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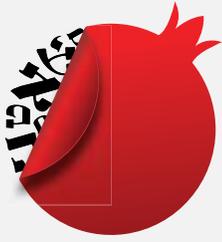
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From the Editor

■ by **BARBARA DAVIS**

In a recent book review, Professor Yehudah Mirsky of Brandeis wrote, “The meanings of ‘Torah’ are inexhaustible, but its plainest sense is ‘teaching.’ It does not exist apart from being communicated.

“That circulation between human beings, and between humans and God, both gives Torah life and teaches us that Torah itself teaches life. We Jews are so in love with our texts and textuality that we bid to lose sight of the human immediacy—typos, misprints and all—without which Torah is a body lacking a soul.” The links that connect Torah and humankind are teachers. “Get for yourself a teacher,” says Yehoshua ben Perachiah in Pirkei Avot 1:6, noting that in so doing you will “acquire a friend” and coincidentally adding the crucial mandate: “judge every person favorably.”

Teachers connect us to our past, guide us in our present and prepare us for our future. The teachers of elementary school children probably spend more hours with their students than do the children’s parents, certainly in today’s busy world. Yet teachers are at once much praised and much maligned. Theirs, as authors in this issue of *HaYidion* point out, is a task that must be an end unto itself, for a career ladder inevitably leads out of the classroom.

Our nation is currently struggling with issues related to teachers: how to evaluate them, how to train them, how to fire them, whether to arm them. The New York State Commissioner of Education was recently booted off a stage by an audience of parents and teachers angered by the implementation of the Common Core curriculum and related testing. In response, he issued a statement entitled, “Teaching Is the Core,” in which he wrote, “Although the work [of education] is complex, the vision is simple. The best preparation for student suc-

cess is a great teacher providing great instruction.”

Yet try as we might, we cannot define or quantify what makes a good teacher. We all know one when we experience the tremendous growth and excitement that comes from studying with one, but good teachers are very diverse in their qualities and qualifications and teachers resonate differently with different students. Educator and author Beth Lewis identified the following six qualities that contribute to a successful, durable, and happy teaching career: “1. Successful teachers hold high expectations; 2. They think creatively; 3. Top teachers are versatile and sensitive; 4. They are curious, confident, and evolving; 5. They are imperfectly human; 6. Successful teachers emphasize the fun in learning and in life.” And yet I think back on the teacher from whom I learned the most in graduate school, and the only one of these qualities he possessed was #5! Despite his failings, he taught me to think in unimaginably new ways and opened up my eyes wider than they had ever been opened before.

In our Jewish day schools, we must appreciate and respect our teachers and value the many ways in which they serve our students. They open the gates to Jewish learning, without which we do not exist as a people. RAVSAK’s Executive Director Marc Kramer recently wrote that it is not enough for us and our students to just “feel Jewish,” to have a “Jewish identity.” Judaism requires a knowledge base that goes far beyond “Mah Nishtanah,” the blessings for the Chanukah candles and eating bagels. Our teachers provide this base.

Maimonides wrote that “just as a person is commanded to honor and revere his father, so is he under an obligation to honor and revere his teacher, even to a greater extent than his father, for his father gave him life in this world, while his teacher who instructs him in wisdom secures for him life in the world to come.” This issue of *HaYidion* celebrates teachers, recognizes their challenges and addresses their issues in ways that we hope will honor their commitment and professionalism! ■



Dr. Barbara Davis is the secretary of RAVSAK’s Board of Directors, executive editor of HaYidion and head of school at the Syracuse Hebrew Day School in Dewitt, NY. bdavis74@twcyn.rr.com



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RAVSAK would also like to thank Rebekah and Howard Farber and Arnee R. and Walter A. Winshall for supporting *HaYidion*.

From the desk of Rebekah Farber, RAVSAK Chair

As usual, the first couple of months of the new school year have been filled with excitement and enthusiasm, especially having coincided with the Jewish high holidays. We spent the entire month of September trying to balance school duties, shortened school days, and interrupted curriculum with praying, cooking and entertaining. It was both exhilarating and exhausting. October came with great relief and the first real chance to assess the state of our schools, of our boards and of our network, RAVSAK.

I am thrilled to report that the state of community Jewish day schools this academic year is very good. Our schools, with rare exception, are reporting stable enrollment numbers, with a few even reporting significant growth. And while affordability remains a challenging issue, the greatest number of schools reported that tuition was less a factor in student attrition, in great part due to valiant efforts to increase tuition assistance, than it has been in previous years. While the occurrence of the High Holidays so early in the school year certainly honed our juggling skills, schools reported that it also set a tone of reverence and reflection from the very beginning of the academic calendar, which reminded our staff, faculty, students and parents that we are first and foremost Jewish schools driven by a Jewish mission.

Just as the holidays piled atop one another in September and the beginning of a very busy school year, so too has the RAVSAK team been blessed with a superabundance of activity and innovation, all seeming to come at practically the same time (much like Thanksgiving and Hanukkah this year!).

I am thrilled to report that RAVSAK is growing! As we move from a transitional organization to a fully mature one, there are major changes in several areas. Our staff has increased in size and scope. RAVSAK has expanded our roster of talented professionals to include several new team members, listed on page 66. Welcome to Debra Shaffer Seeman, Jeremy Willinger, Betty Winn and Patrick Zagdanski. We know they will play an integral part in advancing our mission and providing valuable resources to our network of Jewish day schools.

One of the results of these new hires is that we have completely exhausted the possibility of cramming any more people into the RAVSAK offices on West 97th Street and we will be moving! Our new headquarters will be at 254 West 54th Street in midtown Manhattan and will provide a much better physical environment than we cur-

rently have. We look forward to sharing pictures of our new offices and news of the move in the next issue of *HaYidion*.

The RAVSAK Board has been very busy meeting the challenges associated with these wonderful changes, focusing primarily on fundraising, and stewarding our Jewish community day school network in a time of major field upheaval and the many conversations occasioned by the Pew Report. We held a two day meeting at the Capital Retreat Center in Pennsylvania in October (see page 41), and set the following goals for the Board for 2013-4:

1) Recruit new Board members: The growth of the Board is critical to RAVSAK's future, to our organization's health, the strength of our programs and our ability to serve our constituent schools. Recruitment presents an opportunity to be joined by partners who share our vision and passion for Jewish day school education.

2) Build out support for RAVSAK: Each RAVSAK Board member is responsible for raising additional funds aside from his/her personal board gift. Board members will identify institutional and foundation relationships and make connections.

3) Strengthen Board cohesiveness and enthusiasm: Board members will find organizational connection points to invest time and knowledge. Board members will provide more connecting information, i.e., sharing emails with each other to ensure we know what each other is doing; monthly organizational updates from the executive director to inform and stimulate discussions; Board committees to work on their individual agendas and provide updates to the whole Board.

Now that I am getting into the "meat" of my job as Board chair, I am finding the work truly inspiring and worthy of my focus. I am meeting wonderful heads of school and board members in our network and it is a great honor for me to be a part of this extraordinary network of professionals and lay leaders determined to raise up generations of academically strong, morally sound and Jewishly literate young people.

I eagerly anticipate seeing you at the January RAVSAK-Pardes Conference in my home town of Los Angeles, which will be a truly exciting and purposeful event. Our goal at the conference, as in everything we do, is to be forward-thinking, high-touch field leaders, advancing the cause of high quality Jewish education in the 21st century.

Rebekah ■



Rebekah Farber is chair of RAVSAK's Board of Directors and co-founder of the New Community Jewish High School in West Hills, California. Rebekah would love to hear feedback on RAVSAK's work and engage in conversations with the field about what is happening at our schools worldwide. You can email her at rebekah@ravsak.org.

Good & Welfare

Two extraordinary teachers from RAVSAK schools—Osnat Bernstein, middle school Hebrew teacher at **ABRAHAM JOSHUA HESCHEL DAY SCHOOL** in Northridge, CA, and Benny Ferdman, founding artistic director and performing arts teacher for grades 9-12 at **NEW COMMUNITY JEWISH HIGH SCHOOL** in West Hills, CA—were honored with the Milken Jewish Educator Award, an honor that includes a \$15,000 prize. The awards are given to promote public recognition to teachers, administrators and other education professionals in the Greater Los Angeles area who have made significant contributions in day schools.

HILLEL DAY SCHOOL OF METROPOLITAN DETROIT has been accepted into EdLeader21, a national network of school leaders focused on integrating select core values promoting 21st century education. Hillel is the first and only Jewish day school to be included in the select 128-member organization.

Lay and professional leaders from day schools in Buffalo, Syracuse, Albany and Rochester, all members of the **UPSTATE NEW YORK JEWISH DAY SCHOOL CONSORTIUM**, met in person August 26 at the **SYRACUSE HEBREW**



DAY SCHOOL in DeWitt for a full day summit. The group shared their backgrounds, updated each other on what each school is doing, compared notes on ideas, and formulated plans for further shared action.

Mazal tov to Judy Finkelstein-Taff, head of the **CHICAGO JEWISH DAY SCHOOL**, for being chosen as a recipient of a prestigious Covenant Award this year! Mazal tov as well to her accomplished co-recipients: Howard Blas, director of the Tikvah Program at Camp Ramah in New England, and Zion Ozeri, founder and creative director of the Jewish Lens.

Mazal tov as well to Yonatan Rosner, Judaics teacher at **NEW COMMUNITY JHS** in West Hills, CA, for receiving a Pomegranate Prize for promising young Jewish educators from the Covenant Foundation.

The **LURIA ACADEMY OF BROOKLYN** is the only day school chosen for recognition this year by Slingshot 13-14, an organization that features Jewish initiatives noteworthy for their innovation. Luria is cited for “raising a new generation of Jewish leaders in a vibrant cultural mosaic.” ■



RAVSAK Joins Forces with the WZO on Hebrew Education

The recent Pew report found that only 52% of American Jews say that they know the alephbet. Fortunately, a new initiative aims to swim against this tide. The World Zionist Organization has announced the creation of The Hebrew Language Council of North America, whose bold vision is that “Hebrew will be the language of communication among Jews worldwide.” Its mission: “Raising the prestige and acquisition of the Hebrew language in North America.” RAVSAK is proud to take part in this Council: past president Arnee Winshall was a member of the steering committee, her husband Walt Winshall is a member of the Council, and executive director Dr. Marc Kramer was invited to be a voice in this historic undertaking.

The Council has three stated goals: supporting the expansion and deepening of Hebrew instruction and use; recommending broad action to elevate the place of Hebrew in Jewish communities; serving as the auspices for conferences, publications and research. Council members will include academics, organizational directors, rabbis and teachers from all denominations. As part of this work, the Council will embark upon the formation of a professional association of North American Hebrew teachers.

RAVSAK is excited to offer insight and support for this ambitious project. We anticipate news of important developments to come. Stay tuned. ■

Dear Cooki

■ by **COOKI LEVY**

I have read a great deal about the importance of empowering teachers and developing teacher leaders among the staff. I believe in this form of distributed leadership, but find myself stymied by teachers' perceptions that I am just giving them more work with no additional pay.

How do I get teachers to buy into the principle of teacher leaders instead of seeing leadership tasks as merely an added burden?

Sometimes, we send subtle messages that belie our words. Giving others responsibility for things that we believe are really our job or that we think others cannot accomplish as well as we can is tough. So, first, make sure your teachers know you *really* mean that you want to empower them. Asking others to be leaders means that you are giving over control, even if it is just temporary or for a clearly defined area. You have to be willing to let go; you have to agree not to micromanage or second-guess; your teachers have to know that you trust them to complete well the task you have given them.

As the head of school, you must prepare the way for teacher leaders to emerge. Ask yourself if yours is a community that encourages risk-taking. Will a teacher feel safe to volunteer to take on something new? Do teachers support each other's efforts, or is yours an environment where teachers hide their accomplishments? De-

veloping teacher leaders requires that you create a school culture in which staff members can learn, collaborate, applaud each other's successes and unashamedly share failures both in and out of the classroom.

Provide opportunities for learning how to lead. Invite teachers to outside workshops; invite them to work with you or another administrator on a specific project; ask them to chair a small committee or to head up a project for which a template already exists. Build their confidence and whet their appetites for leadership.

Establishing personal relationships with your staff members is an important step in developing them as leaders. Get to know them as individuals; have conversations (not meetings or evaluation reports) about their work and their interests. Learn about what they value, and let them know what is important to you as an educator. Maintaining a positive relationship will make it easier for you to approach a teacher about a new project, idea or event, and knowing what they are passionate about will steer you to the right person for the job.

One very effective way of encouraging

teachers to take on a leadership role is to give them the gift of time. If you can, substitute some planning time for some teaching time, at the same rate of pay. Nothing will demonstrate the importance of the task or how much you value their participation in a project more than this, even if the time you give is only a fraction of the total number of hours they will invest. Of course, some schools cannot do this because it is not financially feasible or because every hour in the classroom is needed. Give the gift of time another way: offer to take their class on occasion or provide an assistant or team teacher if possible. Even a token number of hours makes a loud statement.

As with every new initiative, start small. Don't expect all your teachers to step forward at once. (You don't even want that!) Concentrate on one or two staff members who demonstrate real potential; other teachers will watch and be ready to volunteer at a later date.

And here is the hardest part for some of us: be prepared to accept (even love!) the work that these teacher leaders do, even if it is not exactly how you would have done it. As long as you agree on the goals, and that they are being met in a timely and cost-effective manner, stand back.

Finally, give your teacher leaders public accolades and celebrate their successes. Acknowledge them in your school newsletter and at your staff meetings. And remember that their success, ultimately, is among your greatest wins. ■



Cooki Levy is the director of RAVSAK's Head of School Professional Excellence Project (PEP). Previously, she served as the longtime head of the Akiva School in Westmount, Quebec. Dear Cooki accepts questions from all school stakeholders. To submit a question, write to hayidion@ravsak.org, with "Dear Cooki" in the subject line.

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Inverting the Triangle

Reimagining This So-Called Profession

■ by **BARBARA ROSENBLIT**

Covenant Award winner and widely admired Jewish educator Rosenblit here offers a potent challenge to Jewish day schools and the educational field more generally: to envision what it would look like to take teaching seriously as a profession.

O body swayed to music, O brightening glance, How can we know the dancer from the dance?

W. B. Yeats, "Among School Children"

Paul Simon gave a series of lectures at Emory University this fall about being a songwriter. He talked frankly about his Inner Critic, strong of voice and purpose, who discourages his best efforts and mocks and criticizes him and about that tender, mysterious and vulnerable place in which the soul of the artist floats, just out of view. I was struck, listening to him over three days, by how much the life of the teacher imitates the life of the artist. We, too, work in a public sphere, subject to our own Inner Critic's whining admonishments, always exposed, visible, vulnerable, the audience invited to criticize, yet we too can be deeply transformative—or, as our Inner Critic warns, shruggingly ordinary.

The professional path of a teacher, though, is better understood using the metaphor of the assembly line. The drone working at the conveyer belt, doing what he's asked, if successful and willing, progresses from lineman to shift manager to site manager to supervisor, perhaps to boss. Salary increases are promised at each juncture, and that pinnacle offers social respect as well as financial reward. Those drones left behind, productive though they may be, clearly lack ambition or they would have been promoted, set free from the drudgery of "the line."

My point? Once a "profession" is understood as a first step to some-

thing else—lecturer, director, curriculum designer, head—then it is no longer a profession: it is a placeholder. It is a first step up a professional ladder that, by its very structure, devalues its own. What a peculiar inverted career ladder: professional and financial reward for a teacher means leaving the classroom behind.

