrators often impose overly strict guidelines on teachers' work. Despite the presence of multiple accepted styles and systems within our field—lesson plans, pacing guides and curriculum maps are all examples of deliverables, even if we don't actually use business school jargon to refer to them—they are often expected to be produced in very specific formats. Applying that formula to the students, do we really want to see 23 identical dioramas of Edgar Allen Poe's “The Tell-Tale Heart”? Or do we want students to personalize their work and present it in a way that is meaningful to them and shows that they grew as a learner as a result of the assignment?

If we expect teachers to be intrinsically motivated, we have to ask ourselves the following question: If I want a member of my team to complete a task by telling them “what” I need done and also “how” it should be done, am I helping them grow and become an even better professional educator, or am I treating them like skilled labor?

TALENT GROWTH

Administrators are responsible for the education and growth that occurs in their schools, of faculty, junior administrators and students alike. But ultimately, they are most responsible for their own growth, because if an administrator gets stuck on one of Maxwell's levels, it gums up the works and everyone below them on the school's food chain can no longer move up either.

So how does this all work? Perhaps by taking a step back. By empowering our teachers—and while *empowering* is very buzzword-y, all it really means is to trust. To trust that our teachers are just as professional as we are, and to trust that they do in fact know what they are doing, and even if they might format their lesson plans differently than we might, to trust that their way is okay too. More, to actually give weight to their choice, by looking at with fresh eyes and seeing, perhaps, that their way might actually be better. Not objectively and universally better, but better for *them*.

By doing this seemingly small thing, the administrator has accomplished so many goals:

- Developed a positive relationship with this teacher by noticing her good work. This teacher will then likely, even if unaware of it, spread that positive relationship around when she shares this good feeling towards the admin with her friends on the faculty.
- Shown the entire staff an openness to new ideas and a willingness to take whatever they have to offer seriously.
- Shown that the phrase “we have always done it this way” has no place in the school, and that change can be good.
- Reinforced to the teacher that he is trustworthy, and in turn, the teacher can take that good feeling of trust and place his trust in his students.
- Allowed for more creativity from the students themselves, simply by believing in the teacher and telling her that.

Doing something as simple as this—and doing it multiple times—can help an administrator move through Maxwell’s steps 2, 3 and 4 quickly, just by engendering these feelings.

Step 2: Permission. People follow you because they want to. People follow a leader who helps them feel good about themselves, who confidently demonstrates trust in them, allowing them to make their own good decisions.

Step 3: Production. People follow you because of what you have done for the organization. This administrator has creating a positive atmosphere in the school. A school’s culture and the feelings that permeate the halls often come straight from the admin office, and each admin team has the choice to cultivate a positive atmosphere of collaboration and joy, or one of rigid demands that can suck the life out of a hallway.

Step 4: People Development. People follow you because of what you have done for them. An admin who allows teachers to take the reins and try new things, whether they ultimately work or not, creates a following of loyal teachers. And a cadre of loyal teachers will ultimately enter their own classrooms with a spirit of allowing students to find their own way and their own creativity as well.

Step 5, aptly named Pinnacle, is the product of a lifetime of continuously working with others and helping them along their own leadership journeys, and is what we should all aspire to. And if you are lucky enough to work for a leader who has made it to step 5, be sure to take many minutes to soak it all up. Ask all of your questions because a level 5 leader is looking to create more leaders, not just more followers.



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Orientation, Enculturation and Retention of Newcomers to Your School

Those of us in school leadership roles know that the single greatest factor that contributes to excellent teaching and learning in the classroom is the quality of a school's faculty. Education today requires teachers to deliver an innovative, student-centered curriculum that promotes curiosity, wonder and joy while meeting the needs of an ever-increasing range of diverse learners. We in the Jewish day school world devote a great deal of time, effort and financial resources to attract and hire outstanding teachers who will do all of that and more. In addition to seeking educators who are excellent pedagogues, we are looking for those who can fit and reflect the values and overall mission of our school.

Below are some recommended practices that schools can use to orient, enculturate and ultimately retain new teachers so that they grow as educators, understand how their work in the classroom aligns with the mission, vision and core values of their school, and deepen the talent within our schools.

WHO, WHAT, WHERE, WHY AND HOW

We use the term "newcomers" to include both novice and experienced new teachers. Novice teachers are in their first years of their career and are being inducted to a new school as well to the profession in general. Experienced new teachers are teachers who have

previously taught at another school. While the background and experience of these two groups might be different, a well-defined and articulated orientation and enculturation program can meet the needs of all newcomers to a school.

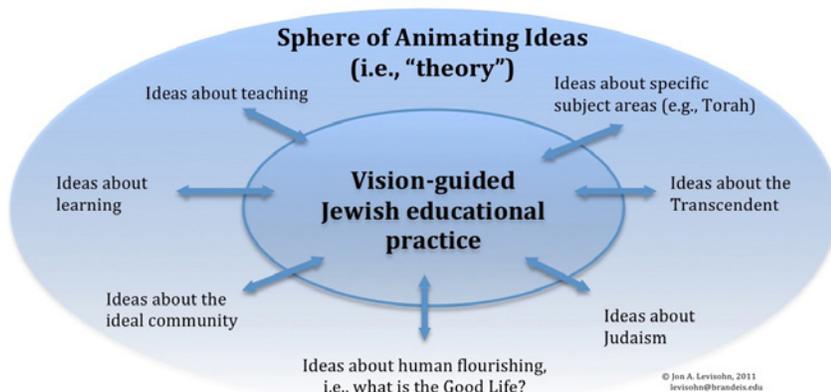
Before designing the program, first identify what newcomers need to know. What are the animating ideas (as Jon Levisohn wrote in "A New Theory of Vision" in the Autumn 2014 *HaYidion*) that guide your school's practice around teaching, learning, the ideal community, Judaism, the Transcendent, specific subject areas and human flourishing? More mundane, practical information, like who to ask for supplies, need to be shared. Just as we identify enduring understandings

and essential questions prior to planning our assessments and lessons, we must also identify what we want our newcomers to learn when teaching them about what drives our school.

As an example of a successful program that accomplishes these goals, we will focus in part on the program in place at Jack M. Barack Hebrew Academy (JBHA), the oldest pluralistic, community secondary Jewish day school in North America. Located approximately 10 miles west of Philadelphia, the school serves over 350 students in grades 6–12 from communities in Pennsylvania, New Jersey and Delaware. JBHA employs over 50 teachers and typically hires between four and ten newcomers each year.

Prior to 2016, the newcomer program at JBHA consisted solely of a one-day orientation program in late August. Department chairs were largely responsible for explaining and enforcing school policies and procedures without any emphasis on how those policies aligned with the mission, vision and core values of JBHA. In June 2016, for a variety of reasons, a third of newcomers decided not to return the following year. The leadership decided that it was important to transform newcomer enculturation at JBHA.

JBHA senior administrators spent much of that summer immersed in this project. We did exit interviews with all newcomers (those staying and also those who were leaving)



to hear about their experiences and how we could have better supported them. We found that newcomers largely felt ignored, unsure of school culture and unclear of their place in the school. We also spoke to local independent schools in Philadelphia to find out about their programs. The results of our research led to the development of a two-year newcomer orientation and enculturation program. Our program continues to evolve to address the needs and desires of newcomers while accomplishing many of the goals stated above.

Some examples below come from research looking at schools known to be vision-guided. When a teacher is new to a school, it is an opportunity for school leaders to articulate the animating ideas explicitly. In studying how the newcomer learns about the animating ideas of a school, one is able to see the implementation of vision-guided education. Below is a composite of ideas from JBHA and research at two other day schools. Many of our examples align with the work of Sarah Birkeland and Sharon Feiman-Nemser on school-based induction.

THE HIRING PROCESS: SCREEN FOR WHAT YOU CAN'T TEACH.

The hiring process is the first step in enculturation, as it is an opportunity for both the school leaders and the candidate to evaluate for fit. School leaders must identify which elements of their animating ideas a candidate must possess prior to coming to the school and which elements can be taught. For example, one school had a commitment to teaching using constructivist methodologies and to acting with *mentschlichkeit*. While they felt comfortable teaching someone how to adopt constructivism, they identified that they couldn't teach someone how to be a *mentsch* and so they screened for it during the hiring process. Identify which characteristics you must screen for and which can be taught later on.

MAKE GOOD USE OF THE SUMMER PRIOR TO A NEWCOMER'S OFFICIAL START.

This is the perfect time for newcomers to meet with their supervisors (department chair, division director, principal) and fellow colleagues. Newcomers should learn about the classes they will teach and the curriculum for each one. Introduce newcomers to others in their department or division, especially if they are expected to team teach a class or teach multiple classes of the same grade/level. Take time over the summer to discuss the school calendar for August, September, and October.

Don't forget to discuss the little things that veteran teachers take for granted, such as, Where is the faculty bathroom? Can faculty buy lunch in the cafeteria? Where can I make a private phone call? The start of the school year can be a blur, so the more enculturation that occurs in the summer, the more secure the newcomer will feel come September.

ORIENTATION PROGRAMS

When planning new teacher orientation, it is crucial to plan not only what you want your newcomers to know, but how you will teach it. In what ways can you model for these newcomers elements of your school culture, expected behavior and even teaching methodology? The aforementioned school with a dedication to constructivist pedagogy conducted the entire three-day new teacher orientation using constructivist methodologies. Another school started their orientation for newcomers with a tour led by the head of school. As the head walked us around, he explained the reason behind each item in the classroom. A first grade class has round tables with shared school supplies to teach them how to be part of a community. As children get older, they progressed to long tables and then to small desks that can be grouped together differently. Students never occupy stand-alone desks, the message being that learning happens in community. Newcomers walked away from the tour of the school understanding that every aspect of the school had a lot of thought that went into it. Later in the year, newcomers were able to reflect on aspects of their class as also having been deliberately decided with much thought.

ESTABLISH SACROSANCT TIME IN NEWCOMERS' SCHEDULES TO MEET WITH THEIR SUPERVISORS AND EACH OTHER.

At JBHA, all newcomers have a once-a-cycle meeting with the middle and upper school directors. Key administrators from various departments (Admissions, Athletics, Learning Support, School Counselors, Development) are invited to attend these meetings to explain their role in the school and, more importantly, how they can support newcomers in the first two years. Not only do these meetings introduce newcomers to important people at JBHA, but they provide newcomers with a sense of how various departments work to support each other and deliver the mission of the school. As time allows in each meeting, newcomers are asked to share successes and challenges they are facing in the classroom. Establishing this safe forum in which

newcomers can ask questions, learn who key players are in the school and hear from each other creates a cohort on which they can rely for years to come.

ESTABLISH AND MAINTAIN A MENTOR-MENTEE PROGRAM.

Each newcomer to JBHA is assigned a fellow teacher from a different department to serve as a mentor, providing yet another layer of support. Newcomers often have questions that they might not want to ask a supervisor who will evaluate them. Mentors and newcomers should be encouraged to meet regularly and keep the discussions private. (The only exception would be if the mentor hears something concerning about the health and well-being of a student or teacher that must be shared with an administrator.) Creating the matches for mentor-mentee relationships will differ greatly between novice teachers and experienced new teachers. While novice teachers need to be advised on the profession and the school, the focus for most experienced new teachers will be on the culture of the school.

INTRODUCTION TO JUDAISM

Like many day schools, JBHA employs a number of non-Jewish teachers and teachers who are Jewish but wish to know more about their religion. One important piece of feedback that we received at JBHA from newcomers several years ago is that they wanted to better understand the rhythm of the Jewish calendar and specifics about holidays. Why are we off so many days in September and October? What is Rosh Hodesh, and why is it important to mark? What is that lemon-looking object that students are holding as they walk around school? To answer these questions and many more that come up, we hold a Judaism 101 program, a series of meetings to explain to newcomers (or frankly any staff member) the school's approach to Shabbat and holidays, and teach about their rituals and practice. Our program has helped newcomers "celebrate the richness of Judaism's language, culture and history," a key part of JBHA's mission statement, and feel more connected to Jewish practice.

A program such as this requires a tremendous amount of work. However, we all know that our schools are only as good as what happens in each and every classroom, which depends upon the quality of teachers, both their pedagogic skills and their ability to reflect the ideals of the school. By putting in the hard work with our newcomers, we not only enhance their practice, but we build a school culture where we are continuously talking about the values that are most important. This is how we not only deepen our talent, but retain our staff by creating a sense of shared vision.

Research on Supporting New Teachers

The most important determinant of a teacher's success in her profession, not just in her first year but throughout her career, is the strength of a school's plan of support for new teachers. Here are composite portraits of four typical first-year experiences, based on research I've done with graduates of the Legacy Heritage Jewish Educators Program at Stern College over the past 10 years. The program is an undergraduate major at Stern, in which students major in Judaic studies with a concentration in Jewish education. They take classes in psychology and pedagogy, and participate in a robust program of fieldwork and student teaching.