Thus we witness and bemoan the dismantling of the teacher-as-artist by constructing a career ladder that celebrates management over classroom acumen. We are rewarded for moving "up and out" because "out" is where we have placed money, status, public recognition and agency for those in education. And here-in lies the problem: initiatives to keep the best teachers engaged and satisfied for the long haul can't work until the top rung of the ladder is peopled by the best teachers, not by their managers.

Do I need to make the case for great teaching worthy of capping the pinnacle of the pyramid? Did you never have one of "those" teachers? Your own Mr. Yglesias who swooned as he read us poems and we saw that teaching can look like levitation, can even lift you out of your seat and transfix you in midair? Your own Mr. Grossman who called us his flock, called himself our shepherd, and herded us through that valley of shadows known as biblical poetry? Your own Mr. Bernstein, whose art history courses uncovered what was hidden in plain sight, who gave us eyes? Your own Dr. Blumenthal, who insisted we take hold of holy texts and gave us license to add our voice to the conversation? Does any teacher come to mind for you? If not, you are the poorer. How could you know, then, that teaching

What a peculiar inverted career ladder: professional and financial reward for a teacher means leaving the classroom behind.



Barbara Ellison Rosenblit, a humanities and Bible teacher and director of mentoring at The Weber School, was one of the recipients of The Covenant Award in 2004. barbararosenblit@gmail.com

is not interchangeable line work but aspires to virtuosity—slow, measured, skilled, purposeful, and profoundly beautiful.

“What we need more than anything else is not textbooks,” Abraham Joshua Heschel wrote, “but text people. It is the personality of the teacher, which is the text that pupils read: the text that they will never forget.” We say it. We quote it. We repeat it. We give talks about it. We elegeize it. We talk and talk and talk the talk. But we don’t walk the walk. If we did, teaching would be a profession that elicits awe and respect when disclosed. More familiar is the response, “Still in the classroom? I thought you’d have moved on and up by now!”

Can we talk about real schools? Our managers create a laundry list of expectations for those still on the line. Besides “teaching,” a partial list of expectations includes counseling and weekly check-ins and phone calls and meetings with parents, tutoring during lunch and before and after school, staffing tefillah programs and shabbaton weekends, club advising and articles for the website, summaries of student progress and updating online grades each week, attending sports events to show support, monitoring lunch and detention duty, designing programs for potential parents or current grandparents or prospective students, running advisory programs that assume expertise in drugs or bullying or sexting.

And beyond that, we are asked to demonstrate the skills of the generalist: to teach all students equally well, ranging from those with extensive learning and behavior profiles to the most intellectually able, to guide students at every level, to never lose patience and to always inspire, even in subjects in which we may have neither interest nor expertise because, we are told, there is “no one else” to do it. And we mop up extra time in the day covering absent colleagues’ classes as uncompensated “in-house” substitutes.

The salary structure assumes that one can’t afford to stay in the classroom without serious financial compromise. Compensation of teachers unapologetically assumes a second family earner who, ideally, can



Did you never have your own Mr. Yglesias who swooned as he read us poems and we saw that teaching can even lift you out of your seat and transfix you in midair?

also provide decent benefits and retirement security. Our profession devours its own.

Educators across fields, and that include ours, wax loud and eloquently about teachers who know their fields and model for students what a lifetime of curi-

osity and intellectual fireworks looks like. But mostly we no longer aspire to virtuosity and we don’t ask the questions that deserve long and self-reflective answers. Let’s face down the elephant that has taken up permanent residence in the faculty room. We insistently bemoan mediocrity, criticize current teaching models, think about how technology will enliven and encourage learners who do or don’t care, navigate our way through the briars and pinpoint where the bells and whistles stop and the engagement begins.

We talk day and night. But let’s stare down the fact that the best and brightest aren’t interested in ending up in a dead end job with endless expectations and few enhancements. We can wax poetic about our calling, but without a paradigm shift, nothing substantive will draw great talents in and make it inviting to stay.

The National Council on Teacher Quality described teaching as “an

[CONTINUED ON PAGE 12]

industry of mediocrity.” Are our concerted efforts at creating a Jewish teacher corps of talented, able, trained, intellectually curious and professionally engaged young people paying off? On many measures, the answer is yes. There are now post-collegiate opportunities to both learn and be taught to teach Jewish subjects in Jewish schools, to sharpen and even practice the craft. The value of intensely mentoring new teachers is no longer a new notion (though schools’ ability to provide what they promise new teachers is often exaggerated). But I am always somehow caught off guard when I hear how we, like proud parents, brag about the ones who have moved “up.” I myself am sad when the great ones, or at least the ones with great potential, leave to become directors or heads or whatever else forces them out of the classroom.

And with further irony, when the great teachers are tapped and leave for administrative positions, they suffer. I’ve been there, and I know. Succumbing to the arguments that one can impact more children by teaching other teachers, by running a program, by designing curriculum, by giving workshops on how to teach (now that you no longer do), I have been prey to those lures. And I have been surprised at how easy these jobs are to me compared to the demands of daily, ongoing classroom life. But I ricochet back, not because I am a masochist looking for hard, often maligned and always exposed (yet in many ways invisible) work, but because teachers have the power to launch the students they teach up, away, and out, beyond us.

Come now and imagine. Imagine with me what teaching would look like if we truly believed that teaching is not a place to *begin* but a place to *be*.

Teaching’s career ladder would encourage only the best and brightest on the first rungs because the very best would hold endowed chairs with compensation matching any administrator’s.

Teaching would provide regular and heralded opportunities for funded sabbaticals, from which you would return renewed, revitalized, ideas alive, recharged.

The teaching day would be structured so that time would no longer be the foe of learning, cushioning the pressurized day of public visibility with private time to become self-reflective, self-corrective, self-aware teachers. There would be time to meet, to talk, to think, to muse, to imagine, to create, compose, engage, invent, and to connect.

Teachers would be on a continual path of serious learning. For the best teachers, stretching intellectually is as vital as breathing. Yet we regularly infantilize teachers with what we offer as education-

I have succumbed to the arguments that one can impact more children by running a program, designing curriculum, giving workshops on how to teach (now that you no longer do).

Imagine what teaching would look like if we truly believed that teaching is not a place to begin but a place to be.

al opportunities. One of the most reliable jokes for an audience of teachers attending a “professional development” workshop is this one: “Dear Lord, please let me die at a staff development workshop. The difference between being alive and being dead is so indiscernible that I probably won’t even notice I’ve died.”

In my own perfect system, energy would vibrate around the idea of curriculum; it would be the jewel in the school crown, organic and fluid and malleable, not be a puzzle where separate pieces lock together but a collage, where seemingly unrelated ideas juxtapose, shifting over time to make new mean-

ing. There would be time for curiosity, for charged conversations, and tolerance for risk-taking among teaching colleagues. With the freedom to erase the boundaries between disciplines, the word “text” would expand beyond Mikrah or Mishnah. A Yom Kippur text could become a Rembrandt self-portrait, a Bereshit text a Haydn oratorio, a text about exile and exodus—a canto from Dante, a Jewish history text—a vintage handbag and the woman who carried it.

Teaching would no longer be viewed as a gladiator sport, with young teachers thrown into the lion’s den trying to survive through their wits. There would be time to watch the masters work and we would come to know what it looks like when students want to be in the room.

The best and brightest would be teachers. Supporting and compensating them and their artistic gifts would be an essential vision of the school.

Can you now imagine what teaching would be if we truly believed that teaching is not a place to begin but a place to be? Surrounded by like-minded souls and hovering in that zone where disciplines overlap and ideas create new bonds, where there was time to think and create, where teachers would be specialists and not generalists, the line work done by paraprofessionals, teachers would find paradise. Can you imagine such a place?

I can.

It would cost money. And in my ideal system, inverting the pyramid means that money would shake out as it upends.

Indulge me a final image. When all is said and done, a teacher as artist is allowed only two stage props, a mirror and a window. With the mirror, teachers can see their own reflections and see who they are. And through the window they train their eyes to what lies beyond themselves. Can we employ these mirrors and windows to both examine and energize our profession? Or are the influential guardians of the pyramid they have constructed going to protect and maintain, at all costs, the structure over which they preside? ■

Head of School Professional Excellence Project (PEP)

Jennifer Fraenkel, head of the Akiva School outside Montreal, discusses the impact of this bold new RAVSAK program:

Everyone who has actually taken on the new role of head of school can understand what I mean when I refer to the wave. You can be sitting in your office and think you are on top of everything, juggling this and thinking about that. You have three word document files open on your desktop, three unfinished e-mails going at once, and a smile on your face every time someone knocks on your door and asks, "Are you busy?" Then one more thing pops up that needs your immediate attention and that's when the wave hits. I literally sit back in my chair and make the "whoosh" sound and movement with my hands. The person in front of me smiles and I drop all the balls I'm juggling.

The two most important things you quickly learn in your first few months are how to prioritize, and how to separate the big from the small. Being part of the HOS PEP is the reason I know this. This knowledge is empowering and sustaining. Without this real understanding, success as a head may be for a limited time. Having a weekly call forces me to discuss and focus on what really matters, on what absolutely is part of my priorities and on keeping my focus on the big picture and not getting stuck in the minutia. Knowing I have someone with infinite wisdom on the other end is helpful in the moment, provides me with a sense of continuity and security in the interim, and is empowering for the long run.

Being part of the HOSPEP is a privilege that I do not take lightly. Forming a relationship through weekly conversations requires both parties to have a commitment to the process

and to believe that the benefits are tremendous. The thought-provoking questions, at times pushing me out of my comfort zone, lead to discussions that without fail leave me feeling energized, positive and secure in my growth as a leader. I truly am grateful to be a part of this project and I know without a doubt that it is having exponentially positive effects on my early success as a new head.

Work is already underway to plan the 2014-15 cohort of the RAVSAK HoS Professional Excellence Project. If you are a head of school in your first three years of practice or are about to become a new HoS, you are eligible to apply. For additional information, please contact Cooki Levy, project director (cooki@ravsak.org). Preliminary meetings with Cooki for anyone who wants to explore further this unique opportunity will be set up during the January conference in Los Angeles. ■



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State of the Field

TEACHER TRAINING FOR DAY SCHOOLS

We invited leaders from some of the major organizations training teachers to work in Jewish day schools to reflect upon their work, share what they've learned from their experience, offer some guidance and wisdom for day school leaders and think about their work in relation to the whole, as part of a field. This roundtable conversation expands upon a similar conversation that took place at this past year's North American Day School Conference.

Is the current system of teacher training for day schools working? I.e., are enough teachers being trained at the level needed to be effective Jewish educators in day schools? If not, what needs to be done better and what changes do you think should take place?

Sharon Feiman-Nemser: The question makes several assumptions which are problematic. First, it implies that there is a "system of teacher training" for day school teachers. Nothing could be further from reality. There are a handful of programs that prepare day school teachers (e.g., the DeLeT programs at HUC-JIR in LA and at Brandeis

University, the PARDES Educators Program, the teacher education program at YU) and other graduate programs with tracks for day school teachers. But there is nothing systematic about these efforts: no common standards for what well prepared day school teachers should know, do, care about and no shared standards for what strong professional preparation entails.

A second assumption is that we actually know how many teachers are being prepared to teach various subjects at various levels and how many such teachers are actually needed. No one collects that kind of data, so we have no dependable basis for making projections about the supply of and demand for well prepared day school teachers.

The question also presumes that we know



Dr. Sharon Feiman-Nemser is the Mandel Professor of Jewish Education at Brandeis University where she directs the Mandel Center for Studies in Jewish Education, teaches practitioner research in the Delet Program and does research on teacher education and teacher learning.

Amy Ament is the associate director of the Jewish New Teacher Project (JNTP), which partners with schools to train and support mentors for beginning teachers in their schools, and adjunct instructor in the education department at Stern College for Women.

Dr. Miriam Heller Stern is the dean of the Graduate Center for Education at American Jewish University, and is a day school alumna and parent.

what it means to be an “effective Jewish educator” and what it takes to prepare one. Is an effective Jewish educator someone who knows how to make her subject matter accessible to diverse learners? Is an effective Jewish educator someone who models meaningful Jewish living? Is an effective Jewish educator someone who produces strong student learning? Is an effective Jewish educator someone who creates a caring and engaged learning community?

I appreciate the opportunity to think with colleagues about these important questions regarding day school teacher education and development and thank you for posing them.

Miriam Heller Stern: Day schools are diverse in their visions, ideologies and school cultures. Day school leaders, both lay and professional, need to participate in the conversation about teacher training if we are to create a shared set of expectations for Jewish teaching that serves a shared vision for the graduates and Jewish communities we hope our schools will foster.

Shira Epstein: Another challenge is that day schools do not have one unified vision of what constitutes an “ideal” teacher. During the job search process, students share that while some schools place primacy on specific Judaics skills or competencies such as rabbinics or teaching Ivrit b’Ivrit, others seek a young, dynamic teacher who can implement constructivist methods. Some schools are willing to compromise on “content knowledge” if they see potential in a teacher for cultivating a positive classroom culture, possessing a solid approach to behavioral management, or attending to the needs of learners with diverse needs.

Amy Ament: I, too, appreciate the opportunity to think with this esteemed panel about what it could look like if there were synergy (or at least alignment) between the teacher preparatory programs and the support they

How powerful it could be if there were one spectrum of teacher practice that included pre-service and in-service support and professional development.

receive in the field. Pre-service education plays a critical role in establishing norms and expectations of behavior for teachers (reflective thinking, looking at student work, collecting and analyzing data) for teachers. How powerful it could be if there were one spectrum of teacher practice that included pre-service and in-service support and professional development.

What do beginning day school teachers need to know, care about, and be able to do?

Rona Novick: To consider what teachers in Jewish day schools need to know and be able to do,

we must consider what we hope graduates of Jewish day schools will know and be able to do. Like all graduates of all schools, they are expected to possess knowledge of and skills in those subjects taught, and for Jewish day school graduates this includes two distinct curricula. Teachers in Jewish day schools must therefore, like their secular school colleagues, possess both pedagogic and content-area knowledge. I suggest two additional areas of skills and knowledge critical to success for Jewish day school students: social-emotional and spiritual growth. Public schools’ attempts to address social-emotional learning may be limited by the current focus on academic standards. Jewish day school teachers, tasked with inculcating students with a way of thinking and living as part of a community, must have promoting students’ social and spiritual growth as an educational priority.

Jewish thought and practice values *community*. From the requirement to have a quorum of 10 for prayer to Jewish rituals for times of joy and mourning, Judaism is not a lone wolf culture or religion. Students in Jewish day schools need well-developed skills of empathy, to encourage their active and positive participation in their local communities. Much more challenging than engaging students in clothing drives for peers oceans away, or raising funds for disaster victims, is the development

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Dr. Rona Novick is the director of the Fanya Gottesfeld Heller Doctoral Program in Jewish Education and Administration at the Azrieli Graduate School of Yeshiva University.



Dr. Shira D. Epstein is an assistant professor of Jewish education in the Davidson School at JTS and coordinates the day school concentration.



Dr. Susan Wall is the director of the Pardes Educators Alumni Support Program, teaches pedagogy to the Pardes Educators and is on the staff of the Pardes Center for Jewish Educators.

[CONTINUED FROM PAGE 15]

of a caring school community where every student accepts his/her responsibility for every other student's sense of safety, belonging and value.

Empathy is a skill all schools want their students to master, but in public schools, students have greater social choices. Jewish students, participants in a somewhat insular and highly connected social community, will most likely attend school, camp, sports leagues and scouting groups with the same cohort of students. Learning to get along with and care about those peers not only serves children's personal needs, it is the building block for the social engagement and responsibility Jewish communities need for their continuity.

Teachers in Jewish schools are charged with another incredible challenge: the *spiritual development* of their students. This necessitates understanding spiritual development and finding a delicate balance between teaching skills that underpin Jewish ritual, and creating an environment that encourages students to consider, question and address large issues of God and belief. Teachers are, at once, storytellers, skill-builders, philosophers, and role models. Well beyond knowing Jewish ritual, history and texts, teachers in Jewish day schools need to know how to gift their students with enough knowledge and skill to appreciate the majesty and mystery of Jewish tradition and belief.

Amy Ament: We must also ask ourselves if we have these expectations only for our teachers of Judaic texts. What about general studies teachers? What about non-Jewish teachers who teach in our schools?

Miriam Heller Stern: Facing one's vulnerability is essential for the empathy, spiritual development and community building which Dr. Novick describes. Our students and teachers are often so afraid to fail that they cannot bravely face and overcome their challenges. With so much pressure to perform and achieve, our school cultures need to signal to students and teachers that it is okay to be vulnerable, because vulnerability is the first step toward growth.

What other expectations are there for the diverse roles day school teachers need to play?

Susan Wall: My hesitation in addressing this question lies in setting out expectations that are so enormous that they would seem impossible to achieve. And yet, being a teacher—and particularly a Judaic studies teacher in a Jewish day school—must be an avocation, not

just a profession. Given the limited time allotted to Judaic studies during the week, if day schools are to help students form substantial and meaningful Jewish identities (in addition to teaching them Jewish content), the role the teacher plays must extend beyond the classroom.

Teachers are called on to plan and facilitate holiday programs, lead discussions of current events and staff shabbatonim. We expect that they will facilitate tefillah, chaperone Israel trips, serve as a Jewish resource for colleagues and parents (sometimes as *the* Jewish resource in smaller communities). Most teachers are not equipped with the different skill sets that would allow them to live up to these expectations. How many have worked in experiential education, spent significant time in

Israel and personally struggled with tefillah?

All teachers should be able to relate well to students, but this is particularly important when the students identify their teachers with *what it means to be Jewish*. We need teachers who are real and accessible Jewish role models: teachers with a passion for what they teach, for Jewish life and Jewish peoplehood. Teachers who have grappled with and continue to grapple with the same issues of faith and relevance that their students grapple with. Teachers who embody Jewish values in their behavior, in and out of the classroom.

Our day schools are mini-communities. We expect our teachers to value and respect not only the school's orientation, but the unique perspective that each student (from whatever background or affiliation) brings to this enterprise of Jewish learning. We want our children to learn how to build and be part of those communities, which includes seeing how their teachers take part in that community, how they relate to one another and to their students. And these teachers need to model for the students their commitment to continued learning and growth as Jews.

These expectations have ramifications for who we hire as well as for our pre-service training, induction and professional development. This is a great deal to expect from any one person, but holy work demands nothing less.

What roles can/do schools play in teacher preparation, induction, continuing PD?

Amy Ament: The Jewish New Teacher Project, the day school division of the New Teacher Center, primarily works with two populations of teachers: our mentors are teachers with five or more years of experience in the classroom, who are skilled practitioners, effec-

[CONTINUED ON PAGE 18]

Day school teachers need to know how to gift their students with enough knowledge and skill to appreciate the majesty and mystery of Jewish tradition and belief.

Our school cultures need to signal to students and teachers that it is okay to be vulnerable, because vulnerability is the first step toward growth.

A young man is shown in a classroom setting, holding a complex geometric model. The background is slightly blurred, showing other students and classroom furniture. The text "DISCOVER MORE" is overlaid in a large, bold, blue serif font.

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A group of five students, three girls and two boys, are smiling and looking towards the camera. They are wearing traditional Jewish prayer shawls (tallitot). The background shows a classroom or study area with bookshelves and windows. The text "EXPERIENCE MORE" is overlaid in a large, bold, blue serif font.

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tive communicators, open-minded thinkers and good listeners; the teachers they work with are in their first years of teaching.

In the past ten years, we have learned the following about what both novice and veteran teachers need:

Teachers are not “finished products” at the completion of their pre-service training programs. (We should also acknowledge that not all teachers have the benefit of attending a preparatory program.) Just as graduates in the field of law, medicine or engineering are required to pursue apprenticeships, residencies, or other on-the-job training, so too, our teachers in their first years are in need of support and growth opportunities. New teachers *want* to become the most successful and effective teachers they can be. It is our responsibility to help them become so. It is during these first years that teachers learn the habits of practice that will guide them throughout their careers, including reflection, self-assessment and collaboration with others.

The first years of teaching are a transition period for teachers. During this time, they actualize, implement and apply the knowledge and theory they bring with them. They need permission and a safe framework in which to experiment with ideas, strategies and techniques. They need feedback from trusted allies. They need opportunities to examine their practice in deep and objective ways. Truly, all teachers benefit from this type of environment where reflection and collaboration are the norm.

Teachers of all levels of experience and expertise need the opportunity to continue their growth and learning, and professional development needs to be ongoing. Somewhere around years 5-7, teachers' practice could begin to plateau. With sustained and meaningful professional development—these teachers can recharge, refuel and reach levels of mastery as they deepen their professional knowledge, effectiveness and self-efficacy. One of the most powerful aspects of mentoring is that the newly-trained mentors return to their classrooms revitalized; the skills they learn help them become better teachers themselves.

It is incumbent upon schools to help induct new teachers into the profession and provide ongoing learning opportunities for more experienced teachers.

Schools can support these teachers by providing:

Opportunities for growth for novice and veteran teachers. When we create cultures within our schools where reflection and professional growth are valued, we open the doors for all teachers to learn. Beginning teachers bring with them valuable assets; they are passionate, committed, idealistic, and enthusiastic, and those with pre-service experience often bring with them an understanding of the latest research in education and psychology. Schools can provide opportunities for teachers to become part of a community of learners where all teachers collaborate and benefit from the exchange.

In these cases, the culture becomes one where are teachers grow; everyone can make mistakes and support each other. Wouldn't it be empowering if the talk in the teachers' room were focused on teaching and learning?

Individual support for beginning teachers. We advocate for one-on-one, intensive, instructional mentoring for all new teachers, the goal of which is for beginning teachers to develop reflective, problem-solving, collaborative habits of practice. Providing the time and personnel to do this is an investment in the school's future, one from which the school will reap benefits down the line. With the support of their mentor, novice teachers receive dedicated time and dedicated space to reflect on their practice, look at student work, get feedback on their teaching, collect and analyze data, set goals and self-assess their professional practice on a continuum of professional teaching standards. We have also seen effective results when principals ensure that the working conditions are conducive to teacher success and growth, including dedicated time, adequate supplies and resources, and appropriate assignments, along with clear communication about expectations and ongoing feedback.

Sharon Feiman-Nemser: Without strong clinical sites, it is impossible to mount a strong teacher preparation program. Teaching is a practice, so learning to teach ultimately happens in the context of teaching. Experienced day school teachers play an essential role as models and mentors, inducting aspiring and beginning teachers into the intellectual and practical work of teaching.

There is no master key; the teacher must master how to match many different keys to multiple locks.

New teacher induction happens with or without an intentional program. New teachers learn through their daily interactions what it means to be a teacher in a given day school and whether they can ask for help. Day schools that take the learning needs of new teachers seriously give them appropriate assignments and provide the material and human support they need to succeed.

All teachers deserve ongoing opportunities to study and improve their teaching. Such professional development can take many forms: teachers observing one another, developing curriculum together, analyzing student work, engaging in lesson study. To insure that these professional learning opportunities result in improved practice, day schools need teacher leaders who can facilitate productive teacher learning.

Shira Epstein: In pre-service training, we ask our student teachers to continuously, methodically engage in “reflective practice.” We can't, however, expect that they will integrate this time-consuming practice into their daily work when they are overwhelmed first-year teachers. Novice teachers need sustained opportunities for reflection both with in-school mentors and during structured consultation with groups of colleagues.

Susan Wall: I agree with both Amy and Sharon in terms of the importance of providing new teachers with strong induction support.

Unfortunately there is too wide a range in terms of what schools do provide and the financial investments they make toward teacher learning. We need some commitment to national standards of teacher induction and access for all teachers to induction support and continuing professional development.

How do you see the needs of the field changing, in terms of the skills and knowledge that teachers are expected to have?

Miriam Heller Stern: In an increasingly competitive school marketplace, where parents are demanding “the best” education for their children and the best value for their tuition, Jewish schools have become far more motivated to cater to the desires of their consumers. In this climate, parents, students and school leaders expect teachers to be jacks of all trades: they must be adept at the latest innovative and technological trends in education; experts in subject matter; and churn out students who consistently score high on standardized tests.

To satisfy sometimes divergent expectations, teachers need to learn how to navigate their pedagogical choices in their daily decisions: when is student learning served best through lecture, and when do students thrive in pursuing independent projects? When is training in testing skills appropriate, and when does the subject invite authentic, creative assessments? In most Jewish day schools, teachers need to be both conventional and progressive to meet all of their constituents’ expectations. Whereas it was once assumed that teaching was uniform and predictable, today teachers need to be prepared to diversify their offerings. The disposition of decision-making is essential for a teacher’s success, a disposition which takes practice and experience to hone.

Beyond delivering excellence in academics, in a Jewish school, the teacher is the gatekeeper of the Jewish soul. Developing a love of learning is as important as mastering content. Most Jewish schools also want their graduates to be leaders, mensches, and committed to Israel and the Jewish people. The Jewish establishment has pinned high hopes for the Jewish future on Jewish schools, and Jewish teachers hold the keys to that future. There is no master key, however; the teacher must master how to match many different keys to multiple locks.

Rona Novick: The change in how schools and families relate creates another area of skill teachers require. Whereas previously parents viewed schools as respected and unchallengeable authorities, current educational practice encourages parent involvement and respects parents’ unique knowledge about their children. In Jewish day schools, parental involvement may be critical to the success of various programs, but it may also cause territorial tensions. With intense pressures on both schools (demands for stellar academic curricula and meaningful religious studies) and families (more families with both parents in the workforce), it is not surprising that struggles regarding boundaries and job descriptions surface. Overworked and overburdened, schools and parents task each other with increasing responsibilities, arguing about whose job it is to teach social skills, inculcate religious values, build self-esteem, develop manners, etc. Amid this

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Painting a Teacher Portrait

■ by **NANCY PRYZANT PICUS**

The Shlenker School developed this tool to clarify teacher expectations. By soliciting teacher collaboration in composing this document, the administration empowered teachers to help define their role within the values of the school community.

Four years ago at the Shlenker School in Houston, we hired an experienced teacher to teach fifth grade math and science. Her teaching partner had been teaching at the school for almost twenty years; however, in recent years, she had become more and more unwilling to take direction from her supervisors. As the year unfolded, it became obvious that both teachers were failing to meet our expectations, and the following year, neither was a member of our staff.

During the summer, as the administrative team discussed what had happened, it became clear to us that while we had been explicit in stating certain pedagogical goals for both teachers, we had not done the same with other expectations such as participation in school events, communication with students, staff and parents, and so forth. We had failed to acculturate our new hire by not teaching her “the Shlenker way,” nor had we held our longstanding teacher accountable to those unstated standards of behavior.

To prevent a similar situation from occurring, we decided to involve our entire faculty in the process of describing a teacher’s professional responsibilities. The result was a deep and fruitful conversation between teachers and administrators, and a clear, concise document titled “Portrait of a Shlenker Teacher.” The document does not list specific duties of a teacher, as those duties will differ depending upon the teacher’s teaching assignment. However, it does capture the commitments the school makes to our students, their families and our community, as stated by its mission and core values.

At the first working meeting, teachers were divided into five ran-

dom groups. The groups were asked to list their responsibilities toward five specific entities: their students, their students’ families, the school administration, the curriculum and each other. Each group was given a laptop. With each laptop, one person captured the group’s discussion.

It became clear to us that while we had been explicit in stating certain pedagogical goals for both teachers, we had not done the same with other expectations.

After about fifteen minutes, the laptops were switched between groups. The second group was asked to add to the list that the previous group had started. However, this time, they were asked to consider the list

through a different lens: namely, to consider their responsibilities specifically as a member of the faculty of our Reform Jewish day school. This process was repeated one more time, when teachers were asked to consider their responsibilities as a professional practitioner.

The five documents that were created were stored on the school’s shared on-line storage so they would be accessible to everyone. Teachers were invited to add statements or comment, but they were not allowed to change anyone’s words. At the next faculty meeting, teachers were regrouped and asked to edit the documents. Because this process was conducted separately with the elementary faculty and the early childhood faculty, the final step involving teachers was a “conference committee” with five representatives from each group. Pairs of teachers, one from each division, each edited one document.

After the individual documents were completed, they were combined into one document and edited by an administrator so that the entire document could be uniformly formatted, and

[CONTINUED ON PAGE 22]



Nancy Pryzant Picus is the director of Jewish learning at the Shlenker School in Houston. npicus@shlenker.org

Portrait of a Shlenker Teacher

Summer, 2013

As teachers at The Shlenker School, we are educators who demonstrate our dedication to our students, their families, our school's curriculum, our colleagues, and our school leaders by respecting the Jewish character of our school and adhering to these professional responsibilities and standards:

Responsibilities To Our Students:

- We will ensure the safety and needs of our students.
- We will provide a fun, loving learning environment.
- We will provide a healthy and orderly learning environment in the classroom.
- We will adjust our teaching styles to the learning styles of all students and their individual needs.
- We will foster independence and self-confidence in our students by providing opportunities for them to develop social skills.
- We will take advantage of teachable moments and explore all academic possibilities.
- We will foster an environment which encourages all students to respect themselves and others.
- We will help our students understand that mistakes provide us with opportunities to learn.
- We will praise and acknowledge accomplishments.
- We will guide our student to love, understand and appreciate Jewish values.

Responsibilities To Our School's Curriculum

- We will introduce and teach the curriculum based on common core standards, providing differentiated instruction and individualized attention.
- We will create a student-centered environment that promotes out-of-the-box thinking and hands-on experiences.
- We will continually update lessons and materials so they are age-appropriate and meet the needs of every student.
- We will align our curriculum vertically by working with other grade levels.
- We will keep current with curriculum trends by attending workshops to improve our knowledge.
- We will provide curriculum that connects to our students' lives.
- We will foster and value the understanding that students come from different backgrounds.
- We will ensure success by using measurable standards and holding students accountable for them.
- We will integrate technology into our lessons.
- We will integrate Jewish content into secular curriculum by looking at our instruction through a Jewish lens.

Responsibilities To Our Students' Families

- We will view families as partners in their children's education.
- We will keep in constant, honest communication with families regarding weekly activities, academics and behavior.
- We will make families feel secure that their children are in a safe

and friendly environment.

- We will listen to families' concerns, follow up, and make our best effort to ensure a positive outcome.
- We will be respectful, friendly, open-minded towards all Shlenker families.