DEENA RABINOVICH

Four students, four different models of mentoring:

Sara began her teaching career in a middle school where she had done her student teaching. She did not have a mentor in her first year—none was provided by the school—though she did have one for her second year of teaching. Sara frequently felt overwhelmed when planning her lessons and turned to her fellow teachers for guidance. She often felt that the school expected the same things from her as they did from the more experienced teachers and that she wasn't given the opportunity to grow into her role as a teacher.

Rivka also taught in a middle school and was assigned a mentor. Her mentor taught during the same times as Rivka, which meant that she was not free to visit Rivka's class while Rivka was teaching. While Rivka and her mentor planned weekly meetings in the beginning of the year, they soon stopped meeting on a consistent basis. Rivka tried to figure out things on her own.

Rachel was an assistant teacher at an elementary school during her first full year of teaching and was mentored by her head teacher. She taught parashah every week and received feedback. She participated in all mentor meetings and felt that she was continuing to grow and hone her teaching skills.

Leah was given a reduced teaching schedule during her first year of teaching high school. She met weekly with her mentor, who frequently came to observe her classes. She had the opportunity to observe her mentor while teaching, as well as other teachers in the school.

These four stories represent a spectrum of options that currently exist in day schools for new teachers. Since the beginning of the program, I have seen an increase in the schools that have mentor programs. While this indicates that schools are making progress, there are two caveats: not all mentoring programs are created equal, and mentoring alone is not enough. Research shows that mentoring is but one part of a well-rounded induction system that can increase the retention and effectiveness of teachers.

WHY ARE INDUCTION PROGRAMS SO IMPORTANT?

The Alliance for Excellent Education reports the following statistics. After one year of teaching, 92% of teachers who had a mentor were still teaching as compared to 84% of teachers without a mentor. After five years, 86% of teachers mentored their first year were still teaching, as opposed to 71% of teachers who were not. The numbers matter, since a major issue facing day schools today is finding teachers. Every teacher who leaves the field requires vital resources in the form of money and time to replace. And, depending upon the school's location, there may be few if any candidates to step in.

But even more important than the numbers of teachers who leave the field is the quality of the teachers who remain. Sharon Feiman-Nemser, in "What New Teachers Need to Learn," notes:

If we leave beginning teachers to sink or swim on their own, they may become overwhelmed and leave the field. Alternatively, they may stay, clinging to practices and attitudes that help them survive but do not serve the education needs of students. A high-quality induction program should increase the probability that new teachers learn desirable lessons from their early teaching experiences.

If we want teachers to remain in the field, if we want teachers to retain the best practices they learned in preservice programs, they must be nurtured and supported during their first years of teaching.

WHAT DOES A WELL-ROUNDED INDUCTION PROGRAM LOOK LIKE?

In “The Impact of Induction and Mentoring Programs for Beginning Teachers,” Carol Ingersoll outlines various elements that can comprise teacher induction, including classes, workshops, orientations, seminars and mentoring. Induction should begin in the summer with an orientation to the school culture and by providing relevant course materials to the new teacher. During the year, induction continues with ongoing mentoring and seminars that provide support for the new teacher within the school, and connections to extended networks of new teachers teaching the same material in other schools.

Ingersoll found that new teachers listed the following as the most beneficial to them during their crucial first year: a mentor in the same subject area, common preparation time with same subject teachers and participation in extended networks. In another article (“Beginning

Teacher Induction, What the Data Tells Us”), Ingersoll concludes that new teachers who received at least two items from the induction list were much better at:

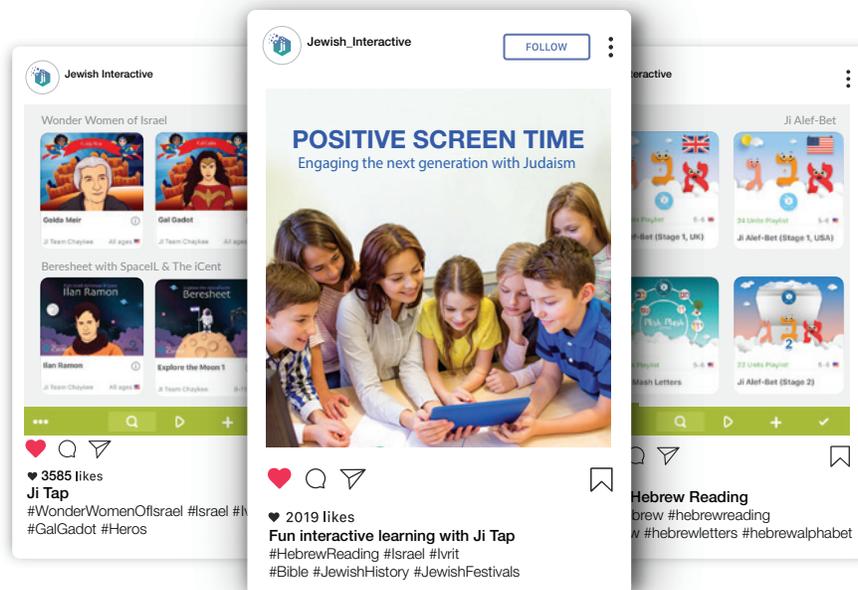
- Keeping students on task
- Developing workable lesson plans
- Using effective student questioning practices
- Adjusting classroom activities to meet student interests
- Maintaining positive classroom atmosphere
- Demonstrating successful classroom management

WHAT CAN SCHOOLS DO?

Perhaps the most important thing a school can do is to realize that new teachers are in fact new and need to be nurtured and encouraged, the same way students do. Support can be in putting together an induction package that includes but is not limited to mentoring. Support can be in the academic realm, letting them know in advance what subjects they will be teaching and what the overall goals for the subject are. Support can be for the culture of the school from the mundane (how you get supplies) to the complex (what is expected in the way of parent/teacher communications). Support can be for learning about the students and their needs before the first day of school.

This may sound obvious but is not the norm in every school. Schools should implement a robust plan for onboarding new teachers. Beginning teachers as well should include the school’s induction plan and teacher support among the most important factors they look for as they apply for their first position.

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INTERNING AT PRIZMAH

HALLIE CHANDLER



The etymology of the word intern stems from the Italian word *internus* meaning within, or inward, and the French word *interne* meaning assistant doctor, over time diffusing into other professions and taking on the meaning of any professional acquiring practical experience. Being an intern comes with the connotation of being a beginner, a trainee. However, the Hebrew word for intern, *מתמחה*, comes from the root *ה.נ.ח*, meaning one who is already on his or her way to becoming an expert. The Hebrew emphasizes the end goal of expertise. After working at Prizmah for the past year, a few things became clear: To be an expert in the field, you need to take charge of your own potential, evaluate the effectiveness of evolving communication and provide for yourself the right mentor.

One of my responsibilities was setting up the program for the network weavers at the Prizmah Conference. These individuals, volunteers from the field, were responsible for making meaningful connections between conference-goers in order to strengthen potential partnerships, seek out common themes and fulfill professional development needs that they requested. The experience of brainstorming what this role would be taught me that there is always

someone you can use as a resource. We are never alone in the work that we are doing, no matter how innovative we think our ideas may be. While we are enjoined with responsibilities, we are also responsible to enlist the resources of those around us.

Another role I took on was helping to set up meetings to inform the day school community of Prizmah's new strategic plan. Since we were working with various communities in multiple time zones, this process revealed the challenges with remote communication, even with its flexibility. Remote work and communication actually requires more "physical" presence for relationship development to occur. As Rabbi Charlie Savenor, a mentor of mine, once said, the biggest mistake of those coming out of school is waiting to respond to emails before final decisions or answers have been decided. Instead, respond immediately. Another mentor, Nancy Parkes, said she relies on finding moments of humor within online platforms to build relationships. With new advancements in technology, we need to consider what types of environments will create the strongest relationships to foster collaborative work.

When I worked on creating excursions for the conference, we developed opportunities for day school professionals to attend The Ron Clark Academy, the Center for Puppetry Arts, Civil Right tours of the Atlanta community and The Lab School. We began by asking ourselves the question of whom we can learn from, within our own infrastructure and outside of it. How can we make the world our classroom? We were dedicated to reveal the value of partnership, encouraging our educational institutions to partner with interfaith, intergenerational and social justice communities to enhance the curricular and cultural experience they are providing to their students.

The need to expand knowledge, skills and experiences also comes with the responsibility to continuously seek out the proper mentors and professional development opportunities so that day school leaders can have meaningful experiences and conversations that contribute to their own professional and personal growth.

Thank you to my mentors Elliott Rabin, Debra Shaffer Seeman and the entire Prizmah team for welcoming me into your community and giving me the tools to deepen my knowledge and expertise in our Jewish communal work.



MAURY GREBENAU

Build Them, Don't Buy Them: Cultivating Excellence in Novice Teachers

As school leaders, one of our primary responsibilities is making sure we have well-trained, talented teachers in our classrooms. The challenge of finding quality teachers, especially for school leaders in areas that don't have large numbers of teachers within driving distance, is significant. Judaic teachers and experienced general studies teachers are scarce and tend to be expensive, with better-funded, selective private schools or Jewish day schools in larger communities more readily able to snatch them up. Focusing on creating teacher excellence, rather than just identifying it, is an important way to meet this challenge and improve our schools at the same time.



Creating a new teacher cohort, even in smaller schools, is an effective way to give new teachers what they need to succeed. Each year at our school, an administrator leads group sessions for the cohort of new teachers focusing on different aspects of pedagogy. These sessions are an opportunity for newer teachers to speak to each other about similar challenges and experiences. The administrator also visits classrooms of veteran teachers with the cohort, and the group debriefs together. Having a more senior teacher mentor each of the new teachers is another way to foster their growth while demonstrating their value to the school.

OBSERVATION AND FEEDBACK CYCLE

The instrument that leverages the most growth is a good observation and feedback cycle for their classroom practice. I have long been a believer in the Kim Marshall model (“The Truth About Teacher Evaluation”) of frequent, short, unannounced visits followed by debriefing and discussion soon after the visit. When I am in the classroom, I capture objective data and observations usually

focused on a specific growth area. I record data such as how many times each student speaks, how many students are on task at different intervals, all questions asked by a teacher, etc. When meeting with the teacher, I try to get curious about what I’ve seen, and ask the teacher to look at the data I’ve collected and give me his or her impressions.

Marshall advocates a 10-10-10 model with a 10-minute observation, a 10-minute debrief and a 10-minute write-up. I tend to observe for slightly more than 10 minutes especially with newer teachers, but I diverge significantly with his program when it comes to the debrief. The post-observation discussion is critical for the teacher growth and it needs to have more time budgeted for richer discussion.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

New teachers need two types of guidance: pedagogical and practical. When the area of need is pedagogical, it is important to have the process be iterative. Teachers should articulate improvements they want to try in their class. The administrator should then see this next step in action (“Invite me to your

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class when you...,” “Send me your proposed lesson plan on...,” “Let’s meet and discuss once you’ve...”). Feedback is given on this effort, and then the process repeats. Such a feedback cycle can really move the needle on what is happening in the classroom and is worth the time investment.

At times, the needed change is more practical and stylistic than it is pedagogical. Teachers and students are not always able to identify exactly what is wrong, but there is usually a vague sense that something is not working. Teenagers tend to couch such feelings in complaints such as “he is boring,” “she is stiff,” “the teacher doesn’t like me,” and “the teacher is mean.” I have learned not to disregard such comments, especially when they are from students who rarely complain. An experienced administrator should be able to identify what is amiss by visiting the classroom and contemplating how students are experiencing the class.

I recently worked with a talented young teacher who seemed to connect well with students, but a number of students complained that they did not like her. When I sat in her class, I noticed that she would begin to speak just a moment before students were done speaking. In her attempt to preserve order, she was cutting them off almost imperceptibly, perhaps causing students to feel they were not being heard. Once I pointed this out to her, she adjusted, and the complaints disappeared. In another case, an experienced middle school teacher had transitioned to high school and was using some classroom management practices that were out of place with these older students. By helping to identify these practices and brainstorming better ways to accomplish the same goals, I was able to guide her to more age-appropriate practices in her classroom.

Schools frequently put significant financial resources and time into searching for excellent teachers who have proven track records rather than focusing on providing novice teachers with support and professional development to create excellence. However, attracting inexperienced teachers with great potential and working with them to improve their pedagogy is extremely rewarding. Such teachers are self-reflective about their practice and especially committed to the school.

I recently introduced a candidate for an administrative position in our school to a teacher who had begun her career with us and is now an excellent teacher. She told the candidate she would never want to work anywhere else. This is the power of growing teachers.

MACHAR: CULTIVATING NEW DAY SCHOOL PROFESSIONALS

CARL HABER, MACHAR FELLOW

The Machar Fellowship is a pilot professional development program run by Gann Academy in Waltham, Massachusetts, in partnership with deToledo High School in Los Angeles and the Abraham Joshua Heschel School in Manhattan. Originally conceived by Gann’s former head of school, Rabbi Marc Baker, Machar creates an on-ramp to the Jewish leadership pipeline by recruiting recent college graduates and developing their talent through work in Jewish day schools, mentorship and peer support. Their work experiences have ranged from marketing and admissions to classroom teaching and program design.

I grew up squarely within the pluralistic/conservative Jewish bubble, attending Camp Ramah Darom and studying under the mentorship of Rabbi Marc Baker at Gann Academy. My grandfather, Rabbi Harold Kushner, is an extremely important mentor and influence in my life. Despite (or perhaps, because of) this upbringing, I was exploring a career in education outside of the familiar day school realm. It wasn’t until Rabbi Baker approached me at a Gann reunion and encouraged me to become a Machar fellow that I reconsidered my next steps. He explained that the Machar Fellowship would offer me the opportunity to gain a new perspective on what it means to be a part of an inspiring community of learners.

I joined the faculty at the The Abraham Joshua Heschel High School and quickly discovered this to be true. Machar gave me the opportunity to jump into any aspect of day school life I sought to explore, and in each of these spaces, to develop a sense of ownership and independence. Rabbi Dahlia Kronish, Heschel’s director of Jewish and student life, helped me navigate the challenges of my first solo teaching experience, a Spanish class where I filled a last-minute open position. From our coaching conversations, I decided to shift toward another content area, social studies. I now assistant-teach an 11th grade history course alongside a veteran teacher. Similarly, after a year of co-leading Heschel’s Social Justice alternative tefillah, I designed and have been implementing a yearlong curriculum focused on developing students as social advocates. My mentors encouraged me to explore new opportunities and created an environment for me to have an impact on the school.

Being immersed as a professional, rather than a student, in this type of learning community also reinvigorated my interest in Jewish life. My colleagues invited me into their homes for chaggim, and I began to see that their love of learning was not confined to the walls of the school. By sharing festive meals with their families, I witnessed how Jewish teachings inspire both life and learning. I internalized the message of “אִיזְהוּ הַחָכֵם? הַלּוֹמֵד מִכָּל אָדָם” (Pirkei Avot 4:1: “Who is wise? One who learns from every person”) and was reawakened as a learner and educator.

With this frame of mind, I gained a new perspective on how students can make meaning in their lives through their day school education. Our Machar summits focused on our role in building a Jewish future, something our cohort nicknamed “Judaism 3.0.” My immersive experience in the Heschel community has shown me that when students discover a relationship between their learning and how they live their lives, it fosters meaningful engagement with the world around them, unlocking their intrinsic motivation for learning.

Next year, I will be pursuing a master’s in teaching social studies from Columbia University Teachers College. Throughout my career, I hope to continue inspiring students to become engaged, civic-minded individuals and lifelong learners who feel a sense of obligation to their communities. My approach to social studies education has been shaped by my placement at Heschel. I move forward in my career with the understanding that learning and living meaningfully go hand in hand.

Deepening Student Talent



Technology in a Jewish Studies Classroom

BRACHA DROR

Third & Fourth Grade JS/
Hebrew Teacher, Bernard
Zell Anshe Emet Day School,
Chicago

Today, education and technology go hand in hand. Just as general studies teachers regularly implement different technological tools, many Jewish Studies teachers are also exploring technologies that bring new ideas, tools, and activities to their classrooms.

I was fortunate to be introduced to a tool called CoSpaces Edu, which I used for a special Torah project in my fourth grade class. This tool helps bring the Jewish curriculum to life by using augmented reality (AR) alongside virtual reality (VR) to immerse students into current and historical Jewish learning. CoSpaces Edu is an intuitive educational technology app enabling students and teachers to easily build their own 3D creation, animate with code and explore in VR or AR.

What is the difference between VR and AR? In VR, the viewer looks through a special device that blocks out everything else while allowing a full, 360-degree view. By contrast, participants in AR experience the world around them and see added things with the AR tools. For example, a viewer can look at a building, item or picture in AR and extra data appears on the app screen that the viewer wears.



In VR, one's vision is occupied completely with a 360-degree screen, creating the feeling of being part of the activity seen.

The goals for this project were to:

- Learn the story of Bereishit 13 in Parashat Lech-Lecha: who are the characters, what are their actions, why Lot chooses to move, what do we learn about Abraham and his character.
- Write a play in five scenes about the story that ensues in chapter 13, using everyday Hebrew vocabulary and grammar while keeping the play similar to the original story.
- Learn how to use CoSpaces Edu with support from the instructional technology specialist.
- Create five scenes on CoSpaces Edu and implement all the tools we learned about the app.

The students studied the chapter, first to grasp the actions and second to explore the characters' motivations. They focused on Abraham's character and his actions. Students worked in groups of four and started to write the scenes. They used vocabulary and sentence structures taught in class to create conversations between the different characters.

The next step was to transfer these plays into VR. Together with the IT specialist, we taught the students how to use CoSpaces Edu. We shared with the students what the final project might look like, employing the "Get Ready/Do/Done" format. Students brought their deep understanding of Chapter 13 to code the characters according to the story. Through the use of a visual block-based and intuitive programming language, students created characters who were able to move, have a dialogue, and shift and transition from scene to scene. Students recorded themselves saying the different parts of the play and added a translation into English to allow parents to understand and connect with the play. They worked diligently on the project and were very proud of their final result. Using VR goggles, they were able to watch their final project.

This project improved digital literacy skills, enhanced creativity and fostered collaboration in the classroom. It inspired students to participate in class and assisted struggling students to find interest in the Jewish Studies class. It showed that tools such as CoSpaces Edu offer a wonderful means to engage students.

Deepening Student Talent

DR. CHRISTINE L. COLEMAN

Director of Technology & K-12 Instructional Technology, Yeshivah of Flatbush, Brooklyn

RABBI YONAH KRAINESS

Educational Technology Director for K-8, Yeshivah of Flatbush, Brooklyn

ST2EM: STEM Squared with Torah



In the fall of 2017, Yeshivah of Flatbush set out to build upon our STEM program for grades 1–8. We decided to make our program unique by adding another “T” for “Torah” in STEM and created ST2EM (pronounced “STEM Squared”). We wanted our students to make connections from the Torah to STEM learning. Our goal was to develop a STEM lesson framework that we could train our teachers to use in the classroom. ST2EM lessons would contain a hands-on activity and a culminating assessment during a 40-minute class period and would include teaching our students about STEM careers. We needed our STEM program to expand the scope, quality and richness of the teaching, learning and educational technology at our yeshivah, while requiring professional development that would impact student achievement with measurable data.

Our next step was to find the right educational technology integration model to align our framework and professional development for our teachers. After much research, we chose the TPACK model, which identifies three types

of knowledge that our teachers need to combine for successful educational technology and ST2EM integration: technological, pedagogical and content knowledge.

Then we created the ST2EM framework in such a way that our teachers could easily draw up a 40-minute lesson. The lesson had been designed so that a teacher of any of the relevant disciplines could implement it in the classroom. The framework included the following components: Lesson Title, Objectives, NGSS Standards/Next Generation Common Core/NYC STEM Framework Alignment, Science Concepts, Technology Concepts, Torah Concepts, Engineering Concepts, Math Concepts, Problem/Challenge, Materials, Introduction & Alignment to STEM Career(s), Hands-on Task, Student Share and Assessment.

We tested the ST2EM framework, beginning with a Torah concept and building the lesson from there. We chose to focus on bitter herbs (Bemidbar 9:11). Science Concept: Photosynthesis and Hydroponic Growing

of Romaine Lettuce. Technology Concept: Grobo (app-controlled home growing system that is intended to make growing small batches of organic produce easier) and Google Earth. Engineering Concept: Design a hydroponic garden on a house rooftop in Brooklyn. Math Concept: Area = length times width (rectangle).

The teacher writes a measurable objective, aligns the STEM career of irrigation technician and creates the task: to design and build a hydroponic garden on a rooftop on a Brooklyn home. The structure must be able to hold water. Working in teams of four or five, students using Google Earth can locate one of their homes, take measurements, then draft and build their structure with cardboard, tape, poster board, paper, paper clips and other materials, testing that it can hold 5 ounces of water. At the end, the teacher creates a one-page exit ticket that mentions solving a math problem using area and asking an open-ended question about the project.



MINDY CIVAN

Fifth Grade Teacher, Perelman Jewish Day School, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Developing Storytelling Artists



We provided ongoing professional development to our science teachers to help them develop ST2EM lessons in the framework and to teach those lessons in their classrooms. The ST2EM framework helped the teachers to manage the time of the lesson and keep the students engaged and on task. Today, the ST2EM framework continues to impact students' ability to make authentic connections between these disciplines. We have now trained Torah studies teachers, math teachers and our technology teacher in ST2EM Framework and TPACK.

As a result of our ST2EM Framework, we have a robust STEM program for grades 1–8 that flows into our high school STEM, coding, robotics and AP computer science courses. ST2EM has allowed our students to be exposed to STEM careers and STEM instruction in a program that values Torah studies. This integrated approach has helped students make connections across disciplines, to real life and to the Torah.

The fifth grade folktale unit is a culminating cross-curricular project, integrating Jewish studies, reading, writing and public speaking. Our goal is for students to see themselves as a crucial link in the continual midrashic, storytelling tradition.

During this unit, students become familiar with a range of stories in their various versions. They see how these stories fit into the spectrum of Jewish and non-Jewish literature, while gaining confidence and understanding in order to retell these stories with purpose. We incorporate the know-how of multiple experts to meaningfully accomplish this broad range of objectives.

We begin with the expertise of the students. They research folktales from Jewish and other traditions, discovering stories they have heard from their rabbis along with connections to tales from other cultures that they have studied previously. Next, we invite our *rav beit sefer* to explain how he tells stories. In this “behind the scenes” lesson, students gain insight into one storyteller’s methodology. He models how he breaks down the tale into events and the message, shows how he uses space and gestures, and provides all the other tricks that has helped make his stories so powerful to the students.

Once this introduction is complete, students shift their position from audience to storytellers. Through the generous support of our PTO, a local theater troupe is brought in to conduct lessons in storytelling. They begin with theater games, designed to build confidence in using voices, gestures and other devices that may seem intimidating at first. Next, they delve into the stories with the students. By analyzing setting, theme and character, students infer emotion and motivation, gaining insight that will help with their retelling. Students then reflect on their goals

for their story. They read the forewords to various story collections, including Peninnah Schram’s “Storyteller’s Prayer,” reflecting on the hopes and dreams of the storytellers. Internalizing this background material, students are ready to conduct partner discussions and reflect on their knowledge before writing their own prayers.

As they continue to analyze and practice their stories, a special virtual visitor joins the conversation. Rabbi Ed Feinstein, author of one of their favorite collections, *Capturing the Moon: Classic and Modern Jewish Tales*, graciously agreed to connect online from California to Philadelphia. During the video conference, he discusses with students the tales that they love and reasons why they are meaningful. He shares his personal story as to why he wrote his book, and the students leave the discussion feeling like they have been charged with carrying forward these great messages from our tradition.

The fifth graders bring all these pieces together by creating an eBook. They start with their storyteller’s prayer, then they record themselves retelling their favorite Jewish folktale. They finish the eBook with lessons learned from the folktales. Of course, you can’t write a book without a dedication page, so we discuss for whom the book is written and why. Finally, students proudly share their tales with students throughout the school in live performances.

Our goal is that students leave the school as readers, analyzers and transmitters of our rich literature tradition, with the confidence and desire to share it with the world. By elevating a reading unit from text study into a multisensory unit with experts from outside the classroom, students leave with a story to tell.



Deepening Student Talent

IRIS GLASER

Director of Marketing and Communications,
The Leo Baeck Day School, Toronto

STEAM for Tikkun Olam: Harnessing Creativity and Innovation to Change the World

STEAM learning (science, technology, engineering, arts and mathematics), alongside makerspaces, robotics programs and a focus on design thinking provide students with new avenues to stretch their creativity, critical thinking and problem-solving skills. But STEAM education has the potential to do more. At the Leo Baeck Day School in Toronto, students are directing their scientific and technical learning to imagine new possibilities for making positive change. We aim to infuse STEAM education with our Reform Jewish focus on tikkun olam and our International Baccalaureate commitment to global citizenship.

Our fifth grade students are working on a number of complex social and environmental problems that they hope to solve through STEAM education.

Food equity in Toronto

Students apply their data-management and measurement skills to map local food deserts (areas that lack access to affordable produce). Students plot the grocery stores and community gardens around our school on classroom maps and research local responses to this issue, including growing food in our own learning garden and considering the Judaic approach to land and ownership.