Responsibilities Toward Our Colleagues

- We will cooperate and collaborate with other teachers by planning together, supporting new ideas, being flexible and open-minded, and inclusive of all team members.
- We will support each other by providing guidance and emotional care for new teachers or those in need of our help.
- We will demonstrate professionalism by handling disagreements privately and by following the school's procedures.
- We will respect each other's differences, strengths and weaknesses.
- We will, when necessary, agree to disagree and move forward.
- We will create a non-competitive environment among ourselves.
- We will share our work with teammates and partners.
- We will feel comfortable enough to seek help from our colleagues
- We will respect the work environment by maintaining focus on student learning.
- We will refrain from gossip.
- We will support non-Jewish teachers by helping them understand Jewish culture, values, and grade-level Jewish content.

Responsibilities To Our School Leaders

- We will be up to date on, adhere to and implement school policies accordingly.
- We will inform administration promptly if there is an issue with parents, guardians, or grandparents in the classroom so that they are aware of any potential issues.
- We will be professional and respectful of each administrator's time and responsibilities and acknowledge the school hierarchy.
- We will provide the necessary paperwork, information and communications within a day or the stated time to administration.
- We will know and follow the policies included in The Shlenker School Personnel Handbook and Parent and Student Handbook.
- We will support schoolwide functions through participation and attendance.
- We will share successes as well as problems and issues with administration.

so that the language and syntax of the document would be consistent throughout the portrait. The final step was review and approval by the administrative team during the past summer.

At the beginning of the current academic year, a close look at the completed document was an important part of our in-service week. In a joint faculty meeting led by the elementary principal, the early childhood principal and the director of Jewish learning, the process of developing the portrait were reviewed and the members of the “conference committee”

that created a unified document were recognized. Then, in groups, staff members were asked to engage deeply with just one section of the portrait and present its contents to the larger group. The resulting presentations were creative, artistic, humorous and memorable. The entire staff, from office personnel to maintenance supervisor to head of school, left that final faculty meeting energized and excited by the sense of professional camaraderie engendered by the portrait they had created.

In addition to fomenting a thoughtful and often passionate discussion about the art of teaching, the process of developing the “Portrait of a Shlenker Teacher” and the resulting document have given supervisors new tools for hiring, supervising, mentoring and evaluating teachers. A teacher who is seeking a position at our school will now

be able to understand our expectations, even before filling out an application. Those of us who hire can use the portrait as a guide when we seek references for prospective teachers.

Once hired, teachers are asked to set at least one personal professional goal based on the portrait. Part of our supervision will now include looking at that teacher’s goal and helping him/her take steps to accomplish it; year-end evaluation will include conversation about how successful the teacher has been meeting that professional challenge. Finally, if we are faced with the unfortunate but sometimes inevitable reality that a teacher has not met the professional responsibilities listed in our portrait, it can be used as a tool to justify the difficult decision of termination.

Throughout the process, our administrative team relied upon the work of the Mandel Center for Studies in Jewish Education. Their Teacher Learning Project Toolkit served as an invaluable resource for us as we took our first step toward our own plan for teacher induction here at the Shlenker School.

Because each school has its own unique culture and history, the process with which our portrait was created will not be appropriate for all schools. However, the need for a clearly stated set of expectations is universal, as are the positive outcomes these expectations will bring. ■

The process of developing the portrait and the resulting document have given supervisors new tools for hiring, supervising, mentoring and evaluating teachers.

State of the Field: Teacher Training for Day Schools

[CONTINUED FROM PAGE 19]

often tense debate, teachers are challenged to cultivate and maintain productive relationships with parents.

What are the biggest changes that you’ve seen in your time working with teachers? What are the most positive developments and the biggest challenges for the field, in your view?

Shira Epstein: One of the biggest changes I’ve noticed over the past decade is schools’ implementation of processes and structures that enable teachers to more fully attend to the socio-emotional needs of their learners, as Rona discusses above. The student teaching experience has expanded to include mentoring on how to facilitate biweekly advisory groups and how to thoughtfully contribute

to a team meeting that focuses on how best to support the needs of one particular child.

While novice teachers are pleasantly surprised by schools’ focus on relationship-building, they are often overwhelmed by the expectations and demands that this places upon them. In my own first year of teaching, if anxious parents wanted to reach me after hours, they would need to leave a voice mail message and wait until I had time the following day to connect. When a first-year teacher receives a detailed late-night email from a parent, the pressure is felt immediately to craft a response that conveys concern and understanding—and this can come at the cost of much-needed sleep.

We want teachers to take advantage of digital platforms that allow them to keep parents and

learners engaged with daily updates on assignments, grades and behavioral issues. We need to also be sensitive, however, to novice teachers’ learning curve in managing their time, and to helping them to set reasonable limits and expectations for both themselves and others.

Susan Wall: I echo what Shira said in terms of the challenge of the increased expectations on teachers (and how overwhelming this can be for our newest teachers). There is clearly a very positive side to the accountability this implies, but new teachers need the support of administration not only in setting limits, but in how to respond to these numerous demands. In terms of positives, I see a greater emphasis on big ideas and meaning-making in the study of Jewish texts, and making text study a more central focus of the Judaics curriculum. ■

We are very pleased to announce two new programs that extend the strong track record of Project Sulam in empowering day school leaders to hone and strengthen their Jewish lens on educational leadership. We thank the AVI CHAI Foundation for their continued faith in the program's mission and efficacy. We would also like to thank Legacy Heritage Fund for its generous support of Project Sulam. RAVSAK additionally thanks an anonymous funder for their support of SuLaM Alumni.

RAVSAK Launches Sulam 2.0 for Board Leadership

Sulam 2.0 is an elite, intensive program addressing the unique needs of day school boards. Sulam 2.0 is the only program of its kind to blend mentorship, ongoing learning opportunities and institutes with top educators to strengthen knowledge of governance, increase leadership skills and better integrate good Jewish values into all participants do.

The project director is Orlee Turitz, a leadership coach and day school board president. She is joined by five outstanding field leaders to serve as coaches: Jonathan Cannon, Dr. Ann Cohen, Rabbi Dr. Joshua Elkin, Dr. Dina Gerber Huebner and Rae Ringel.

Schools selected for this dynamic project will identify three board members—an executive member, mid-level and new member—to receive consistent, high-level support, helping to champion top-level Jewish board governance in their schools. Sulam 2.0 will provide the tools to maintain strong, sustainable day schools for the twenty-first century. By building and sustaining strong Jewish leadership in community day schools, Sulam 2.0 will empower board members to more deeply engage in and advocate for the Jewish life of the schools they lead, while building their network of potential collaborators and experts in the field.

“Sulam 2.0 will benefit Jewish day schools across the country through an intensive, varied skills-building agenda incorporating personal mentorship and participation in larger events for the day school community,” said Orlee Turitz.

“I am thrilled to partner with our network schools as we work together with their leadership to build stronger institutions of learning that educate and inspire their students while instilling Jewish literacy and contributing to their Jewish identity,” said Rebekah Farber, RAVSAK’s chair. ■

For more information about Sulam 2.0, please email Orlee Turitz at orlee@ravsak.org.

Sulam Alumni Project: Class in Progress

For the past five years Sulam alumni—known affectionately as Sulamites—have taken part in a dynamic, rich and invigorating shabbaton filled with deep learning, great conversation and spirited tefillah. This year the alumni of all four cohorts are provided with the opportunity not just to enjoy this shabbaton but also to rekindle the community of shared learning throughout the year, in several ways.

Four study circles have been established to enable participants’ personal and professional learning through Jewish growth. Two of these focus on text study, to be led by Sulam mentors: one on the biblical books of Esther and Ruth; a second on Pirkei Avot. Two others look at works of current scholarship on Judaic education: one studying *Loving the Real Israel* by Alex Sinclair, and a second on *Turn It and Turn It Again*, edited by Jon Levisohn and Sue Fendrick.

Participants are signing up to contribute to a weekly parsha blog. They will write a short dvar Torah to be distributed among their Sulam peers. People can share them with their school, in a newsletter or other forum, or simply read them for pleasure and inspiration.

Additionally, funds are available to enable Sulamites to continue their individual learning, in a forum convenient to them: a class, tutorial, or online offering.

Aside from these opportunities for study and reflection, a new Reshet Sulam has been established for sharing questions, thoughts, information, successes, resources etc. in the same way as the other RAVSAK reshatot. Reshet Sulam is part of RAVSAK’s project to weave together people throughout the RAVSAK network in ways that are most useful and meaningful to them. This reshet—Hebrew for “network”—is an opportunity for participants to continue to learn from each other, support each other, and inspire each other as a community, to continue to draw from the wells of Jewish wisdom and connection dug by Project Sulam.

We’re so excited to continue to strengthen this Sulam community through our shared commitment to Jewish study and leadership. ■

School Quality Depends on Teacher Quality

■ by ERAN TAMIR

The author of a large-scale study of teachers at Jewish day schools finds that teacher support, including professional development and mentoring, is critical for satisfaction and retention, and needs to be considered as an ecosystem beyond the schools themselves.

Some people believe that day schools could thrive if we pursue donors and parents aggressively and/or hire the right leaders. Yet decades of research in general education suggest that teachers are the single most important school-related factor affecting student learning outcomes—more than principals or anything else within the boundaries of a school. In other words, these findings suggest that the quality of a school is to a large extent correlated and dependent on the quality of its teachers.

Knowing that high quality teaching is crucial does not mean researchers have a clear understanding of what exactly constitutes teacher quality. There is a consensus that teachers need to know their subject matter well and be able to teach it effectively to diverse groups of learners. But there are other important variables that contribute to teacher effectiveness. When teachers are carefully recruited and prepared for teaching in particular school contexts, and when they are offered meaningful mentorship and professional development opportunities, as well as administration support at their schools, they are more likely to become satisfied and effective, and as a result stay longer in the profession.

When those components are lacking, teachers are more likely to leave early on, forcing a vicious cycle of recruitment and spending to bring in new and often inexperienced teachers, just to see them leave school a few years after their arrival. Besides the rising cost involved with recruitment and induction of new teachers, teacher attrition impedes the development of a cohesive professional culture and is harmful for student learning. While this phenom-

enon is often seen as related to urban public schools, studies suggest that many day schools have also failed to create the conditions of support that would enable their teachers to stay for the long term.

In a recent study based on a comprehensive survey of 639 teachers from Jewish day schools across the US and Canada, I examined who are the teachers that currently teach in day schools. I wanted to understand if and to what extent teachers are supported and satisfied, and to what extent are they committed to teaching their students and serving the Jewish community. Together with my collaborator Sally Lesik, I considered a broad array of school conditions, as well as teachers' motivations and commitments that could help explain what causes teachers to stay in or leave day school teaching.

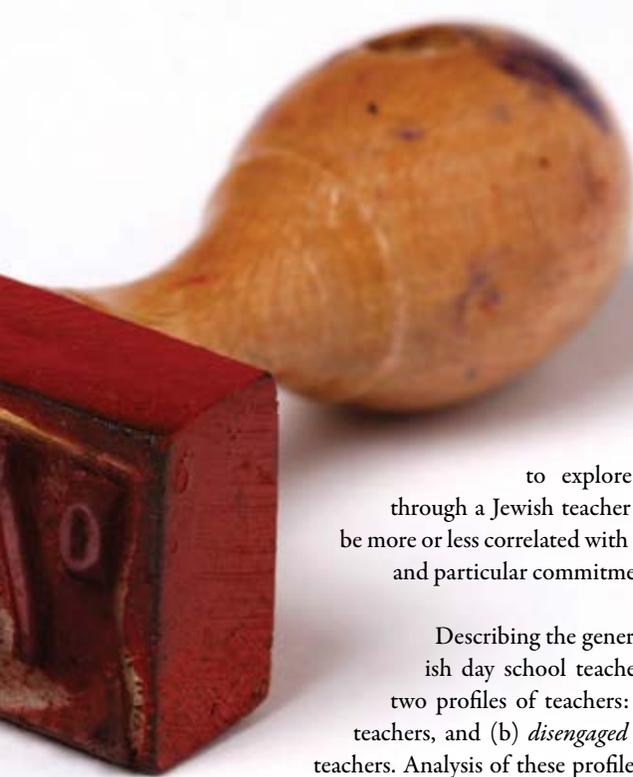
The study identified two profiles (types) of Jewish day school teachers and compared them across two teacher populations: a general sample of Jewish day school teachers (taken from a JESNA study by Michael Ben-Avie and Jeffrey Kress) and a group of Jewish day school teachers who were prepared through the DeLeT (Day school Leadership through Teaching) program at Brandeis University and HUC-JIR. I included DeLeT teachers in the study because I wanted

Besides the cost involved with recruitment and induction, teacher attrition impedes the development of a cohesive professional culture and is harmful for student learning.



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to explore whether going through a Jewish teacher preparation may be more or less correlated with teacher retention and particular commitments.

Describing the general sample of Jewish day school teachers, we identified two profiles of teachers: (a) *very engaged* teachers, and (b) *disengaged and unsupported* teachers. Analysis of these profiles reveals an issue that should concern the day school community. On the one hand, the *very engaged* teachers were highly committed to their students and the Jewish community and reported a strong intention to stay in Jewish education. This group was not correlated (either positively or negatively) with professional and administrative support, which means that these variables had neutral effect on the teachers' intentions and desire to stay in teaching. On the other hand,

the *disengaged and unsupported* teachers reported on debilitating school environment, a weak commitment to the Jewish community, and little interest in helping children to grow. The teachers related to this profile did not intend to stay in day school teaching or other Jewish education jobs.

Analyzing the population of teachers who graduated from the DeLeT program we identified two distinct profiles of teachers: (a) *engaged and well supported teachers*, and (b) *engaged and unsupported teachers*. The first group includes teachers who received support from their administration and peers at school and were enthusiastic about continuing to teach in day schools. The second profile of DeLeT teachers was somewhat more complex. It includes teachers whose prime motivation to stay in teaching was connected to their deep commitment to help the Jewish community thrive and their desire to teach children and see them learn and grow. Although the latter group of teachers reported receiving only minimal levels of administration support, their commitments to the Jewish community and to student growth probably reinforced their intention to stay in teaching.

These findings complement a growing body of literature in general and Jewish education suggesting that high-quality mentoring, professional development and administrative support are likely to improve teachers' professional growth and retention and result in better teachers and student learning. Unfortunately, despite some important initiatives aimed at improving professional development in North American Jewish day schools, many schools cannot and do not of-

[CONTINUED ON PAGE 47]



Teacher Day at the Day School Conference

■ By **Betty Winn**, Director of Leadership Initiatives

When I was a classroom teacher many years ago, I had an incredibly supportive and encouraging principal who truly believed in professional development and encouraged and supported me in my learning. Opportunities to attend top-notch conferences, with inspiring keynote speakers, provided me with new ideas, enhanced stimulation and an expanded network of educators and professionals who were committed to learning and enhancing their classrooms with cutting-edge pedagogy and tools. What she gave me was a gift—a gift that has lasted me a lifetime.

Our teachers are our schools' greatest as-

sets. They are the ones on the frontlines inspiring and instructing the next generation of Jewish leaders. On Tuesday, January 21, 2014, we invite teachers to join us at the RAVSAK/PARDES Conference in Los Angeles for a day designed especially for them.

As an extension of the national RAVSAK/PARDES conference, appropriately titled "Moving the Needle: Galvanizing Change in Day School," teachers will have the opportunity to wrestle with big questions to galvanize change in their classrooms. Teachers will participate and network in intensive workshops focusing on current educational trends facing our day schools such as core curriculum, blended learning, formative assessment, project-based learning, teacher collabo-

rative leadership, primary source research and STEM (with a Jewish lens). Inspired by keynotes, interactive learning sessions, networking with colleagues, and roundtable discussions, teachers will leave inspired to take on these new challenges with confidence, excitement and support.