Partnerships with local organizations help deepen our students' understanding of this complex problem. Students work with Action Against Hunger to study the costs of fresh produce in cities across Canada. They will be visiting a grocery store with a budget to purchase ingredients and then cook for people in need. Our students' meals will then be distributed through Ve'ahavta, a Jewish humanitarian organization. By the end of this school term, they will be growing food in

our learning garden to give back to the local community and to inspire healthy connections with growing and choosing fresh produce.

Green machines

In their unit on energy conservation, the fifth graders apply their knowledge of renewable and non-renewable energy sources by building their own "green machines," which perform an everyday function using only recycled materials and renewable energy. They research green technology around the world, like Israel's innovative solar energy desert projects and their advanced desalination technology. Students have designed solar-powered ovens and dryers, water filtration systems, zip-line transport systems, fire starters, portable fridges and more.

The impact of environment on design

Students consider the impact of climate and weather on structures and are challenged to build model homes that can withstand simulated forces. During the design process, students research contemporary natural disasters, such as the floods in New York, Japan and Houston, and have gained insight into a person's right to live in a structure that is safe and appropriate for their environment.

Makerspaces

Students of all ages have undertaken ingenious projects in our makerspaces, which we established at both campuses in 2017. Here are some examples:

- One student proposed a wheelchair prototype that climbs stairs so disabled children can attend standard schools.

- Another student who recently had an arm cast removed drew from his personal experience to design a contraption that helps those who don't have manual dexterity open doors and grasp objects.
- As part of their unit on patterning and algebra, fifth graders studied the history of Braille and considered the themes of equity and inclusion of people with disabilities. Using makerspace materials and tools, students created their own versions of Braille and composed sentences with their unique notation/patterning systems that expressed the connection between mathematics and social justice.
- First graders are proposing ways to make our school's playground even more accessible for children. They built prototypes in our makerspace with the help of their parents at a STEAM in Action event in early May.

What do these STEAM-based projects all have in common?

They address real-world concerns, framed in terms they can relate to, thus driving student passion and excitement as they tackle those questions.

They highlight the potential of STEAM learning to tackle complex issues related to social and environmental justice.

They root student inquiry in Jewish values. Their explorations guide students to understand their responsibilities to one another and what it takes to enact those responsibilities in the wider world. Through this process, young people discover who they are, as citizens of the world and as modern Jews.



NATALIE WILLIAMS

Associate Principal, YULA Girls High School,
Los Angeles

Checking In



A seasoned educator once remarked to a newly minted teaching cohort to which I belonged: “Every night that you hit the pillow exhausted while involved in education, you know you have been living a meaningful life.” I have always found the statement to be perplexing. How can we know that we are living a meaningful life, that we are helping our students live up to their potential? Must one be “exhausted” to be living a life of meaning? Convincing teenagers that they have a greater purpose than their own gratification, and that they have a responsibility to make a contribution to the world and their fellow man can be challenging at best, and often daunting.

In my own struggle as an educator I challenge myself daily in three ways: giving more individual time to my students, becoming authentically personal and vulnerable, and becoming a stakeholder in helping them develop and pursue their passions and dreams.

Giving time means going above and beyond what is expected, spending quality time with students and discovering their truths, strengths and struggles. That will mean at times engaging outside the structured classroom and office. Get to know them in their comfort zone: on the basketball court, in the art studio and even on stage. Your recognition of their world and their interests, of their individuality, will carry over to a connection in the classroom as well. When young adults feel they have developed a non-judgmental relationship with an adult that allows them to be who they really are, it will make them receptive to input and mentorship. They will allow the teacher to join them on their journey to self-discovery.

We each have had our own challenging journeys that have brought us to where we are today. Sharing these journeys is one of our most powerful tools in helping young adults

address their own weaknesses and insecurities and empowering them to overcome obstacles. Relating our own personal struggles, successes and failures will help create a relationship of trust and authenticity between teacher and student.

We are here to teach students that we believe in them more than they believe in themselves. Teach them to dream and to actualize their dreams. The grade we give them cannot be seen as the be-all and end-all, but rather as a stepping stone toward achieving their goals. Great men and women in history who have made life-altering contributions to mankind were not always A students, but they had curiosity and passion that was nurtured and cultivated by mentors who were able to recognize their talents.

Giving students the belief that they can achieve something more than what a grade reflects can prioritize motivation over achievement. They will learn that what may be labeled as failure is an important factor to success. It should provide the motivation to try harder. Any successful experiment comes as a result of the lessons learned from failure. It is the educator’s role to not only teach and set goals, but to continually check in and follow up. One of my own students returned to me years later to tell me that my “checking in” on her periodically is what kept her motivated.

Academic excellence can promote successful people; instilling passion can promote even more successful human beings. The task of being a successful educator can often be physically and emotionally exhausting, but there is nothing more meaningful than impacting the life of your students by directing them on a path to become productive and passionate adults.



Deepening Student Talent

DAWN STRAITH

Innovation Hub Coordinator & Educator,
Hillel Day School of Metropolitan Detroit

Maker Education as a Tool to Deepen Talent

Hillel Day School sixth grader Rebecca Mills loves to spend her lunch and recess periods in the Hillel Day School makerspace, immersing herself in art, sewing, jewelry making and even drilling, and mentoring younger students who similarly find their way there. “The makerspace suits my temperament,” she says. “There’s a sense of pleasure when you’re choosing to do something you enjoy, rather than being forced to do something you don’t—like go outdoors or finish your homework,” she says with a smile. In the makerspace, an expansive hub containing machines, manipulatives, technology and tools, Rebecca has discovered an environment in which she can pursue her creativity, learn through trial and error, and share her knowledge with others.

Like Rebecca, eighth grader Celia Levy has found a natural home in the makerspace, where she takes inspiration from a bare canvas and turns it into something tangible, as she did when she chiseled an intricate spoon out of wood or created one-of-a-kind, vinyl-printed onesies. “The makerspace has changed my perspective,” Celia says. “Where I once saw blank objects, I see potential. I want to continue to see everything in my life through a creative eye, and I love working with my hands—it’s therapeutic. I come into the makerspace, and I can get lost there for hours.”

Celia shares her sense of wonder with her peers, guiding them in 3D printing and laser cutting, woodworking and jewelry making, and sharing what she’s learned working individually with an engraving specialist. “When the student becomes the teacher, he or she demonstrates that they have truly synergized concepts to the degree that they can learn how to break those ideas down again to make them absorbable to others,” Joan Freedman, director of curriculum, explains. “In the makerspace, where learning involves ideas, protocol, safety and perseverance, education goes far beyond any stated curriculum. It becomes personally meaningful, authentic, one in which a child’s voice is heard.”

Teaching others is just one of the many ways educators assess learning outside of a typical classroom, Freedman says. “When students are in the makerspace, we measure success by the motivation we see through observation, the dialogue in which we engage as students problem-solve, the tools they choose to use, and the eventual output, the product they have made and its aesthetic qualities.”

In the four years since maker education took root at Hillel, educators have seen students unlearn the feeling of “I can’t,” and teachers are unlearning the instinct to “rescue” them. Through the makerspace, students have been challenged to solve real-world problems, such as building a chandelier for a school play, designing an oversized menorah and prototyping products for their version of *Shark Tank*. They have started to own their learning, and they’ve grown more independent. They’re using electronics, spray paint and software, and evolving into innovators, “learning the resilience that comes from prototypes that fail. They come to realize that there are many possibilities, not just one right answer,” Freedman says.

The social skills students master cannot be discounted, from collaboration to the art of compromise when working as a group. For students who struggle to connect with friends or with a teacher in a typical setting, maker education is a godsend. There, they find a way to bond with others through using their hands or working alongside children of various ages. For some students who prefer solitude to socializing, a morning spent in the makerspace sets the tone for their day.

“Once students establish a routine that helps them succeed, the sky truly is the limit,” Freedman says, whether they pursue STEM fields, Jewish education or entrepreneurship. “What we’ve seen is that maker education produces the outcome we all want for our children—that they graduate with skills, passion and self-confidence, and that they become their best selves.”

Teacher Research as a Pathway to Professional Growth

There are two basic methods of educational research. Quantitative methods analyze large numbers of students to study causes and effects. What teacher practices, for example, improve student outcomes? Researchers plan interventions, create control and experimental groups, and compare the results.

Qualitative research, on the other hand, offers powerful tools to access the minds of a small group of students. How do these young people think about God? What do they do when they approach a text? How do they use the Internet to find information online? To answer these questions, researchers don't need thousands of people; they may only need a single classroom. The goal of qualitative research isn't to make generalizations. Rather, the researcher aims to generate hypotheses based on a set of carefully selected cases. These hypotheses chart directions for future thinking and research.

Learning and practicing qualitative research methods, therefore, can be a powerful way for teachers, especially veteran teachers, to deepen their practice. The tools of qualitative research help teachers articulate clear learning goals, design new assessments and expand their understanding of students' experiences in the classroom.

Over the last two years, with support from a CASJE small grant and in partnership with the Jack, Joseph and Morton Mandel Center for the Study of Jewish Education at Brandeis University, I organized a group of teachers to use qualitative research methods to study their own teaching. They articulated research questions, collected data and synthesized shareable findings.

This sort of research isn't for every teacher. Teachers in the first years of their career have their hands full with the basics of classroom management and lesson planning. They may lack the mental space to pull back from the everyday and consider larger issues.

To find a question with the potential to add to the field, teachers need years of experience. I recruited six teachers who had mastered the basics and were looking for opportunities to reflect on their work in a new way. I met with each teacher for an hour every other week throughout the year. In our first meeting, I asked each teacher, "What questions or problems have continued to bother you over the course of your career?"

Teachers answered as if they had been waiting for the chance to share their ideas. Anna, who taught history, talked about the challenge of teaching African American history to (mostly white) Jewish students. Emily, who taught science, described her struggle to negotiate between her identity as an educator and a climate activist. "When, if at all, is it appropriate to share her own beliefs and work with her students?" she wondered. Kevin, an English teacher, noted that we talk a lot about close reading but never define exactly what it means, and he wondered whether students knew what we meant by close reading (or whether we did ourselves).

But brainstorming questions wasn't enough. For a research project, we needed to articulate specific and concrete questions about which we could collect data. Anna, for example, began with an intuition that learning African American history would pose specific challenges for her students, but she couldn't, at first, articulate what those might be. Emily's questions about her own identities might be an appropriate subject for a memoir, but to research the question, we would have to refine it. Kevin had many fascinating thoughts about the nature of close reading, but when we began, they seemed

more appropriate for a work of literary criticism than for classroom research.

In each case, I worked with the teacher to consider how data could shed light on their areas of concern. Some teachers pushed back on the need for data. To them, using data meant quantitative research—distributing surveys and using statistical analyses to test hypotheses. They also raised questions about the ethical implications of studying their students in this way. As we explored qualitative research methods however, teachers began to see that doing qualitative research had a lot in common with the ways they thought about their students already. Teachers used a number of methods: think-alouds, asking students to vocalize their thoughts as they read a text; structured interviews, posing the same questions to a number of students in order to compare their answers; and ethnographic observation, observing students' behavior and jotting "field notes" for later analysis. As the teachers used these methods, they noticed aspects of their students' behavior they had never considered before. Qualitative research generated vivid insights into students' thoughts and feelings about the world.

Ultimately, teachers designed data-collection plans. Anna assigned her students to write autobiographical essays in which they described their experiences with race. She recorded students thinking aloud as they read those essays at the beginning, middle and end of the course. She hoped to use these data to shed light on the development of their racial identities. Emily recorded six weeks of her environmental science class's discussion as they studied the effects of climate change. Pairing those transcripts with her students' journals, she hoped to chart the ways that students' scientific knowledge interacted with their sense of justice and morality. Kevin decided that before he could ask students what close reading means, he wanted to examine disciplinary differences in close reading. He asked six teachers from humanities departments (Jewish studies, history and English) to think aloud as they read Psalm 137 in translation. He chose that text because of the way that it functioned simultaneously as a religious, historical and literary text.

Each of the teachers in the group enjoyed collecting data. Yet as they went through the process of collecting data and reflecting on it, they began to have more insights about their work far beyond the scope of their research question. They regularly told me how the research they were doing had changed the way they looked at their students. As she read their essays about race, Anna noticed herself paying closer attention to students' comments in class. Some students used theoretical vocabulary like "intersectional" and "false consciousness." She wondered, Were they showing off? Did the theoretical vocabulary they used add value to the conversation or obscure what they were trying to say?

Emily often planned for units as she taught them. For her research project however, she had to plan in advance. Although it was not her main topic, she started to ask whether there might be benefits to planning her science class along the way rather than having a unit set in stone in advance. Although Kevin interviewed teachers for his project, he found the think-aloud approach so useful that he began to use it with his students. He found these kinds of interviews helped him develop ways to evaluate student thinking more directly

than through their writing. He told me his plans to ask students to record their own think-alouds as a way to engage in literary interpretation without having to write. This pattern suggested that engaging in the process of qualitative research can shape teachers' practice beyond the scope of a particular research project.

During January, we started analyzing data to formulate findings. During our regular meeting, the teachers and I would comb through transcripts of interviews and observations and attempt to generate theories grounded in the reading we had done that might explain what we were seeing. Little by little, teachers began to draw preliminary conclusions. By March, several of the teachers had findings they felt confident enough about to share more broadly. Of the six teachers in the group, four presented at national conferences during the spring. These conferences included practitioners and academic researchers. The questions they were asked and the answers they gave demonstrated that their research had the potential to contribute not only to their teaching or their school but to the field of education at large.

The group faced a number of challenges. A literature review is time-consuming, time that many full-time teachers don't have. I found myself pointing teachers to relevant articles and continuously lowering my expectation about the amount of reading teachers would do. By reaching out to my contacts in the educational research world, I was able to make sure that each teacher encountered key relevant citations in the area he or she was working. The informal collaborations between academic researchers and practitioners suggest a way to bridge the gap between academia and schools.

Moreover, the teacher research group took up an enormous amount of *my* time. I met with each teacher for an hour at least every other week (sometimes more). This kind of intensive coaching may not be sustainable. If teacher research is to be as powerful a tool as I think it is, schools must consider how to scale the program by developing more internal capacities for research. Gann has already taken steps in this direction. During the second year of the program, I devoted far more of my time to building capacity throughout the school for teachers and administrators to conduct their own research without my direct oversight. Today, Gann is well on its way to developing a culture that values ongoing research about teaching and learning.

My experience in the Teacher Research Group confirmed something I have long believed: we vastly underestimate our teachers. Teachers don't just help students discover knowledge; teachers create knowledge. They have unique access to the moment in which learning happens and a special rapport with students that no academic researcher can achieve. Educational institutions must explore how to support teachers in this task and how to help them share what they learn with the world.

Some steps have already been taken in this direction. Publications like *HaYidion* and the *Journal of Jewish Education* seek out teacher research and, increasingly, conferences like the Network of Jewish Education feature teacher presenters. Nevertheless, we still have a long way to go. For the field of Jewish education to advance, teachers must become central players in growing our knowledge.

Professional Excellence: Recruiting and Retaining Top-Notch Faculty



In the competitive world of school choice, parents often ask questions about a school's teachers. How many of your teachers have master's degrees? Do any of your teachers have special training? Are your Hebrew language teachers native speakers? Are all of your teachers certified?

While we usually think of recruitment and retention as terms that apply to students and families, their application to educators is equally vital to school success. This is especially true in the current marketplace where information is readily available to current and prospective families, and competitor schools, public and private, publish faculty and curricular information on their websites. For many schools where budgets are tight and the pool of talent is limited, creating a proactive recruitment and retention strategy is worthwhile and sometimes requires innovative approaches. Here are some ideas and examples to get you thinking about what might work best for your school.

BUILDING A PIPELINE

At the Epstein School in Atlanta, we look to recruit Hebrew language and Judaic studies teachers who not only are native Hebrew speakers but also embody the professional culture of the school, so that students experience consistency in classroom expectations and management throughout their school day. We have accomplished this goal by

creating a teacher pipeline through a partnership with a local university.

Now in its fourth year, the program known as Ruach HaCarmel or Spirit of Carmel brings Haifa University students to Atlanta to study at Kennesaw University and intern at Epstein. The program benefits the participants by giving them the chance to study in America and practice teaching in English. It also invests in young, capable teachers who receive training on-site, understand the pedagogy of the school and could serve as future faculty members.

Additionally, the program exposes Epstein students to Israeli young adults who have completed their IDF service. Often, when the eighth graders travel to Israel before they graduate, they meet up with former interns from the program with whom they have stayed in touch. These relationships are a testament to the dedication of the interns and help to shape the students' connection to Israel. The Israeli interns are housed by Epstein families, and the program is funded by generous donors, making this partnership a genuine community effort.

CREATING A POSITIVE PROFESSIONAL CULTURE

Happy professionals are more likely to stay in their current jobs and more likely to recruit their friends to be their co-workers. Here are three keys that we've found to keep high-quality faculty happy and passionate about their work.

Listen to them. Conduct a survey to get a pulse on the culture; use it as an opportunity to ask how your school's teachers would feel appreciated. Find out what's working for them and what isn't. The most important part of the listening is that when you see trends in the data, take action. If the survey reveals that meeting every Monday for 15 minutes right before the students arrive is stressful for the majority of teachers, work with them to determine a better time. If people feel uninformed, create a better method of communication to boost morale.

Let them be social. Despite the overwhelming use of social media and text messaging, people crave the opportunity to actually connect with others. How can you create

community among your faculty? Can you use professional development time to do fun team-building activities? Can you host an end-of-the-year dinner for teachers and their families?

Give added benefits. Understanding how your professionals want to be rewarded or appreciated can help you provide extras at little to no cost. Is there a yoga instructor on staff who can lead a class after school? Do you have a professional badge program to reward those who go above and beyond? Can you highlight faculty members on social media or in your newsletter? Can you cover lunch or carpool duty to recognize someone?

INNOVATION GRANTS

When teachers can bring a passion project to life, it is fulfilling—not just for them, but also for their students who benefit from a new learning opportunity or environment. At the Epstein School, twice a year teachers can apply for an innovation grant and be awarded up to \$2,500 for implementation. The application process requires them to think through

the project to ensure it is mission-appropriate and will have positive student impact.

This year, Epstein teachers have been awarded grants to bring mindfulness into the classroom, create a pray-and-play classroom for our preschoolers and provide additional tools for creating original music. In one project, students participated in Design Thinking to help determine that flexible seating options and arrangements would best support their learning and collaboration.

The process also works to motivate teachers to think about new ideas and bolster what's happening in their individual classrooms. And it can be a selling point for recruiting new teachers: knowing that they have the freedom to create new initiatives and make change in a school is attractive to top-notch teachers.

Professional excellence is an expectation among potential day school families no less than at other premier schools. By recruiting, retaining and cultivating a top-notch faculty, day schools work to support the ultimate recruitment and retention goals of student enrollment.

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ODELIA EPSTEIN

PRIZMAH'S KNOWLEDGE CENTER: A TREASURE FOR DAY SCHOOL LEADERS



In March 2019, Prizmah launched an online Knowledge Center to serve as an asset to the field of Jewish day schools, with curated resources aimed at Jewish day school professional leaders and lay leaders. It contains videos, templates, samples, articles, reports and research that have particular relevance to Jewish day schools. The Knowledge Center is constantly growing based on the needs of the field, with newly created and curated articles, templates and research uploaded regularly.

Prizmah's Reshet Groups provide one vehicle for field leaders to voice their needs. When we see interest in a specific topic, we curate resources around that topic and make them available on the Knowledge Center. Among recent examples, we have curated resources for day schools on the measles outbreak, on school security and on supporting children in the face of tragedy.

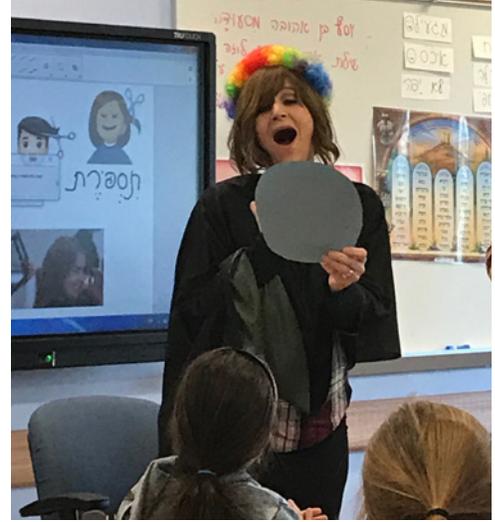
A valuable component of the Knowledge Center is that it contains studies, briefs and reports conducted by academic institutions, research-based consulting firms and organizations, all in one place. By either browsing a topic or using the search bar, a user can filter results for research, templates, videos, case studies and *HaYidion* articles.

"Affordability" and "Teaching and Learning" are the two most visited topics on the Knowledge Center. As tuition increases to meet requirements to provide an excellent Judaic and secular studies education, affordability is on the forefront of the minds of Jewish communities, parents and day school leaders. Under "Affordability," one can find

research that looks at the relationship between tuition and enrollment ("Income and Jewish Connection Determine Who Can't Afford Jewish Day School" by the Berman Jewish Data Bank and "Effects of Tuition Increases on Enrollment Demand" by ISM, Measuring Success and NBOA), as well as reports on middle income affordability strategies ("Greenbook: Jewish Day School Financial Sustainability and Affordability" by Daniel M. Held and "Yehoshua Ben Gamla's Vision in Practice: Kehillah Funds" by Charles Cohen.)

"Teaching and Learning" contains valuable resources on Judaic studies, tefillah and Israel, pillars for Jewish day schools. One can find research papers produced by the Consortium for Applied Studies in Jewish Education that delve into measures of success in Israel education ("Assessing Outcomes in Israel Education"), the role of Hebrew and Israel in Jewish education ("Purposes and Practices of Israel/ Hebrew Education: Towards a Joint Agenda for Applied Research"), and the capacities required to be an effective educator ("The Israel Educator: An Inquiry into the Preparation and Capacities of Effective Israel Educators).

The compendium of research in Jewish education is constantly growing. If you are aware of relevant research, or have conducted research whose wider accessibility would benefit the field, we would love to hear about it. Next time you are looking for research specifically relevant to Jewish day schools, consider using Prizmah's Knowledge Center as a tool.



Reimagining Modern Hebrew Instruction

ALISA
SHAPIO-ROSENBERG

It's no secret that though our students are exposed to years of modern Hebrew instruction, many emerge with relatively little comprehension of oral or written Ivrit to show for it. Too many can neither understand nor join an impromptu Israeli conversation, much less read, comprehend or write basic Hebrew. Many are doubtful about their prospects for gaining proficiency and are reluctant to use their lagging language skills in an authentic context.

Of course, the study of Hebrew is just like the study of Spanish, Mandarin or any other language in this regard. A steady diet of vocabulary lists, grammar and rigorous testing rarely produces enthusiastic or proficient language listeners, readers, writers or speakers. Nor has dry cultural or religion-based content study in the modern Ivrit class contributed much to conversational competence. And yet we continue to rely upon these stock curricular ingredients, now with new-and-improved online games.

Our unfulfilled mission frustrates Ivrit teachers as much as it hurts our students. We signed up to spread our passion for modern Hebrew, yet we never get to pluck the fruit of our toil. On the contrary, we often unwittingly contribute to negative attitudes around Ivrit and an overwhelming malaise: "It has been and always will be this way. Modern Hebrew just can't be taught successfully."

ALIGNING WITH THE RESEARCH

What would it take to change this disheartening narrative and break the cycle of ineffective Hebrew offerings? How can we reimagine Ivrit instruction?

The field of language teaching has evolved since the days of vocabulary lists and grammar drills. We are now poised to overhaul and revitalize the Hebrew quest by vastly improving teacher training and efficacy. A better-supported Ivrit faculty, grounded in knowledge of Second Language Acquisition (SLA), is the key to turning around our outmoded sequence and delivering the once elusive prize: transformed Hebrew attitudes and outcomes.

While many Ivrit teachers may be unfamiliar with SLA, the good news is, it's fairly intuitive. This patent precept anchors the work: We acquire language by understanding messages. Furthermore, the more compelling the messages, the more student attention to and engagement with them. With this framework in mind, an ever-expanding repository of research-aligned and classroom-tested instructional strategies is already successfully employed in language classrooms—including some Hebrew—around the world.

The first phase of effective Hebrew professional re-development involves educating both institutional decision-makers and Ivrit instructors in SLA essentials. Only by internalizing this bread-and-butter of the profession can instructors identify which legacy elements and practices to scrap and how to build anew.

GETTING A FEEL FOR IT

Once faculty and their supervisors understand the basic principles of SLA, teachers will next focus on honing their classroom communication skills. Delivering compelling and understandable oral messages is their number one task. One of the most practical ways to train faculty is by having master comprehension-based instructors model extended language lessons, but in a target language the teachers do not already speak. Experiencing initial uncertainty during a barrage of unfamiliar sounds and language chunks not only builds empathy for their students' task, but trainees get an inspiring first-hand appreciation for the effectiveness of comprehensible-input-based strategies. This demonstration usually leaves enthusiastic teachers hungry to tinker in their own classrooms.