The cost of the teacher day is only \$75, which includes continental breakfast and keynote speakers on educational trends and brain research, along with a selection of workshops. Give your teachers the gift of professional development, a gift that will last a lifetime.

For more information, go to www.movingtheneedle2014.org or click on Conference on the RAVSAK website, www.ravsak.org. ■

A Model to Support Faculty and Build Morale

■ by **JILL KESSLER**

Kessler presents Appreciate Inquiry as a philosophy and method for creating positive relationships and productive collaboration among faculty members and between faculty and administration.

Integrating another teacher into a close knit teaching team that has worked together for a long time can be difficult, especially when the new teacher brings her own ideas. How can an administrator be instrumental in helping the existing teachers become a well functioning team of three, rather than two who are aligned, and one who is disenfranchised?

How can a Jewish studies faculty and Hebrew faculty who have worked together without an immediate supervisor accept a new authority figure when a director of Jewish studies and Hebrew is hired?

These are two examples of situations we face in Jewish day schools. In our experience at the Pardes Jewish Day School in Phoenix, the model of Appreciative Inquiry enables us to utilize a positive approach when faced with day-to-day issues as well as challenging situations. By using this model we can establish a strong unified faculty culture, retain more teachers, and demonstrate how to build excellent working relationships with parents and students.

In the mid 1970s, David Cooperrider at Case Western University defined a generative thought process for change that he called Appreciative Inquiry. Its premise “is that in every organization something works and change can be managed through the identification of what works, and the analysis of how to do more of what works.” Appreciative inquiry is not a specific technique or management style; rather, it is a mindset. Simply put, it is a philosophy which calls upon each individual in the workplace to seek out the best in each other. Appreciative Inquiry calls for leadership to unite the faculty to work towards a shared vision, to appreciate everything of value in the organization, and to work together to construct a shared future.

Translating theory into practice requires hard work. It starts with the leadership who must seek new ways to positively understand the needs of teachers. This is done through a process

of inquiry that starts with the question, “What is working for you?” Once we find out what is working, we begin a process to build upon the strengths and use this information to inform our future.

In the case of the three teachers that needed to find a more functional way to work together, a process of inquiry was started. The first question was, “What is working well for the three of you?” Rather than focusing on what wasn’t working, the language shifted to the affirmative. Once the teachers defined something that worked well, a framework was set that moved the conversation from the negative to the positive. The next set of questions focused on each individual teacher’s strength and how the team could benefit from one another. In this case, it was determined one teacher would take the lead on planning the science curriculum because this was her area of strength, one teacher took the lead planning the language arts curriculum, and the other teacher took the lead on planning the social studies curriculum. Two of the three teachers worked together on the math curriculum while the third chose to continue planning on her own. In their second year as a team, all three teachers worked together on implementation of the math curriculum.

Recognition of one another’s strengths was the first step in uniting the three teachers. The benefits of working together were experienced as each teacher’s work load decreased. This in turn led to a new appreciation for each other. New questions were asked: “Describe a time you felt the team worked especially well together. What made that time special? Can you use what you learned from that time and apply it now?”

Now in the third year working together, the teachers have an easy, respectful relationship, where they truly enjoy working together. In fact, they joke that they spend more time together with one another than they do with members of their family. They quickly add that this is by choice!



Jill Kessler is the head of Pardes Jewish Day School in Phoenix, Arizona. jkessler@pardesschool.org

In the case of the Jewish studies and Hebrew teachers, the model of Appreciative Inquiry was used to help the teachers see this new hire as positive. When it was clear that accepting a new leader was a challenge, the questions focused on the value and benefits of having a supervisor. Teachers were asked how they could envision this working well for them. Out of those answers came a greater understanding of the teachers' needs and a wonderful blueprint for building trust.

Schools are all about relationships. The attitudes and behaviors that administrator's model for teachers has an influence on what teachers model for their students. Appreciating our students is as important as appreciating our teachers. A substantial body of research shows that the school's social environment has a significant influence on students' learning and growth (see *The Role of Supportive School Environments in Promoting Academic Success* by Eric Schaps). We all exist to serve our students.



This process works for building faculty morale. If the school leadership focuses on what is working and thoughtfully takes every opportunity to provide specific positive feedback to teachers, faculty members feel appreciated and morale increases. Despite how busy we are as administrators, it is well worth taking the time to e-mail a teacher to thank her for writing a well written detailed letter to parents about the unit on chemistry she is about to begin, or thanking a teacher for taking the initiative to start a middle school newspaper. These are simple examples of recognizing the good in our teachers and taking the time to express our appreciation.

How does this model work when difficult conversations are necessary? I have found it actually becomes easier to have difficult conversations with individuals. The individual is more open to hearing about what is needed to improve or change when she knows you recognize all the good. Trust has been established by the open sharing of appreciation in the past. The individual knows we are not seeking out the negative but neither do we shy away from the truth.

**The leadership must seek
new ways to positively
understand the needs of
teachers. Start with the question,
“What is working for you?”**

There is so much more we can learn from Appreciative Inquiry. This mindset harbors tremendous potential to change attitudes, behaviors and practices in our schools. I highly recommend reading a short but wonderful overview written by Sue Annis Hammond called

The Thin Book of Appreciative Inquiry. If you relate to this mindset, you will want to read *Appreciative Inquiry Handbook For Leaders of Change* by David Cooperrider, Diana Whitney, and Jacqueline M. Stavros. It will provide a way to think about how we can lead with optimism and build and sustain our schools.

Ben Azzai said, “Be eager to fulfill the smallest duty and flee from transgression: for one mitzvah induces another and one transgression induces another transgression. The reward of a mitzvah is a mitzvah, the reward of one transgression is another transgression.” The habits of mind cultivated by the practice of Appreciative Inquiry build success upon success to create a positive, healthy, collaborative work environment in schools. May we all move from strength to strength as we continue to build our day schools. ■

Don't Forget the Teacher When Teaching with Technology

■ by **JARED MATAS**

The author argues that technology is not merely an add-on to lesson planning. Instead, field leaders should treat technology as part of a new triad that needs to be fully enmeshed with teachers' pedagogical skills and content knowledge.

An outsider visiting an innovative Jewish day school might think that technology has replaced the teacher in the classroom. Kindergarteners build and program Lego robots to depict parashat hashavua. First graders develop fluency with math facts by playing games on iPads. Fourth graders videoconference with students in Haifa. Middle school history students use a video game to virtually become a printer's apprentice in pre-revolutionary Boston, interacting with characters such as Paul Revere, loyalist merchants, Sons of Liberty and British soldiers. In each of these examples, students are using technology to actively engage in hands-on learning. It may appear that teachers have become obsolete. Yet in fact the role of the teacher has never been more important than in the technology-infused classrooms of today and tomorrow.

Teachers must thoughtfully integrate knowledge about pedagogy, course content and technology when deciding how to integrate technology in their teaching. The kindergarten teacher has her students use robotics because she believes that using technology to manipulate objects in the physical world embodies age-appropriate constructivist pedagogy. The middle school history teacher replaces textbook readings and worksheet assignments with a video game because he believes that by role-playing a character the students will better develop and retain an understanding of the conflict that led to the American Revolution.

The fourth grade Hebrew teacher knows that Skype video conferencing creates a meaningful opportunity for her students to use their language skills by developing a relationship with native Hebrew speakers. While this week the first graders use iPads to

develop their math facts, next week the iPads will be put away because the teacher wants her students to hold manipulatives in their hands to develop their number sense. Decisions that the teacher makes about how to integrate technology determine the impact on teaching and learning. Digital technology in education has the potential to lead to tremendous innovation, yet used ineffectively it can also be an expensive way to reinforce traditional pedagogy.

In the past two decades, digital technology has become pervasive, impacting virtually every aspect of our daily lives. New technologies are having an impact on society at an unprecedented rate.

Information distribution is now instant, unfiltered and free. Ubiquitous Internet access has radically altered notions of knowledge, expertise and access to information. Ben-David Kolikant points out that "the school system—unlike other cultural in-

stitutions such as banks, hospitals, the entertainment world, and the press—has not re-thought ... goals and practices ... in the digital age." The environment in which students are growing up today is radically different than the environment in which their teachers came of age. The world in which tomorrow's graduates will enter does not yet exist. And yet too many Jewish day school students are still learning in schools that were designed to train them to be part of the workforce of the 20th century.

Many educators are legitimately wary about proceeding with technology integration. Just because the possibility exists to use a particular technology in the classroom does not guarantee that using it is a pedagogically sound decision. Punya Mishra and Matthew J. Koehler propose a conceptual framework that

It is far more important for thoughtful teachers to apply their emerging TPACK when making teaching decisions than to be able to download the latest app.



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can be applied to help. They argue that the transformative impact of technology has altered the context in which teachers acquire knowledge to such an extent that knowledge of technology is now an essential and distinct element of teacher knowledge. Effective integration of technology in education is a result of the interplay between three elements of teacher knowledge: technology, pedagogy and discipline-specific content. Thus, Lee Shulman's concept of PCK *pedagogical-content knowledge* becomes TPACK: *technological-pedagogical-content knowledge*.

As a teacher adapts lessons by introducing new technology to the classroom, planning decisions are guided by the teacher's emerging TPACK. Teachers develop their TPACK as they acquire the skills and experience to make thoughtful decisions about the appropriate integration of technology in their teaching. This framework is helpful in understanding how teachers' knowledge about digital technology impacts their ability to integrate it effectively and exercise teacher leadership. Significantly, TPACK is situated knowledge that exists in relationship with a teacher's knowledge of specific pedagogies and content being taught. Knowledge of effective teaching emerges from the integration of what the teacher knows about technology, good pedagogy and the course content.

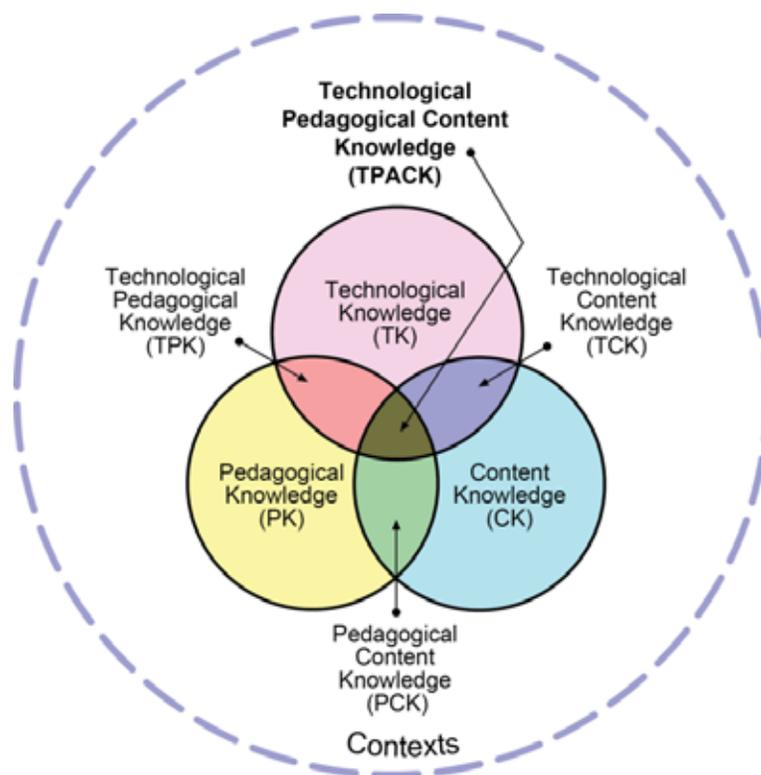
The TPACK framework suggests ways for both teachers and school leaders to encourage technology integration in a manner that ensures the focus is kept on actualizing educational goals, not increasing technology consumption. As teachers plan their lessons, the question they must ask themselves is not how they might increase the amount of time students spend using technology, but how can the technology help achieve learning outcomes. For example, a science teacher might develop ways that students can use the camera and microphone on an iPad to record data and observations from classroom experiments.

Teachers must keep up-to-date with innovations in technology because they are the ones best qualified to assess how any change might impact teaching and learning. Teachers can use digital technology to encourage critical thinking, collaboration and student empowerment in their classroom. For this to occur, it is far more important for thoughtful teachers to apply their emerging TPACK when making teaching decisions than to be able to download the latest app.

There is no shortage of free digital resources readily available to teachers, but the impact of each resource is dependent on the manner in which the teacher uses it in the classroom. A website with tremendous potential is IWitness, a tool for accessing the USC Shoah Foundation video archive of Holocaust survivor testimony. With well indexed video of over 1,200 testimonies, this website has the potential to transform Holocaust education, especially at a time when there are fewer and fewer Holocaust survivors still able to actually visit classrooms. The site allows students to view clips of the lengthy testimonies and search the clips by topic. Students can edit the footage to create short videos to show their classmates. In the right context, this can be a powerful educative

experience for students. Yet the impact of IWitness is dependent on the ability of a teacher to apply his or her TPACK to develop lessons that are pedagogically sound. The teacher needs to be able to integrate knowledge of Holocaust education with an understanding of how students learn when viewing and editing film.

The concept of TPACK must also be applied to develop pedagogy for teacher professional development. Through hands-on learning experiences, veteran and novice teachers alike can participate in meaningful professional development that has the purpose to improve each teacher's TPACK. The days of bringing in outside experts to lecture to a roomful of busy teachers are over. Professional development opportunities for teachers should expose them to examples of innovative teaching with technology and then allow for reflective talk with partners on how the examples could be adapted, or not, to their teaching practice. In this manner, each teacher will be able to connect the three elements of teacher knowledge that integrate in the creation of TPACK. School resources are more effective when allocated towards professional development than purchasing apps or SMARTboards.



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It is vital that we don't forget teachers when talking about teaching with technology. Although digitally empowered students take more ownership for their learning, and knowledge is no longer centralized in a person at the front of the class, the role of the teacher continues to be an essential component to effective teaching and learning. TPACK is a valuable conceptual framework to guide technology integration, ensuring that the role of the teacher is not forgotten. ■

The Pew Survey and Day Schools: Opening Ourselves to New Possibilities?

■ by **JONATHAN WOOCHEER**

The publication of the Pew Research Center Survey on U.S. Jews on October 1 has given the Jewish world plenty to talk about as it got back to work after the holidays.

The initial report has only a modest amount of information that relates directly to day schools, and what is reported generally confirms what we already knew. About a quarter of Jewish parents say that they had a child enrolled in a day school or yeshiva during the past year—slightly more than the percentage of adults who attended themselves—with extent of enrollment following a predictable denominational pattern. Regrettably, except for Hebrew language proficiency, the initial report does not compare day school attendees and non-attendees with regard to many dimensions of Jewish activity and attitude. However, there is no reason to doubt that such comparisons would show that day school attendees “score higher” in almost every respect than do those who did not attend day school.

So, in terms of day schools themselves—who attends them, what impact they have—there is little new in the Pew survey data published thus far. This doesn’t mean, however, that day school leaders—especially community day school leaders—should simply put the report aside. In fact, I would suggest that

there are other findings in the Pew survey that should be stimulating serious conversations among day school leaders.

I’m referring to the findings about how American Jews define their Jewishness and what is important to them about it. The not-so-secret secret revealed (again) in the survey is that “religion” as most Americans and many American Jews understand it is not a good “fit” for the way in which large numbers of American Jews understand and embrace their Jewishness. The good news

Are we operating and marketing day schools that provide American Jews with opportunities to engage Jewishly with the things they care most about?

is that vast majorities of American Jews, including many who explicitly deny being Jewish by religion, *do* embrace their Jewishness positively. Ninety percent of Jews by religion (JBR) and 46% of Jews of no religion (JNR) say that being Jewish is very or somewhat important in their lives. Ninety-seven percent of JBR and 83% of JNR are proud to be Jewish. Eighty-five percent of JBR and 42% of JNR feel a strong sense of belonging to the Jewish people.

And what does this Jewishness mean to them? Well, it turns out that even for self-identified Jews by religion, for 55% it is primarily a matter of ancestry and culture. For only 17% is it primarily a matter of religion, and for 26% it is both ancestry/culture and religion. The conclusion that being Jewish is for most American Jews (and certainly most who are not Orthodox) about something more (or other) than being religious is reinforced by looking at the responses to the survey’s questions on what respondents consider essential to their own Jewishness.

Not surprisingly, the responses show that ethical living and working for justice and equality rank among the most strongly affirmed elements of Jewishness (remembering the Holocaust—both an ethnic and an ethical act—is the top choice). But the fact that being

intellectually curious and having a good sense of humor were regarded as “essential” by half and two-fifths of the respondents respectively (more than saw being part of a Jewish community as essential) clearly signals that for many American Jews—and not just those who are totally secular—being Jewish is a complex identity with multiple dimensions beyond those that are normally focused on in the public discourse of institutional Jewish life.



Dr. Jonathan Woocher works in a senior capacity with the Lippman Kanfer family on its philanthropic and educational initiatives. jou@lippmankanfer.org

So, I pose this question: Are we operating and marketing day schools that provide American Jews with opportunities to engage Jewishly with the things they care most about? I am not anti-religious, nor do I believe that the “religious” elements of Jewish life are unimportant or should not be part of our curricula and the cultures of our schools. But for many American Jews, these are not the most important and resonant components of their Jewishness. I’m not suggesting that we simply “play to the masses” and offer a watered-down “Judaism lite” that merely affirms what students already believe.

What I am suggesting, though, is that we start with what Jews care about and believe in and use that interest and those passions to help them encounter those elements in Jewish tradition and history that add depth to

those interests. This is what is being done, I would argue, in two of today’s fastest growing Jewish educational domains: social justice and environmental education. For many Jews, religious practice and belief remain central to their Jewishness. Nonetheless, there are other dimensions of Jewish experience, both historical and contemporary, that provide alternative vocabularies for engaging in Jewish life and enacting Jewish values. The question is: How and to what extent can we and do we make these dimensions available as well in our schools?

By virtue of their pluralism, community day schools are well positioned to extend the boundaries of what we define and offer as “Jewish education” today. I don’t kid myself. I don’t believe there is a pool of thousands of children waiting to enroll in day schools if only we change the curriculum to empha-

size social justice and Jewish comedy. But I do believe that “religion” is and always has been too narrow a category to encompass what “Jewishness” is about. I hope that community day school leaders will be bold in experimenting with expansive educational visions and programs that seek to tap into the reservoir of positive disposition toward Jewishness that the Pew study reveals.

If we can do so successfully, we will be doing something more important than just building enrollment. We will be enabling more Jews to discover that their strongest commitments—to historical memory and responsibility, to moral living, to a better society, to passionate learning, to approaching life joyfully and tolerantly—are indeed *Jewish* commitments that can be enriched and fulfilled through a deeper connection to Jewish tradition and community. ■



Breaking News from the RAVSAK Reshets

Where can you find board chairs engaging in thoughtful conversations around their strategic planning processes, Judaic directors challenging each other with new ways to integrate 21st century educational strategies into the study of Tanakh, and heads of school grappling with tuition and admissions policies? All of these conversations have taken place recently in the RAVSAK reshets.

Over the course of the past year, RAVSAK has launched eight different reshets (networks) in which a community of school professionals or lay leaders work together to think through challenges and learn about successes in each other’s schools. Half of our reshets are organized by the role that an individual plays within their school’s community: heads of school, Judaic directors, early childhood educators and board members. The other half are based on RAVSAK programs in which an individual has participated: Moot Beit

Din, Jewish Court of All Time, Sulam and the Head of School Professional Excellence Project. In the coming months, we hope to launch a new model of reshet based on common interest, the first one focusing on Judaism and the environment, to be called Reshet Teva.

Through these reshets, RAVSAK is already achieving five goals. We are investing in long-term professional development and community building of our school employees and lay leaders. We support collaborative plans for strengthening the educational work in the field and the reflective communities in which to test, evaluate and tinker with them. We are creating links among school professionals and lay leaders in order to foster collegiality, support, communities of practice and professional development. Fostering outlets for thinking through tough situations beyond borders of the local community is a natural product of this kind of work. With the new form of access to one an-

other, school employees and lay leaders alike are deepening, broadening, expanding and increasing the educational quality in RAVSAK schools, while breaking down some of the isolation that comes with the territory.

The measure of success in any network is not just the quality of conversation which takes place online, but also the practical application which occurs in our day to day interactions. At RAVSAK, we are already seeing shifts in school decisions, processes and educational product due to the conversations taking place throughout the reshets. It’s one thing to read the text on the page. It’s another to weave it into the text of our lives. And that is exactly what we are doing with the work of the RAVSAK reshets.

To learn more about the Reshetot and / or join the conversation, contact Debra Shaffer Seeman at debra@ravsak.org. ■

Moving the Needle: Galvanizing Change in our Day Schools

The RAVSAK/PARDES Jewish Day School Leadership Conference

Los Angeles, CA • January 19-21, 2014 • Conference begins at 1:00pm on Sunday and closes at 2:00pm on Tuesday.

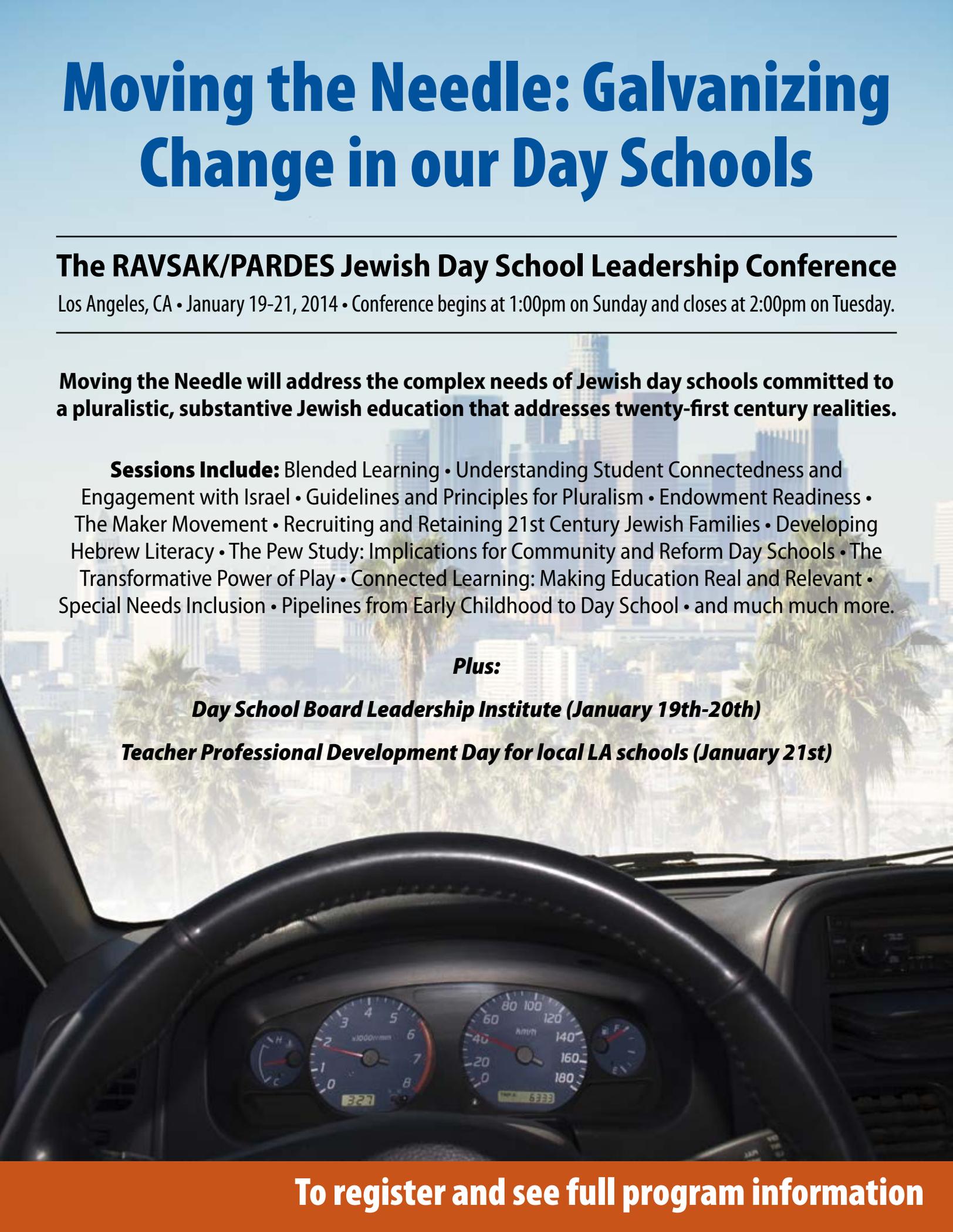
Moving the Needle will address the complex needs of Jewish day schools committed to a pluralistic, substantive Jewish education that addresses twenty-first century realities.

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Dr. Mary Helen Immordino-Yang

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Dr. Rob Evans

"The Human Side of School Change."

Deep Dives (Monday, January 20)

Small Schools and a Sustainable Future (in cooperation with PEJE)

New Paradigms for Israel Education (in partnership with the Shalom Hartman Institute of North America)

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Tefillah: New Paradigms (in partnership with Pardes Institute for Jewish Studies)

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Teachers in Our Schools



Teachers are expected to reach unattainable goals with inadequate tools. The miracle is that at times they accomplish this impossible task.” Haim Ginott

We asked teachers to share a moment or experience that encapsulated for them something of the essence of being a teacher at a Jewish day school. Interestingly, responses harvested very different kinds of experiences: students’ insights in a classroom, a mother and daughters’ advocacy on a school’s behalf, parent excitement over Hebrew learning, and a broader personal transition, a shift in perspective. What all these personal testimonies have in common is the attempt to capture a feeling when everything comes together—when the meaning of their work comes into beautiful, radiant focus.

An Ongoing Journey

By Ilana Chernack, Akiva School, Westmount, Quebec

For as long as I can remember, a “journey” always implied a long road trip with my family. There was minimal preparation required of me. The ride itself was not particularly pleasant, consisting of Graval pills, limited personal space, incessant asking “Are we there yet?” and far too many sandwiches.

Despite the unpleasantness, getting to the destination was always climactic and resulted in that sense of “I have arrived.” Yet as soon as I arrived, my feelings of happiness and relief were overshadowed by a desire to get right back in the car and return home. I wondered why this was the case: was I a pessimist or realist? I came to realize that I had not yet internalized the meaning of the term “journey.”

I spent four years in university working towards my degree in education. I can confidently declare that this provided me with the most proficient skills in lesson plan writing and report card comment composing. Yet, despite my dedication as a student, the essence of what it meant to be an “educator” eluded me. This question gnawed at me throughout my undergraduate years.

When and how would this become apparent to me?

The answer began to take form when I started my professional career as a teacher at the Akiva School in Montreal. This position gave me the opportunity to work, teach and interact with many incredible individuals. These newfound mentors, colleagues and in particular, students, redirected my journey entirely. They shifted my focus from a purposeful but one-dimensional direction, to a multi-faceted, continuous odyssey. They allowed me to see the forest through the trees and the meaning behind my life choice. Indeed, they changed me as a person and as a Jewish woman but above all, they changed me as an educator.

Those who have impacted my life have shown me that the meaning, the passion and the purpose are not left at the starting point, but are taken with me and reignited throughout the journey. They have taught me that it is not about the car I am getting into for the drive, but the inner drive that will allow me to achieve excellence. They have shown me that it is not about externality of the “schoolteacher clothes” that I

wear, but rather the “internal me” that will affect my students for the rest of their lives. And they have shown me that it is not about counting down the seconds until I arrive to school, but about making every second count, seizing every single moment and transforming every instant into a lesson to be learned. I remain a dedicated believer in skill-based learning, but now I have learned that the greatest gift of being an educator is preparing my students for their own journey and being a role model for every single one of them along the way.

So you see, it’s no longer about the twenty-five bodies who occupy the desks in the classroom; rather, it is about changing the twenty-five universes who stand before me. It is no longer about looking at my own reflection in the rear-view mirror, but seeing the reflection of my school’s academic and Torah-based values in my students. It is not about the final destination, but the continuous journey of self-reflection, self-discovery and self-improvement. It is an ongoing process that will never allow me to sense that anti-climactic feeling of having to return home. How could it? I am home with the journey. ■

Back to School Night

Sara Wolk Bernstein, Heilicher Minneapolis Jewish Day School

I prepare for Back to School Night with a little bit of uneasiness. I'm no longer nervous about presenting to a room full of adults as I was earlier in my career. I no longer fear that I won't know how to respond to a questioning parent. The reason for my uneasiness stems from my desire to share with parents my love of the Hebrew language and how much I want to make Hebrew exciting and positive for my students. Since many parents approach Hebrew with some trepidation, I hope I can express that learning Hebrew is meaningful and valuable.

It wasn't until college that I fell in love with Hebrew. I give credit to my professor, Jonathan Paradise, for that feat. From him I learned that Hebrew words that were seemingly divergent could be connected by virtue of a shared shoresh (root). I explored the complexity of the language and the imagery embedded within it, which opened up so many doors of understanding and depth of meaning for me. It became one of the reasons that propelled me to become a Jewish educator and specifically to day school education.

About 15 years ago, I embarked on a new avenue in my career. At HMJDS we had been designing our own resource department for general studies and could no longer ignore students' needs in Hebrew. I left HMJDS administration to develop our Hebrew resource program, working with students who struggle to learn Hebrew. I discovered I have an aptitude for developing learning experiences for these learners and that it was very important to me that these children feel successful and positive about

Hebrew. Over the years, I have seen great successes by students whom many thought would never be able to even read Hebrew, let alone work creatively with the language.

Just this year, I experienced a first. At our Back To School Night, I had only a short time to discuss our Hebrew program. I explained that in 4th grade, we see that students are beginning to be able to think more deeply and understand more complexity in regards to verbs. This expands their capabil-

As I expected, one of the parents in the room said, "It looks like the word *shalom!*" I further explained that the word we use to mean "peace" really has a much deeper meaning, a more complex imagery behind it, one that includes the element of completeness. Another father was very excited to learn this about Hebrew, and exclaimed in one run-on sentence, "I never knew this about Hebrew—so that is why some can read Hebrew without vowels if you know the context, is this true all over Hebrew?"



ities in using the language; grade 4 is often a doorway to more proficiency in Hebrew.

To illustrate my point, I used the shoresh *shin-lamed-mem*, which I wrote on the board. I explained that this shoresh can be used to form the following words in Hebrew: *leshalem* (to pay or compensate), *lehaslim* (to complete) and *shalem* (whole).

my kids are learning this about Hebrew? Wow! That is so cool..."