ABANDONING UNALIGNED MATERIALS

To this end, enlightened Ivrit teachers relinquish the prescriptive grammar and vocab-heavy textbook. Instead, they use narrow and repetitive extemporaneous language, in much the same way parents use “motherese” with their young children: concrete “here and now” messaging; a slowed pace; shortened/simplified sentences; and extralinguistic supports such as gestures, facial expressions, voice intonation, visuals, drama and movement. In short, the teacher-as-language-parent uses whatever means available to make Hebrew understood in real time. Such classes are conducted almost exclusively in Ivrit as our students, like babies, need to hear and simultaneously understand lots of Hebrew in order to begin acquiring it.

KIDS AS CURRICULUM

But how do we get our kids to tune in and sustain their attention while this extended oral language is coming in? Here is a real shift in how we conceive curriculum. Knowing that kids are most interested in talking about themselves—their experiences, ideas and opinions—we talk to and about them, extending the conversation to include everyone. Our kids *are*, especially in the beginning, the Ivrit curriculum!

At first, teachers may build a bridge of interest by asking countless Hebrew questions—surveying, comparing and contrasting, voting, tallying and graphing results. Do you have a pet? What’s your favorite kind of candy? Cubs or Sox? Who’s your least favorite book character? Each inclusive poll invites students to share their personal response aloud, which the teacher massages back into extended conversation as she reports back to class. “Class, Esther says she loves Hermione Granger! Ya’akov says he likes Harry Potter, but Shira loves Hermione. Whom do you love, Ze’ev?” A single compelling query can yield cordial conversation, mostly provided by the teacher-as-language-model. This input is rife with narrow repetition, personal information and pleasant, community-building banter. Furthermore, such canvassing likely employs some of the highest frequency words, giving a real workout to practical sentence building-blocks, such as *likes, has, says* and *wants*.

This levity and stress-free ambience support our SLA-informed goals of focusing primarily on meaning, not on language accuracy or mechanics.

READING CART AFTER LISTENING HORSE

But perhaps the most conspicuous shift away from traditional Hebrew instruction is delayed reading at the novice-to-intermediate levels. Gone are the days of densely stacked vocabulary words, glossed at the bottom of the page. Instead, our students wait to commence the literacy phase until they’ve interacted with and demonstrated comprehension of front-loaded oral language. Only then are students invited to read that which they have contributed to, and understood in class. With the teacher as reading guide, we ensure a successful and affirming reading experience that feels automatic and effortless. The specially prepared learner text or co-created story is often elicited from the group and written up by the teacher, who, having worked closely with her students, can accurately pitch readings to the class’s proficiency level.

So, in our reimagined Ivrit classes, our kids turn off their devices and clear their desks; listen to, understand and interact with the compelling Hebrew input surrounding them, supported by visual anchors, such as pictures, props and student dramatization; and then read what they’ve been hearing, once we’re sure they confidently recognize both sound and meaning. A broad selection of aligned literacy extensions

can provide even more novel repetition of this narrow language, affording students time to acquire, without hastily proceeding to the next unit of study.

CREATING A CHILL ENVIRONMENT

With the newly established priorities of student interest and ease of understanding in place, retooled Ivrit teachers debunk conventional wisdom that a sense of discernable struggle or rigor is conducive to acquiring Hebrew. On the contrary, we want our kids to understand Ivrit unconsciously and without frustration, and to that end we frequently check to insure they “get it.” This constant monitoring helps us adjust both our rate of delivery and register of speech, ensuring that no passengers fall from our Understanding Train. Learning a new language is a distinct process, different from, say, algebra or history. We want to safeguard the Ivrit class as an accessible, pleasant and *seemingly easy* environment, as the brain works hard to process lots of incoming Hebrew data.

Unfortunately, though schools may attempt to improve the quality of their offerings by piloting new Ivrit curricula and attending materials-training sessions, this rehashed content often perpetuates the same pedagogically indefensible missteps of the past. Devoid of SLA undergirding, it tends to favor forced student output, writing and speaking, rather than prioritize listening and reading, the language inputs that drive acquisition. Stakeholders must, therefore, be grounded in SLA in order to recalibrate and embrace reasonable expectations for language production, which is *the result* of copious comprehended input.

Once this shift in classroom focus and revised proficiency timeline is adopted, we will no longer assess beginner-to-intermediate student progress on how well or how much the kids can say or write, but rather on how well they understand increasingly sophisticated chunks of oral and written language at the discourse level. The community will simultaneously notice increased engagement, improved attitudes and a more pleasant classroom atmosphere with better teacher-student relationships. Eventually, natural unforced Hebrew output will emerge, in the service of friendly communication.

SUPPORTING THE CHALUTZIM

A paradigm shift of this magnitude can be daunting, and routine challenges are to be expected. A spirit of collaborative troubleshooting, in which Hebrew teachers have a voice in say, scheduling, teaching assignments, classroom configuration and technology setup can go far in assuaging underlying tensions even before new teaching strategies are brought to students.

Once teachers are ready to embrace their reimagined roles, the sudden spotlight on a discipline that heretofore flew under the radar can be jarring. Planning for peer-collaboration time, support and observation plus regular team meetings with the supervisor and/or evaluating administrator can help bolster a growth mindset (Carol Dweck), problem-solve and identify areas for additional professional training. The first steps of an unfamiliar journey can feel vulnerable, so pioneer teachers should be encouraged and acknowledged.

With this course change, Hebrew teachers are trying on new interpersonal behaviors, content, assessment and classroom management, and learning as they go. Regular and ongoing supervisory observation, feedback, coaching and mentoring is crucial, though teachers can also initiate cycles of powerful self-reflection by videorecording themselves teaching, and watching themselves later, with a qualitative rubric in hand. The key is for them to notice not only what they are doing as the leader in the room but how the students are responding and interacting with the Ivrit surrounding them.

Communities of comprehension-based practice and texts are also widely available to help support our Hebrew teacher-innovators. Workshops and conferences targeting comprehension-based strategies for instruction abound, and the blogosphere teems with teacher articles, curricular resources and demonstration videos, including the first community blog specific to teaching comprehension-based Hebrew: cmovan.edublogs.org (article author's blog).

Because Hebrew is mostly taught in private settings, this grassroots Comprehensible Input movement is relatively new for Hebrew teachers, who, until now, have not trained alongside public school language teachers. Participation in this wider professional setting is a healthy venture that builds networks of support and inquiry and can also provide laboratories for additional peer observation and reflection.

A POSITIVE AND PROACTIVE SCHOOL CULTURE IS THE BEDROCK

Finally, but no less significant, is the school's institutional culture. Not only do we need to ask hard questions about the community's apathy or negative attitude towards Hebrew instruction (and how to repair it through research-aligned teaching and learning). Educational and administrative leaders must also be sufficiently grounded in the new language instruction rationale to discuss and defend it within the wider community.

By exemplifying engaged learning and unwavering commitment to improvement, leaders hold their principals, teaching supervisors, department chairs and faculty accountable to aligned practices. Realizing this vision of excellence often requires attendance at a professional conference or workshop alongside Hebrew faculty; hosting informational opportunities for parents to ask questions and have their concerns heard and answered; regular visits to classrooms and department meetings; frequent informal observations with qualitative feedback, perhaps initially modeled by an outside trainer; and defined and attainable goals for teacher progress along a continuum of improvement.

Additionally, stakeholders must also reflect on the tone and tenor of relationships in school. By acknowledging that we are all shaped by the teacher, administrator, student and parent dynamics, school administrators at every level can do much to ensure that classrooms, hallways, meetings and assemblies reflect both the school's academic mission and highest aspirations for community conduct.

Rooted in a healthy and positive school culture, with determination and a renewed sense of purpose, we are set to transform our Hebrew dreams into reality. As Eliezer Ben Yehuda predicted, "The Hebrew language will go from the synagogue to the house of study... to the school... [I]t will come into the home and... become a living language."

A part of this article was originally printed in The Chicago Jewish Home.



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The Master's Degree as a Way to Deepen the Talent and Motivation of Teachers

MICHAEL SHIRE
DEBORAH SKOLNICK EINHORN

A student in our graduate Jewish education program recently wrote to us to share how our program shaped her and her role as a Jewish educator. Her career path was opening up, she felt, because of the deep work that she had done on her leadership skills, her Jewish understanding and her sense of self as a learner and teacher. Our faculty has spent the past year learning about extrinsic and intrinsic motivation, reading Daniel Pink's *Drive* as the basis of our exploration and investigating its application to Jewish education. Both of these experiences prompted us to ask: What are the ways that a master's program deepens the talent and motivation of Jewish educators?

Since there are so many training paths to the voluntary and privatized system of Jewish education in North America, and so many settings in which educators work, we sought to better understand how the master's degree is uniquely positioned to offer transformation for educators. Drawing from our experience working with graduate students in Jewish education over many years, this is a perspective based on alumni careers, student experiences and faculty aspirations. It is helpful to explore this question through the lenses of autonomy, meaning-making and mastery, as articulated by Daniel Pink, in the development and growth of Jewish educators.

AUTONOMY

“A sense of autonomy has a powerful effect on individual performance and attitude. According to a cluster of recent behavioral science studies, autonomous motivation promotes greater conceptual understanding, better grades, enhanced persistence at school and in sporting activities, higher productivity, less burnout, and greater levels of psychological well-being.” (Pink 89)

The field of Jewish education is a varied and diverse one; it encapsulates many educational settings and environments, from the formal grammar of schooling with its set curricula and competency-based assessments all the way to experiential experiences offered in non-classroom settings, including

the home, college campus or outdoors settings. As such, cultivating autonomy is an important feature of any master's program in order that students seek their own place and focus along the multiple paths of the program. Coupled with the possibility of a number of concentrations, the autonomous self is choosing and selecting on the basis of a growing focus of interest and depth. While we emphasize the need to understand all settings, we also guide students to develop their own niche and expertise for their chosen setting.

Students can navigate course selections in a way that tracks with their professional and personal aspirations for growth. Their assigned project choices in each course build their expertise and allow them to experiment with ideas and approaches with their learners, and then return to critically reflect on them in an academic setting with their cohort and instructor. Ultimately, these choices will build toward a deep and rigorous exploration of a problem of practice as the final capstone thesis. As anyone who has written a thesis or dissertation can attest, this is among the hardest and loneliest of autonomous tasks. Yet embedding autonomy in a program from the very beginning hones the skills of individual choice, scaffolding of major tasks and sustained motivation and drive towards a final successful end goal. These skills are necessary both for an extended research paper and an educational leadership role.

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A mid-career student invited us to join in her deliberation of issues initiated in her coursework that were relevant to her workplace and personal leadership:

I do want to tell you how relevant the abstract “Preparing Children for Spirituality” is at this exact moment in my role as religious school director. I was presented with an issue that relates directly with the ideas of interpersonal sensitivity and exhibiting holiness in our relationships in school. In fact, I will probably draw upon the points explored when I address the sixth grade students who are struggling with these concepts and their lack of sensitivity. However, I am also presented with some challenges that there are parents of some of the students who are clearly modeling poor behavior and insensitivity that is fueling the lack of sensitivity of the students. I would love to speak with you about this because I see a much deeper, more serious problem that is festering.

MASTERY

“Only engagement can produce mastery. And pursuit of mastery, an important but often dormant part of our third drive, has become essential in making one’s way in today’s economy.” (Pink 109)

The content of a master’s degree can be overwhelming, particularly when one considers the nature of Jewish education and its associated disciplines: Jewish studies, social studies, Hebrew language, Jewish textual sources in their original languages, character and moral education, social and emotional learning, religiosity and spiritual search. So mastery must be selected and honed by the student. In our program, we encourage students to become “master” and “mistress” of their own learning in the following ways:

First, the weaving of content, pedagogy and application to practice through deep immersion in Jewish texts. We find this inherently improves practice through the ability to articulate connection to theory and the evolution of a personal educational philosophy. At the same time, it ties educators to a larger and longer conversation about education and Jewish education.

Second, a deep practice of reflection through intense advising and faculty mentoring over three years. This is an opportunity for the loop of feedback, reflection, change, re-reflection and ultimate evolution as a practitioner to take place.

Third, providing a safe laboratory space to experiment and grapple with academic, professional/vocational questions that can feel too vulnerable for the workplace. And this feels essential to the evolution toward mastery, “the desire to get better and better at something that matters” (Pink 109).

In the professional workplace, mastery achieved in graduate studies gives a leadership role even to the classroom teacher, as witnessed by this alumna:

Tonight was the third grade service Shabbat, and in addition to having the kids present the Hebrew letter posters they designed to form the alef bet, the parents who are studying on Sunday morning were invited up for an aliyah. The director shared with everyone how it was my thesis research that prompted her to start this program. I thought I was going to cry when I saw the group of eight to 10 parents at the Torah. It was so heart-warming to see them up there and made me feel proud that my work has had such a positive impact in our community.



MEANING-MAKING

“Autonomy and mastery are essential. But for proper balance we need a third leg—purpose, which provides a context for its two mates. Autonomous people working toward mastery perform at very high levels. But those who do so in service of some greater objective can achieve more. The most deeply motivated people . . . hitch themselves to a cause larger than themselves.” (Pink 131)

In a graduate course entitled Spiritual Development in Jewish Education, students face the challenge of realizing the potential of cultivating meaning in others. This has been expressed by a student in describing a classroom pedagogy:

The modality called “philosophical inquiry” provides a means to ask questions about every story in the Torah curriculum. In a combined second and third grade class with a “Torah and Me” curriculum, children added their questions in a reflection exercise, with a project coming from the inquiry. It was a mind-blowing opportunity as an educator, for me, because of the children’s connections to their own lives and experiences in the stories. By sharing their feelings, it enabled the children to relate to their feelings and connect to their own difficult stories. One child’s story was about the death of her mother, and she wondered if Sarah (in the Torah) died similarly to her mother.

Once there is a realization that Jewish education is aptly designed for the very meaning-making that we wish to instill in our families and children, then we as teachers need to understand more fully the process for this intentional work. It was Janucz Korczak who said we cannot get to know children until we know the child within us. A master’s degree program with its level of trust, intimacy and vulnerability generated over a lengthy period of time offers transformation of the



educator into becoming an intentional cultivator of meaning-making and thriving.

The challenges of such an open yet deep transformative experience are many. They include the capacity of the admitted student to grow and develop over the length of the program. Yet these aspirations are challenging for some and difficult to always foster in some students. We continue to discuss whether withdrawn and Leave of Absence students means that we need to revise our expectations of students' capacities to achieve these underlying goals of such a program. At the same time, we hear more and more the call for short-term relevance for the immediate needs in the classroom or experiential experience. This too we continue to review, noting that fostering autonomy, meaning-making and mastery doesn't come from the quick fix or the easy answer. Indeed, the unresolved question that leads to a critical analysis of the very issue at

heart is the key to growing to live with ambiguity and lead with the enduring essential question.

When a student came to us with a capstone thesis proposal concerning the teaching of the "illegal and repressive" Israeli Occupation of the Palestinian territory, we all gave pause for thought. It was a long and arduous process for the student and faculty to struggle with the role of education in heated political situations, to evaluate the nature of curriculum as a selective tool, to face assumptions and passionate beliefs while at the same time exemplifying a leadership stance. The student's final thesis, entitled "Peacemaking and Healing through Exposure in the Israel Studies Curriculum," was a testimony to the unfolding of a six-month process of autonomy, meaning-making and finally mastery of Jewish educational leadership.

If our programs succeed in creating experiences that drive autonomy, meaning-making and mastery for Jewish education graduate students, then we should see those outcomes reflected in *their* students as well. This depth of intrinsic motivation can be contagious when modeled by educators who act as catalysts for their students' independence and drive. A student recently reflected on this ripple effect:

You played such a big role in how I ended up delivering this and being able to believe in myself to do so (with so much courage and vulnerability). I have no doubt that you offering that to me will be a gift that keeps on giving (to me and the communities with whom I will work) as I continue teaching in this way of integrating movement and spoken/sung word.

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STEVEN LEVEY

Faculty Health and Wellness

The research is clear: Teaching is one of the most stressful careers a person can choose. Simply entering into Google the words “teacher burnout” (17 million results) or “teacher stress” (340 million results) confirms this fact. Approximately 40% of teachers leave the profession within the first five years.

Unaddressed faculty and staff stress, within the school setting, leads directly to poor work performance, a toxic and contagious attitude, and absenteeism, all of which harms academic and behavioral functioning for the students. Studies also show that teacher stress has a negative impact on home and life outside of school.

Significant funds are spent solely on frequent faculty absences—on average, 3% of total budgets for faculty pay. For a school with an operating budget of \$10 million per year for teacher salaries, the loss would be \$300,000, per year. In addition to these costs, administrators’ time is also spent dealing with these concerns. As a school leader, your time is better spent on the performance of teachers and students rather than with the process of advertising, hiring and training replacement faculty or staff.

PLAN

An organized health and wellness program for faculty and staff that is financially, emotionally, socially and academically beneficial is in every stakeholder’s best interest. With the full support of the administrative team, the program, in whatever form it takes, will be successful.

Begin by inviting someone to lead, one of your faculty or staff member who is respected and whose voice is heard among their peers. This person is charged with forming a committee. The size of this committee needs to be proportionate to your faculty and staff numbers. The committee can now start getting feedback from the rest of the staff on what they are or aren’t interested in with regard to any type of health and wellness program.

The most successful activities are ones that involve some type of incentive. For example, the staff or faculty member that walks the most steps in a certain time period will win an award or points to an award. If every faculty or staff member pays a \$1 to participate, the winner gets the pot as an award. Maybe the school can match the amount paid into the event by the employees. It’s the reward, not the amount of money, that makes the difference.

Here are some other suggested activities:

- Form a team of “walkers,” and participate as a school in a walker-friendly 5K. Your faculty can get financial pledges that can be for tzedakah. They can have T-shirts made with the name of the group and school. This a great for team building and morale as well as advertising and marketing your school.

- Bringing in a person to run a yoga, meditation or other type of class on a regular basis. These can be mix-gender or single-sex, depending on the school.
- Movie night: Turn your gym into a theater and provide popcorn and other snacks. Instead of chairs, people can bring blankets and pillows.
- Create and manage a school-specific health and wellness website and/or group chat.
- Therapy dogs: Pet therapy has been shown to have a tremendously positive impact on moods and behaviors. There are many organizations that visit schools, including day schools, for little to no charge.
- Participants can post “thoughts for the day,” articles and links to videos, and even make videos of their own.

GET STARTED

Regardless of whether your teachers are still in school or away for the summer, make a commitment now to implement some type of school-based health and wellness program.

There is no need to reinvent the wheel. Everything that you need, from forming a committee, engaging staff, planning events and so on, already exists. For example, the Associated Talmud Torahs of Chicago has many free downloadable materials on its website (att.org/jewish-day-school-wellness-initiative).

As an employee of a Modern Orthodox yeshiva for the past 12 years, I can personally attest to the positive impact of programs as simple as “good and welfare” staff and faculty lunches, therapy dogs, book clubs and so on.

If you haven’t tried one of these, now is the time.

Suggested Resources

- [Directors of Health Promotion and Education, “School Employee Wellness: A Guide for Protecting the Assets of Our Nation’s Schools”](#)
- [Sustainable Jersey Schools, “Staff Wellness Program”](#)
- [Alliance for a Healthier Generation, “Employee Wellness Toolkit”](#)



Mindful Leaders Foster Mindful Learners

JENNY WECHTER

Imagine your favorite song is playing. Its familiar rhythm draws you in, undulating in melodic waves. Have a listen, but now imagine that the pauses between notes are withdrawn, so the song is solely composed of notes strung together one after the other. Is the song still playing? Or is it just noise?

Sometimes I wonder if this is what is happening to us—to younger generations—to those of us whose hands were born with a proclivity to reach for the comfort of our screens and the safety of the virtual realities we seem to build during any moment of boredom or internal discomfort we experience. I wonder what happens to generations of children who have a conditioned tendency to fill the pauses between notes.

As Jews, we feel in our gut what is important to us and what we hope to impart to our children. We hear the songs of our ancestors and practice the traditions that will perpetuate our existence. And it is the sole cause of Jewish day schools to immerse children in a learning environment built for and around the values of this song. But with the impacts of social media and smartphones, the rising levels of anxiety and depression, and our plummeting attention spans, perhaps there is now a need to be taught *how* to notice, not just *what* to notice. Exploring possible antidotes to these challenges, some Jewish educators have taken to mindfulness, the formal practice of present-centered awareness.

The concept and practice of mindfulness has been proliferating as a movement in the West over the last few decades, emerging in classrooms, medical clinics, even business offices. But what really is mindfulness: a practice, a disposition, a state of mind? Oftentimes the word *mindful* is used ambiguously, as a synonym for *considerate* or *kind*, *conscious* or *aware*. What makes mindfulness distinct, though, is that it is a habit and trait that accrues in a person who sits in formal meditation practice regularly.

There are two distinct components of mindfulness practice: the discipline of closing our eyes into stillness and silence each day (meditation), and the way mindfulness naturally emerges in our daily lives as the outgrowth of our seated practice (our post-meditation practice). People who meditate generally agree to the presence of something barely capable of articulation, something in their daily lives slowly yet deeply changing simply because they sit in meditation each day.

Many scientific theories offer explanations for how and why meditation affects the brain and heart. Still, there is much to learn about the causal processes that lead to the impacts of meditation—the method to its magic. One common conception sees meditation as a technique to still the mind. I like to think about meditation in a different way: not as a way to stop our thoughts, but rather as a way to learn to sit with them in a particular way.

We close our eyes in meditation practice and set an intention—focusing on the breath, for example. Inevitably, we drift off from our place of focus, and then we become aware that we’ve drifted off. The work of meditation, to me, is *not* about not drifting. The work lies in changing the way we respond to the moment that we become aware we have drifted.

When we sit still, everything internally—thoughts, emotions, sensations—tries to shake us and move us away from our discipline. Precisely when we sit through this intrinsic chaos, when we take a deep breath and place our attention back upon our intention, we strengthen the muscle of mindfulness. This is a difficult practice, and sometimes even uncomfortable. But perhaps meditation is not about being comfortable, despite its association with relaxation; perhaps it is really about cultivating comfort within discomfort. This relational work—of creating relation with our breath and internal world—maps onto our external world. We sit not so we may perfectly focus on our intention; we sit so we may practice remembering when we forget, and returning when we drift. Imagine what happens to the cognition and consciousness of a child who learns to master this practice of calling intention to heart and mind.

Quite a few Jewish educators know this practice well and have integrated the teachings of mindfulness into Jewish day schools. Over the last few months, I have been speaking to these educators, inquiring about their practices and their perception of the value of school-based mindfulness.

Many have reported the positive impact that mindfulness has had on stress levels, emotional regulation, cognitive functioning and sense of

overall well-being. Educators shared their personal practices as well as their school’s practices, what they’ve seen and felt, and what the process has looked like in integrating mindfulness into school curricula. Some schools have hired yoga and meditation teachers, some have had faculty engage in secular mindfulness trainings like Mindful Schools or Calm Classroom, and others have been part of Educating for a Jewish Spiritual Life, a mindfulness program for Jewish educators led by the Institute of Jewish Spirituality.

What was most affecting in these conversations were stories about the bidirectional nature of school-based mindfulness. Children learn from teachers, and then teachers learn from children—from the embodiment of mindful learning that emerges in changes in children’s behavior, their attention in class, academic outcomes, even in the ways in which they interact with peers, faculty and themselves. One educator told me about a preschooler who intervened in her own experience of anxiety by closing her eyes and independently doing “belly breathing” when she realized she needed to calm down. Another educator recounted how a middle schooler explained that he now knows what to do to reconnect when he realizes he is tuning out of tefillah. Others noticed that the initial resistance of hesitant teachers broke after seeing the way the culture of their classrooms began to shift.

Most striking of all was the feeling that heads of schools alluded to, in being able to “really see what’s going on in people’s lives and in our schools,” in having a consistent space and practice to step back and ask, “What Judaism are we really giving over to the kids?” This comment brought me back to my own day school upbringing. What I remember most are the ways of my teachers, the ways they showed up, the ways they responded to challenges—not so much what they said but how they said it.

Mindfulness training elevates the way we show up, with ourselves and with others. In the words of another head of school, “Mindfulness training has dramatically affected how I engage with kids who come into my office. Professionally and personally, it has helped me to become much more conscious in my actions and reactions.” Almost all the school leaders affirmed this same message: Educators are moved by the unexpected potency of intentional practices of stillness and silence, in themselves and in children.

But like all change, this growth is slow and calls for an investment of commitment, practice and patience. As one head of school shared, “This really is a long path. An early adopter helped me understand and accept that.” A counselor who directs a social-emotional learning program based in mindfulness spoke about the challenges that have arisen along this path:

I see tremendous value. In an ideal world, all teachers would be trained. So much of the success of these mindfulness initiatives, though, is dependent on the leadership’s presentation of them and the systems in place to support them in an ongoing way. Really, it is not enough for the leadership team to support it. Are we receiving adequate training? Is there time set aside in the schedule? For this to be absorbed in the school culture, it has to become part of the fabric of the school. This takes time and a ton of system support.