I have been fortunate to see the light bulb go on for so many students about Hebrew and watch them find the same "coolness" and value in the language that I see. To my great satisfaction, this year, I was able to bring a parent to that same great place. ■

Teachers in Our Schools

Why I Teach

Nathan Somers, *The Lerner School, Durham, NC*

It was first period on a clear crisp September morning, and my fifth grade Judaic studies students and I stood silently in our school's garden watching as the sun made its way above the building's roof and began to illuminate the garden with a warm golden glow.

Students held in their hands leaves, flower petals, seeds, acorns, decaying wood, stones and seedlings gleaned from our school garden. We had begun the morning by discussing Sukkot and the idea of harvest festivals. Students had read two short passages from Kohelet and we were outside reflecting on the text and choosing items from the garden that we felt represented the ideas we had read in Kohelet.

As we came together as a group and began to discuss how the items we held represented birth and death, tearing down and building up, planting and harvesting, we also discussed the cyclical nature of the statements made in the text. We came to the conclusion that although the plants and trees in our garden are “born” and one day will “die” they will also produce new generations. This understanding led us to recognize that the cycle of life never really ends. One generation is simply surpassed by another that carries on the work of those who came before.

I was moved by the clear, straightforward wisdom of my students and the simplicity of the items they had taken from the garden. As we left the field and returned to our classroom I felt pride in my students, but I also felt that special feeling that keeps me committed to being a Judaic studies teacher:



a feeling of contentment in knowing that students not only know something but that they have learned to process an idea.

Back in class we discussed the final parshah in the Torah, *Vezot haberakhab*. It is in this

parshah that Moses shares his final message with the Israelites, passes on the leadership of the people to Joshua, and goes up into the mountains where he dies and is buried by God. Without dropping a beat, the students recognized that this is an end but not “the” end. They explained to me that although their leader Moses has died, his work, patience, soul, and memory will continue on with the people as they enter into the land of Canaan and begin to create their own lives there.

As a Judaic studies teacher I often feel overwhelmed with everything I need to do. I feel that Rabbi Tarfon is speaking directly to me about my job when he states in Pirkei Avot, “You don’t have to complete the work, but you are not free to desist from it.” I have prayers to teach, lessons to write, history to explore, technology to learn, emails to answer, but just when it feels like too much, and I am ready to desist from at least some of my work—the sun rises above the school’s roof and illuminates the faces of my students. Then they grasp another concept, turn it over and over again in their minds, and ask a deep question or share an amazing thought that makes me feel that pride and contentment of being a teacher once again. ■

And From My Students Most of All

Rabbi Moshe Yosef Gewirtz, Rabbi David L. Silver *Yeshiva Academy, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania*

“Rabbi Tarphon used to say, ‘It is not your responsibility to finish the work; neither are you free to evade it.’” (Pirkei Avot 2:16)

“Whoever preserves a single soul in Israel is considered by Scripture to have preserved

an entire world.” (Mishnah Sanhedrin 4:2)

Talmudic quotes such as these are a necessary elixir for the soul of those involved in Jewish education today, especially those of us in areas with small Jewish populations like Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. We don’t

need Pew surveys to realize that for all the examples of retention and return, there are more of loss and disinterest. The personal experience of Jewish educators reflects much frustration because of all those students we could have taught but did not, or did teach at a young age but not when they were ma-

ture enough to absorb what is life-changing about Torah. For our own happiness and motivation to continue teaching, we must learn to focus on what we do accomplish with those we do reach.

I have been teaching long enough to have seen many of my students grow Jewishly and pass on their love of Torah in their own families. The development of one family in particular gives me special joy. (Certain facts have been changed to insure their anonymity.)

From the beginning it was clear that Brad was a special student and a challenging one. When his kindergarten class performed at assemblies, he couldn't sit on his chair for more than a few seconds. I was always profoundly impressed with his parents who displayed no evidence of embarrassment despite being aware that all eyes must have been on their son. Brad was very bright and had a winning personality, although it was often difficult to understand his speech.

Brad's sister, Rachel, three years his senior, was an average student and very athletic. Her quiet demeanor in school gave no hint of the intelligence and depth she would express later.

The children's mother, Shelly, was Jewish, but their father, John, was not. A mixed marriage is by no means always an indication of an apathetic attitude towards Jewish education. However, in this case, it became clear that the family's commitment to the school was only for the early grades.

As time passed, however, Rachel and Brad remained in the school. Brad was diagnosed with Asperger's Syndrome, and qualified for therapeutic staff support. He made significant progress, and by sixth grade he no longer needed the support. His enjoyment of Judaic subjects and his mature understanding were impressive. Brad had an almost "Rashi-like" ability to say much with few words. Despite sometimes giving the impression of being distracted with other matters, Brad was always on task, absorbing,

creatively thinking and contributing much to class.

As much progress as Brad made, the more inspiring sibling for me was Rachel. Despite not always finishing homework or being prepared for tests, Rachel enjoyed learning Torah. One could see by her facial expressions and enthusiasm that she was interacting with Torah in a very personal and profound way.

The year after she graduated, we maintained our teacher-student relationship at the Sunday Hebrew High School. Rachel and her Silver Academy classmates participated in a ninth grade shabbaton in the shomer Shabbat neighborhood and left wanting to do it again. But the most significant experience happened toward the end of that ninth grade year.



One of the classes in the school appeared headed for disintegration. The parents of more than half of the students were planning on not reenrolling their children the following September. Most of these parents agreed to attend a parlor meeting called by the school president to discuss their decisions and the school's exciting plans for the coming year. In the end, the meeting did not sway any of the parents.

But a comment made at the meeting left me with a positive feeling when I went home. Shelly attended the meeting. After hearing

a few parents speak about their reasons for their children not returning, Shelly asked to speak. What followed was a brief but eloquent and impassioned argument for allowing one's children to receive as much Jewish education as possible. About how the quality secular and Jewish education at the Silver Academy allowed her daughter to become an intelligent, mature, responsible, compassionate, God-respecting, community involved and Jewishly committed young lady.

And then Shelly said that her daughter, Rachel, who really wanted to come to the meeting but couldn't, asked that the following message be related. "I can't understand why anyone would deny their children a Jewish education for as long as possible. The middle school years were the ones that really made me into who I am. I am so grateful to my parents for allowing me to have a

meaningful Jewish education at least in the beginning of my teenage years, so that the ideas of the Torah can be incorporated into my adult personality."

Rachel's words, as well as the appreciation of her mother, brother, father and many others give me hope that although the numbers don't look very promising in the big picture, Jewish educators are making a difference. We must persevere in our work. Each soul in Israel is like an entire world. And with God's help, the results might even be more amazing than we ever dare dream. ■

“Adorn Yourself”: Mindful Model Learners

■ by **JAIMI BOEHM** and **DEVIN VILLAREAL**

Articles in this section all explore the notion that the special quality of Jewish day school teachers resides in their serving as role models. This first article posits that teachers should be model learners, exposing their interests and a striving to grow.

Beyond teaching one’s subject matter in a classroom, a teacher in a Jewish day school is a model *learner* for students and other teachers, particularly in terms of personal development and personal investment in the learning community. But why should we be model learners, and what are the additional skill sets we must model for our students both as teachers and learners ourselves?

“Adorn yourself first, then adorn others” (Sanhedrin 19a). This insight is articulated by the Talmud in relationship to the idea that in order for one to make sound judgment, he must be first be in a position to be judged. While most of us would not associate being judged with being adorned, “adornment” here is about clarity regarding who we are and what we are striving to become. To “adorn” ourselves, then, is to reflect upon and evaluate ourselves so that we are able to identify our own areas for personal development and formulate an understanding of our personal evolution.

In doing so, we enable ourselves to serve as model learners for others on the same journey. Leaving the notion of judgment aside, teachers of Jewish day schools find themselves in unique roles as mentors, supporters, and persons who integrate academic, cultural and moral values. Most teachers do not arrive at community day school campuses with the training to take on these roles and, therefore, are learners as they take on and actualize those roles. If we as teachers are reflective about what tools we use to evolve as learners ourselves and then make concerted efforts to grow and develop, we stand in a position to be both reflective practitioners and able guides for our students who are newer learners.

The Jewish day school is, by virtue of its being an executor of Jewish values, an environment in which acts of tikkun olam and extracurricular learning are fundamental to the institution’s larger educational endeavors. As teachers in such settings, we must ask ourselves how we can serve as model learners outside our classrooms and traditional content areas.

It’s worth clarifying what such extracurricular experiences might look like. At our school, the New Community Jewish High School near Los Angeles, the opportunities for faculty involvement outside the classroom are typical—we are advisors for special interest clubs and student government, coaches for athletic teams, chaperones for local, national, and international trips—but they are also untraditional, shaped by unique faculty interests and passions that align with those of our students. For example, an English teacher runs a cooking program using only local, seasonal produce and camping gear, and a rabbi and Jewish

What seems most effective is giving teachers the space and time to share their non-content-specific passions, hobbies and interests with students in a way that is genuine and rewarding.

studies teacher guides students through tai chi and meditation.

The question we must ask then is: What is the real and meaningful value of participating in or guiding learning in this way? As model learners in this context, we have seen that we can teach our students how to take inspiration from others’ passion and then respond to that passion in ways that are productive and generative, organize people of varying and different motivations around a single goal, innovate with programming that makes unusual connections between interests, develop interest in unfamiliar disciplines, integrate the elements of that emerging interest into daily life and learning practices, and balance time commitments.

What we must be careful to avoid is requiring faculty to engage



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in such experiences outside the classroom. If we are to be true model learners, what we must primarily model is a passion for and joy of learning that is pure and untainted by external factors. In his book *Drive: The Surprising Truth About What Motivates*, Daniel Pink contends that preemptively offering rewards quickly undermines a person's intrinsic motivation and that positive feedback after the fact is a more effective approach to sustaining a person's motivation.

This is true of a teacher's extracurricular involvement. Stipends, hours required, and other "carrots" will not create quality programming in which teachers are model learners. Instead, what seems most effective in our school is giving teachers the space and time to share their non-content-specific passions, hobbies and interests with students in a way that is genuine and rewarding.

Of course, we cannot ignore the fact that our primary role as teachers occurs mostly in the classroom. Some teachers find that their interests or passions do not easily translate to extracurricular student learning, or they are unable find time outside their regular teaching schedules to accommodate this extra commitment. All faculty, regardless of their extracurricular involvement, can be effective and inspirational model learners in their own classrooms, too. The question, again, is how?

Boundaries between teachers and students are essential for the safety and wellbeing of all.

Sometimes, however, policies about such boundaries create a culture of fear. Teachers worry about the repercussions of sharing personal opinions or experiences that might disrupt the delicate teacher-student relationship. Those concerns are real and valid, but taken too far, they disrupt the potential for teachers to become model learners in the classroom. When teachers are given the freedom to weave their own identities into what they teach, they have the power to more subtly and powerfully model learning for their students.

Take, for example, an English teacher whose upbringing was in the same community where she now teaches, whose own views on her Jewish identity have shifted over time, and whose curriculum is, for the most part, secular. If this teacher is not required to integrate Jewish text into her curriculum and is instead given the freedom to make responsible, professional choices about how she teaches, she is more likely to make organic, natural connections to Jewish text and culture when they work for her. In this way, such a teacher can demonstrate for her students that the learning she has done throughout her life has valuable applications in other areas of her life—i.e., the ethics, values, and stories of Jewish life and learning can apply to discussions about literature written by authors of myriad backgrounds and from disparate time periods. What is more, if this teacher can acknowledge and carefully discuss with her students the ways she grapples with her Jewish identity and the manner in which literature helps her come to terms with that experience, she has potentially validated her own students' experiences without

compromising the integrity of the Jewish day school's mission or purpose.

Teachers in community day schools must be reflective also about their role as mentor. Whether as a club advisor or a sounding board for a student, we are called upon to respond with some wisdom and guidance. This raises the question of what personal work teachers can engage in to sharpen their own skills in dealing with student concerns like stress management, conflict resolution and organization. Teachers in community day schools must be aware of the role they play in regards to mentorship and how they cultivate the attending skill sets for that role in a student's life. Some schools have dedicated portions of their professional development days to this arena, while others have introduced more general opportunities for introspection and practice around these issues.

For example, our school has developed a program of using traditional middot (character traits) to stimulate mindfulness in our interactions with each other and with our students. In this type of practice, teachers select a "middah card" each week that contains a word such as "equanimity," "courage," or "calmness." Throughout the week, the teacher attempts to put this middah into practice in a mindful way and pays attention to the effect of the middah on his interactions. These practices are done with the explicit awareness that

the skills developed by teachers will have a direct translation into their ability to mentor students who are negotiating similar concerns. For instance, if a teacher's middah is "courage," he can share his personal work with a student who comes to him seeking guidance regarding matters of a similar nature. This is not to say that the teacher becomes a "guru" of sorts; instead, he has an opportunity to connect with a student as a learner in the same realm he finds himself and thereby model important meta-skills for personal growth.

As teachers, it is easy to become so myopic in our practice that our focus is strictly on the lessons we plan and the assignments we grade. However, we must recognize and understand that the roles we play extend far beyond that of classroom teacher. We are mentors, advisors, multifaceted human beings. Each of these roles has an attending skill set, and it is these skills that afford us the opportunity to serve as model learners in our Jewish day schools.

Because we ourselves must be on a journey of personal reflection and growth and our students are on a similar journey, it behooves us to become *mindful* model learners—people who learn and reflect on their learning at the same time they are teaching others to learn. People will arrive at their own conclusions about how best to accomplish this, but at the most basic level, we must ask ourselves these questions: What role do I play beyond delivering a curriculum? What do the students learn from me that I am not consciously teaching? How can I use my own journey to benefit my students? ■

Teachers in community day schools must be aware of the role they play in regards to mentorship and how they cultivate the attending skill sets for that role in a student's life.

Strengthening the RAVSAK Board to Strengthen Community Day Schools

Amidst towering trees overlooking peaks of the Catoclin Mountains, RAVSAK's Board of Directors and executive leadership team convened this October at the Capitol Retreat Center in Waynesboro, Pennsylvania, for their annual board retreat.

The gathering is a yearly opportunity to bring together RAVSAK's board members, made up of lay people with experience in leadership at local community day schools throughout the US and Canada, to discuss ongoing initiatives to strengthen and support RAVSAK and the 130 Jewish day schools that comprise the RAVSAK network.

The retreat was the first under new board chair Rebekah Farber, who comes to RAVSAK amidst a period of growth, for both the board and the organization. It was a perfect time to align her vision for the organization, which includes building board engagement, stewarding collaboration with like-minded institutions, and expanding the many ways that RAVSAK serves our network, with the many strengths of the board, both as individuals and as a whole. Just a few years ago, the RAVSAK board transitioned from an executive committee made up entirely of professional heads of school to a board that is primarily made up of lay leaders, and the talents that each board member brings contributes to the overall vitality of the organization.

Board members reflected on where



RAVSAK has been and how to keep moving forward. They reviewed RAVSAK's progress in implementing the five-year business plan and set new goals for the year ahead. Our Board tackled how best to expand partnerships between schools, implement effective fundraising tactics, raise awareness of the role of day schools in communities across the country and deepen their understanding of and commitment to our mission. The recent Pew Research study inspired an engaging discussion on the role of day schools in 21st century Jewish education and how day schools promote and instill Jewish literacy to create the next generation of leaders.

Conversations took place in conference rooms, through Jewish text study, around the fireplace, while on walks through the woods and at the dinner table. Truly a cholent of ideas, this was a fun and educational retreat that yielded real results.