A few months ago, the Prizmah conference dared us to dream. I dream about what might happen if every school was provided—and ultimately, was able to provide—this support. I dream of every educator and learner being formally trained in mindfulness. With meditation, we would learn how to tune ourselves like the instruments we are; we would learn to cultivate the pause between notes so that we could once again hear, with a little more clarity, the profundity of the music that is played for us by our dedicated teachers, note by note, generation after generation.



Haredi Women School Leaders

An interview with Zipora Schorr and Barbara Davis

Zipora Schorr and Barbara Sheklin Davis are co-authors of the recently published study *A Parallel Universe: Haredi Women Leading Haredi Schools for Girls* (Hadassa Word Press).

Tell us about the origins of this book.

BSD: The book was an elaboration and expansion of Zippy's doctoral dissertation. Zippy and I had met through our service as school representatives on the RAVSAK board of directors and despite being very different in some respects, we were totally in sync in others. When I read her dissertation, I knew she was onto something fascinating and little known, and encouraged her to write more. She asked me to work with her, and that's how it began.

ZS: My doctoral dissertation focused on educational leadership styles of women in Jewish schools. This has been a passionate interest of mine ever since I watched my own sisters lead Jewish schools, and ever since I have been in Jewish education, which is for the past 50 years!

Why did you decide to focus on haredi women educational leaders?

ZS: I decided to focus specifically on haredi women educational leaders because, in my research, I discovered that that study had never been done before. There have been

studies of leadership in education, of women in leadership, of Jewish women in leadership roles, but haredi women had never been studied because theirs is, essentially, a closed world. Their reluctance to speak to researchers beyond their community arises out of several things: a sense of modesty and unwillingness to be in the public eye; a concern that the restrictions or religious limitations described would be seen in a negative light, as repressive rather than prescriptive; and a protectiveness about the environment that these women were charged to care for. The fact is that this world had not been studied because "strangers," i.e., people not in the community, were just not entirely trusted to present it in a truthful (read: favorable) way.

BD: It was amazing to me that there were such strong women in the haredi community whose work and contributions were unknown in the larger world. The fact that Zippy had entry into this community and that she could have access to these woman leaders made researching and writing the book together an exciting process.

You found yourselves in a bind: forced to write about women whose communities would not approve of them being featured in your book. Explain how you handled this predicament. Were you and your subjects satisfied with the result?

ZS: The subjects were all people who knew me or knew about me, and felt that, since I was a “member of the club,” I would portray them positively. We explained to each subject who agreed to be interviewed that we were interviewing them for research purposes (explaining the subject of the study) and that we would be objective and accurate in our reporting. There were quite a few women who objected to being a part of the study, which was a major obstacle. Those women who did agree were most concerned with “identifiability,” and we assured them that we would do our best to anonymize them as well as we could. That was a commitment that was very important to us and to our subjects, and we honored that commitment.

BD: Only Zippy could have gotten these subjects to agree to be subjects of our research. They knew her and trusted her; her connections to their community were solid and strong. They didn’t know me at all, so establishing trust was one of the first things I had to do in my interviews. It didn’t take long. We all share a passion for Jewish education and children, and inevitably we were able to establish rapport within a very short space of time. I found these women to be remarkable in so many ways.

You spend a great portion of the book putting your subject in context. Why did you feel that your portraits required so much context? In your view, what are the obstacles that hinder people outside of the haredi world from understanding and appreciating these women?

BD: So much of what is written about haredi women and their lives is negative and critical. Much of what I knew prior to working on this study derived from books written by those who had rejected ultra-Orthodox Judaism, who had gone “off the derech.” The reason people outside the haredi world don’t understand and appreciate these women is that so little is known about them. Their world is very insular; they feel no need to seek validation or approbation in the larger community. But that does not mean that they don’t have something to teach the larger community, particularly the Jewish educational world. It is important to place their contributions in the unique context in which they work.

What surprised you the most during your research? Were there things you discovered that you did not anticipate?

ZS: Contrary to public belief, not all women feel repressed and unfairly treated if they do not have a public persona. Each of these women were authorities in their own schools, felt enormous professional and personal satisfaction in their roles, were proud of what they had accomplished and did not feel diminished in any way by having a male authority as the titular head. In fact, during the defense of my dissertation, it was difficult for my committee to accept or even to understand that conclusion, in light of the very different society in which we live.

BS: Honestly, I was completely floored by the interviews I conducted. I assumed, based on my previous readings, that I would be dealing with timorous, self-abasing women, who cowered before male authority. Was I ever wrong! These were some of the strongest, most self-possessed and passionate women I had ever encountered. They were so dedicated to their schools and their students and their educational missions. They were just like Zippy and me! They worked endless hours, had crazy schedules, families—and loved every aspect of their jobs. They shared the commitment to Jewish education, to Israel, to tikkun olam and to doing deeds of lovingkindness that we all share. And they were every bit as strong in their school leadership as Zippy or I, in our community day schools.

What was the process of co-writing like? Did it help to have one person who was closer to the haredi community and one who was more distanced?

BD: It was a lot of fun. Luckily I was retired, so I had more time in which to write. Zippy’s schedule, like that of our subjects, is ridiculous, so a lot of work was accomplished between 11 pm and 5 am. Although we are very different—Zippy is Orthodox, and I am Conservative—we mesh pretty well and the process was smooth and quite enjoyable. The fact is, of course, that this book could never have been written without Zippy’s ability to get the subjects to agree to participate. She was able to bridge a giant gap.

ZS: I learned a great deal during the co-writing process. Aside from the fact that Barbara is a fluent writer and an editor with a keen eye, it was also helpful that she was coming to the subject with a very different perspective. It helped me to frame the questions and commentary because it forced me to think more objectively, seeing my subjects

through a lens that was not familiar with the world I was describing, sharpening my view and clarifying my observations. Additionally, I looked to Barbara to bring a more dispassionate attitude to the study; neither of us wanted a biased, idealized view of the subjects, and co-writing made us keep each other more objective.

As long-time heads of Jewish day schools yourselves, what similarities did you note between the work of these women and leaders of schools outside the haredi world?

BD: There is a model of leadership exemplified by these women which I think successful Jewish educational leaders of all stripes share: They provide a clear vision for their schools, they are caring and attentive to teachers’ needs, they make decisions based on the needs of the students, they have well-defined expectations for staff and follow up to assure they are met, and they value teamwork and collegiality far above personal aggrandizement.

ZS: Agreed. Good leadership can be replicated in any setting, and it was evident that these women were utilizing best practices—in some cases quite intuitively—that are promoted in the secular world.

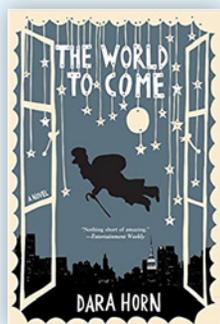
In conclusion, what lessons do you think other Jewish educational leaders can derive from your study?

ZS: The most important finding I felt came out of the study was the incredible joy and pride each of the women felt in their roles. These women are all countercultural, and truly do live in a “parallel universe” in a totally unapologetic way.

BD: *A Parallel Universe* shows how women can be successful, powerful and influential even in a social structure that most of us would consider restrictive. The book begins with the words of *Eshet chayil*, but perhaps a better description of each of the extraordinary women portrayed in it is *ishah gedolah*—a great woman, one who has not only fulfilled her wifely and motherly duties but has touched the Jewish future through her school. Wise men appreciate these women, as the Torah tells us: “God told Abraham, ‘All that Sarah says to you, listen to her voice.’” Though theirs is truly an impenetrable glass ceiling, our subjects do not see it as a barrier but as a surface which reflects the good work that they do, the happiness that characterizes their schools, and the belief that they are truly doing holy work in a unique and special way. I think all Jewish educational leaders, whatever the type of school they head, share this conviction.

ON MY NIGHTSTAND

BRIEF REVIEWS OF BOOKS THAT PRIZMAH STAFF ARE READING



The World to Come

By Dara Horn

The story pulls you in: a stolen Chagall painting, a budding romance, artists who struggle, siblings who hope for one another, jealousy, deception, love, sacrifice and more. The language is evocative and rich, and for a Tanakh nerd like me it was a delight to pick up biblical and midrashic allusions in a casual turn of phrase or description.

But the real treasure of this book—a paradigm shift—is the last chapter. I do not want to give it away, because the delight in your discovery will be great. Suffice it to say that Dara Horn weaves together a description of the “world to come” that is as mesmerizing as it is spiritually uplifting.

So give yourself the gift of reading this tale. Though at times the pain of the characters is profound, it is told with wit and truth, and sets the stage for a culmination that will leave you seeing the world with more depth and color.

Rachel Levitt Klein Dratch



Two Jews, Three Opinions

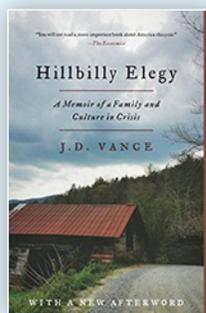
By Barbara Sheklin Davis

This book pays tribute to a dedicated group of school leaders who created an organization focused on the needs of schools not aligned with any particular denomination. That organization became RAVSAK, which saw its member schools rapidly grow, and thanks to strong leadership, realized a burgeoning impact on the entire field of Jewish education. Community schools embraced diversity, open discussion

of intentional and meaningful pluralism, and a commitment to the centrality of Israel in the schools. The author, who was a RAVSAK board member and head of school, captures the excitement of building the community day school network and the hope that with the creation of Prizmah, attention to these schools will not be lost.

So much of what was on the table in 2010, when RAVSAK was creating its last mission and vision statements, is still relevant and important today. The author makes clear that our future challenges are not just within our schools, but within our broader Jewish communities. As she states, “Faced with the myriad diversities of the modern world, Jewish community day schools opted to confront them squarely, fully embrace diversity and inclusivity, and be enriched and enlivened by differences.” Nothing that Davis states as important then is less important now, and this book provides the blueprint for maintaining the vitality of Jewish community day schools within the Jewish communal landscape.

Amy Wasser



Hillbilly Elegy

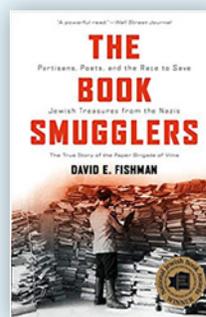
By J. D. Vance

Once upon a time, families in Appalachia had clear paths towards middle class success, even without advanced education. In the last 20 years, these opportunities have receded and with them, the loss of control over one's life.

As someone who grew up deep in Appalachia and who “escaped” through some well-placed protectors, good fortune and eventual belief in himself, Vance understands well the despair felt by many of his former neighbors and peers. It took Vance a long time to come to believe that his choices made a difference, that he had some control over his own fate, that he did not need to look with resentment at others. This process began in the Marines and built on itself as he began to see his choices leading to success.

We take for granted that our choices matter. Imagine for a moment, however, that you didn't believe that, that whether you made an ostensibly good decision or an objectively bad one made no difference. Think about the corrosive effect of such an attitude. Despite this depressing outlook, Vance also recognizes that just one or two people who help you buck that attitude can change your life—a lesson for everyone in education.

Joshua Levisohn



The Book Smugglers

By David Fishman

Vilna (Vilnius) was known as the “Jerusalem of Lithuania,” perhaps the greatest center of Talmudic scholarship. Before World War II, Vilna's book learning expanded to secular Jewish literature as well, but it remained a critical center of Jewish writing and study, with several important libraries. The founding of YIVO, the bastion of Yiddish-language scholarship and education, in Vilna solidified the city's

importance. The Jewish population of the city was approximately 80,000 in 1939; of all the Jews in Lithuania, only about 5% survived the Shoah.

Fishman tells a gripping story of a group of poets, artists, librarians and scholars who managed to save millions of volumes and cultural treasures from Vilna's vast Jewish resources. The Nazis aimed to create a museum dedicated to maligning the Jewish “race”; these Jews, while pretending to help the Nazis, used their limited freedom to smuggle the most important documents, such as the record book of the Vilna Gaon's synagogue and Herzl's early diary, into hiding places within the ghetto. After the war, those who survived and returned to rescue the documents needed to smuggle them again out of the country to the newly established YIVO headquarters in New York City, out of hands of the Soviet-installed regime.

Elliott Rabin

THE PRIZMAH NETWORK

THE PRIZMAH NETWORK is the robust, peer-to-peer professional development network for you to connect with other Jewish day school leaders.

- Share leading practices and build a community of trusted colleagues.
- Be a part of the conversations advancing the field and your school.
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- Access research, thought leadership, and resources that can strengthen your school.
- Take advantage of Prizmah programs, services and gatherings to advance you and your school.

Through our strong relationships and network weaving, Prizmah strives to understand the strengths and challenges of your school, and creates connections between you and other leaders in pursuit of excellence.

For more information, visit prizmah.org/prizmah-network, or contact our network team at network@prizmah.org with any questions.



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254 West 54th Street
New York, NY 10019
www.prizmah.org