Opportunities like the board retreat help focus our energies and talents on new ideas and challenges, as we work to strengthen RAVSAK as an organization in order to strengthen our schools, and ultimately have a positive impact on the more than 25,000 children in our ever-growing network. ■

Rebekah Farber welcomes feedback on RAVSAK's work and invites readers to engage in conversation with her and share their experiences from the field. She can be reached at Rebekah@ravsak.org.

I Am a Teacher, I Am a Text

■ by **JOSHUA RABIN**

Rabin argues that Judaics teachers don't just, or primarily, teach texts. They exert an even more profound influence by virtue of who they are, how they discuss and practice Judaism. They themselves are a text that students study.

*Teaching, like any truly human activity, emerges from one's inwardness, for better or worse. As I teach, I project the condition of my soul onto my students, my subject, and our way of being together. (Parker J. Palmer, *The Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teacher's Life*)*

Jewish educators committed to reflective practice know that every element in the classroom affects the learning environment, from the subject chosen, to how instruction is differentiated, and even to how the chairs and desks are arranged. At heart, however, the greatest impact we have upon students is through the way in which we model Jewish life to them. While many educators choose to teach in Jewish day schools because of their love of Jewish texts, our Jewish tradition and educational theory suggest that *we* are the most important text studied in our classrooms.

Many of us are familiar with the famous quote of Abraham Joshua Heschel that the teacher is “the text the students never forget,” yet it is important to read Heschel's quote in its original context and think about what Heschel considers to be implications of this statement.

*What we need more than anything else is not textbooks but text-people. It is the personality of the teacher which is the text that the pupils read; the text that they will never forget. The modern teacher, while not wearing a snowy beard, is a link in the chain of a tradition. He is the intermediary between the past and the present as well. Yet he is also the creator of the future of our people. He must teach the pupils to evaluate the past in order to clarify their future. (“Jewish Education,” in *The Insecurity of Freedom*)*

For Heschel, teachers are a text because the totality of their

Jewish life speaks greater volumes than any text taught in the classroom. As a result, when Jewish educators think about their educational vision, they must recognize that who they are as a person will teach lessons the students will notice, analyze and remember.

When I began my career in Jewish education, I used to get annoyed that the teenagers I taught found my off-the-cuff comments about a movie, television show, or last night's football game more interesting than the text I wanted to teach. Over time, however, I began to see how common interests and the totality of who I was as a human being provided the trigger for us to engage in a deeper learning experience. In “Eros and Education,” Joseph Schwab writes,

The manner and appearance which will evoke liking and respect in the student will arise only as the teacher does, in fact, respond to the persons before him. (It is the reciprocity of evocation and response which constitutes a genuine interpersonal relationship.)

According to Schwab, robust learning necessarily involves teachers thinking about how they might draw their students into an interpersonal connection, for that connection builds the foundation of a learning relationship. The moment I realized my students were more interested in me than the subject, I discovered the way in which I could make this fact a stepping stone, rather than a stumbling block.

As Jewish educators, we like to believe that the subject, Judaism, is the center of our work. However, the reality is that learning involves what David Hawkins says is a connection between an I (the teacher), a Thou (the learner), an It (the subject). By extension, if we want our students to connect better with the



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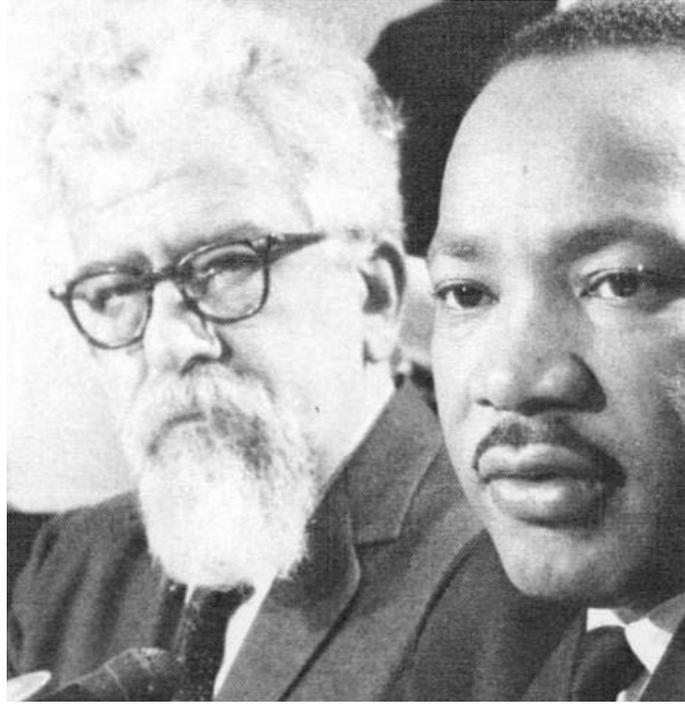
subject, we need to ask hard questions about how their relationship to the subject is affected by their relationship to us. Hawkins writes:

*It's a tradition which is expressed by saying, in one way or another, that people don't amount to very much except in terms of their involvement in what is outside and beyond them. A human being is a localized physical body, but you can't see him as a person unless you see him in his working relationships with the world around him. The more you cut off these working relationships, the more you put him in a box, figuratively or literally, the more you diminish him. Finally, when you've narrowed him down to nothing more than the surface of the skin and what's inside, without allowing him any kind of relationship with the world around him, you don't have very much left. ("I, Thou, and It," in *The Informed Vision*)*

If I want my student to love studying Talmud or Israel, or want to deepen their connection to Shabbat or prayer, I cannot ignore how their relationship to their teachers affects their relationship to the subject. The more I open myself up as a person whose very presence can affect my students, the more comfortable the students will feel working with me to engage with the subject matter.

To be clear, I am not suggesting that educators move in a direction of eliminating boundaries between teacher and student, or make some kind of attempt to be the "cool teacher" that inevitably results in less attention to one's pedagogy. Instead, just as every educator knows that good pedagogy involves modulating our methods of instruction in order to engage the students in different ways, so too must we insert aspects of who we are as individuals at appropriate moments to invite our students to think about the living and learning component of Jewish education.

For example, I am currently teaching the 12th grade intensive class at my school on the fourth chapter of Bavli Berakhot, which deals with many concepts of Jewish prayer that exist today. At the conclusion of these students' day school experience, when many of them can feel burned-out by being "forced" to pray every day for the last thirteen years, the subject matter I teach will mean little unless I am willing to let them speak about their own prayer lives and share feelings about my own, as well. We began our year by studying the



For Heschel, teachers are a text because the totality of their Jewish life speaks greater volumes than any text taught in the classroom.

corresponding chapter in the Mishnah, where the students were drawn to the following text:

Rabbi Eliezer says: One who makes his prayer fixed, his prayer is not supplication [for divine mercy]. Rabbi Yehoshua says: On who is traveling in a dangerous place should offer a brief prayer, and say: "Save God, Your People, the remnant of Israel. Even when they distance themselves through sin, let their needs be before You. Praised are You, God, who hears prayer." (Berakhot 4:4)

While many day school students eventually study this text as a means of learning how the early rabbis conceived of personal prayer, this text represents an excellent opportunity for teachers to share a piece of themselves with the students. After translating the text, defining key terms, and analyzing how

these two statements in a single mishnah fit together, many teachers might ask, "How frequently do you think prayer in our school resembles the kind of prayer Rabbi Eliezer wants us to *avoid*?", or "Are you surprised that the rabbis make this kind of assertion?" as a means of letting the students share their own opinion about the larger issues raised by the text. However, what many teachers will *not* do is share their feeling about this text, and how their prayer life includes moments when prayer might feel "fixed" for them. Our instinct is to keep ourselves out of the lesson, for fear that we become the focus of our conversation. Yet how much richer would this larger conversation be if we saw what new avenues would be opened for ourselves by us opening ourselves to them?

To be fair, it takes courage to share a piece of ourselves with our students. But our willingness to share who we are in appropriate moments can be the difference between an interesting intellectual exercise and transformative moment. A beautiful midrash explains that the relationship between teachers and students is akin to that a parent and a child:

"Impress them upon your children"—these are your students. You find that in every place "students" are referred to as "children" as it says further on (Deuteronomy 14:1): "You are children of the Lord your God" and it says (II Kings 2:3), "The children of the prophets who had been in Beth-El came out to Elisha." But were they the children of the prophets?

[CONTINUED ON PAGE 44]

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They were actually “disciples,” and from this verse we learn that disciples are called “children.” (Sifrei Deuteronomy 6:7)

If any meaningful Jewish education experience combines living and learning, then it follows that the life and personality of the educator teaches something important about what it means to be a Jew, and thus we cannot separate who we are from what we teach. Sadly, in spite of the fact that all teenagers spend significant amount of time in the presence of teachers, scholars who study which adults most impact teenagers argue that “there is little evidence that their relationships with the average teacher are as emotionally significant as their relationships with the average parent or sibling, and certainly not as salient as their relationship with a close friend” (Nancy Darling, Stephen F. Hamilton and Katherine Hames Shaver, “Relationships Outside the Family: Unrelated Adults,” in *Blackwell Handbook of Adolescence*). While this conclusion is sobering, it also presents a tremendous opportunity, should

The notion that every action we perform impacts our students creates discomfort, yet from this discomfort we can find the greatest source of influence as educators.

we be willing to think boldly about what is possible if we engage in a paradigm-shift of how we see the primary task of a Jewish educator.

For most of us, our passion for Jewish learning and Jewish education did not come from a text that we learned but from an educator who taught it. If we are willing to acknowledge Parker Palmer’s assertion

that teaching emerges from something deep within us and embrace our role as a text taught in the classroom, we make the space for wider and deeper set of conversations in our classroom.

Think about your work in Jewish education. What are moments when you allow

your personality to shine through to your students? How do you model Judaism to them in the classroom, the hallway, the cafeteria, and when you see them outside of school? The notion that every action we perform impacts our students creates discomfort, yet it is also from this discomfort that we can find the greatest source of influence as educators. We are teachers, but we are also texts; what lessons would you like your students to study about you? ■



Enrollment Study: Community Day Schools Right the Ship

In partnership with our member schools, RAVSAK has again undertaken a study of enrollment trends in Jewish community day schools across North America to clarify the impact the economy and demographic changes have had on our individual and collective rosters. With 118 of our schools in the US and Canada now reporting, we believe that we have captured an accurate snapshot of enrollment figures, and more importantly, changes in enrollment from last year.

Last year (2012-2013) the field of community day schools was down by nearly 1.1%—a net loss of approximately 470 students from the previous year. The enrollment changes experienced by RAVSAK schools were similar to the changes felt in Reform and Modern Orthodox schools (enrollment in Conservative schools was down significantly; enrollment in the Centrist Orthodox and Chareidi schools was up notably).

A year of media attention to the challenges facing day schools, not to mention the Jewish community as a whole, suggested that Jewish day schools would again experience a major downturn in enrollment. We are pleased to share, however, that the net change in North American enrollment this year from last is just

2 students: a loss of .01%.

It is important to note that enrollment changes vary greatly, from schools weathering losses in excess of 50% to those that have grown by nearly 35%. Here are the trends in enrollment, according to the reporting schools:

| | |
|-------------------------|-----|
| Loss of 10% or greater: | 15% |
| Loss under 10%: | 15% |
| Flat, +/-, 1%: | 27% |
| Growth of 1%-10%: | 30% |
| Growth over 10%: | 13% |

In essence, we can see that while 30% of Jewish community day schools experienced a drop in enrollment, a full 70% of our schools had stable enrollments or experienced growth. These data suggest a growth in schools that have sustained or regained stability and a decrease in schools continuing to face notable enrollment challenges.

For more information, contact Robin Feldman at rfeldman@ravsak.org. ■

Moot Beit Din

March 27 – 30, 2014

Moot Beit Din is a unique and highly interactive program that enables students from Jewish high schools to examine issues of Halakhah through creative engagement with contemporary situations. Teams of students are given a contemporary dilemma and asked to write a judgment using Jewish texts. The teams then come together for a weekend Shabbaton where they meet their peers for four days of Jewish learning, community-building, prayer and fun, all within a pluralistic Jewish environment.



The Moot Beit Din will be held March 27-30, 2014, in Kansas City. Our friends at Hyman Brand Academy are thrilled to be this year's host school!

Students from across North America are studying the case, investigating halakhic sources and testing out different arguments. There is already much excitement and conversation between the students throughout participating schools.

- Adelson Educational Campus, Las Vegas, NV
- American Hebrew Academy, Greensboro, NC
- Charles E. Smith Jewish Day School, Rockville, MD
- Tanenbaum CHAT, Kimel Centre, Vaughn, ON
- Tanenbaum CHAT, Wallenberg Campus, Toronto, ON
- David Posnack Jewish Day School, Davie, FL
- Denver Jewish Day School, Denver, CA
- Donna Klein Jewish Academy, Boca Raton, FL
- Frankel Jewish Academy, W. Bloomfield, MI
- Hyman Brand Hebrew Academy, Overland Park, KS
- Jack M. Barrack Hebrew Academy, Bryn Mawr, PA
- Jewish Community High School of the Bay, San Francisco, CA
- Milken Community High School, Los Angeles, CA
- New Community Jewish High School, West Hills, CA
- Golda Och Academy, West Orange, NJ
- Ottawa Jewish Community School, Ottawa, ON
- San Diego Jewish Academy, San Diego, CA
- Schechter School of Westchester, Hartsdale, NY
- Schechter School of Long Island, Williston Park, NY
- Tarbut V'Torah, Irvine, CA
- The Scheck Hillel Community School, North Miami, FL
- The Weber School, Atlanta, GA
- Talmud Torah/Herzliah, Montreal, QC

RAVSAK's Annual Hebrew Poetry Contest

RAVSAK's annual Hebrew Poetry Contest is in full swing. Teachers have received the curriculum and are actively working with their students exploring the beauty of Hebrew poetry.

Join your colleagues in this powerful program!

Participating schools so far include:

- The Agnon School, Beachwood, OH
- Akiva School, Montreal, QC
- Carmel Academy, Greenwich, CT
- Emery/Weiner School, Houston, TX
- Frankel Jewish Academy, W. Bloomfield, MI
- Gesher Jewish Day School, Fairfax, VA
- Hillel Day School of Metropolitan Detroit, Farmington Hills, MI
- Jewish Primary School Day School of the Nation's Capital, Washington, DC
- Donna Klein Jewish Academy, Boca Raton, FL
- Arthur Meyer Jewish Academy, West Palm Beach, FL
- Milken Community High School, Los Angeles, CA
- N.E. Miles Jewish Day School, Birmingham, AL
- The Scheck Hillel Community School, North Miami, FL
- Shalom School, Sacramento, CA
- Syracuse Hebrew Day School, Syracuse, NY
- Rabbi David L. Silver Yeshiva Academy, Harrisburg, PA

Email Lisa Inberg, student programs coordinator, at linberg@ravsak.org to inquire or sign up. To learn more about Moot Beit Din, the Hebrew Poetry Contest and many other programs for community day schools, please visit www.ravsak.org/programs.

RAVSAK's Hebrew Poetry Contest is a proven program that has inspired students to produce works of demonstrable excellence as they use their Hebrew language skills in creative new ways.

To date, over 800 students from 30 day schools have participated in the RAVSAK Hebrew Poetry Contest.

In matters of Hebrew language learning in the Jewish community, "identity" has become the current buzz word, and rightly so. Still, the writing of poetry is an art. We call upon these young Hebrew learners to manipulate what they have acquired, to mold their creations from this clay. The aesthetic of the endeavor springs from an initial distancing from the material. I like to imagine these day school poets taking stock of their Hebrew assets and venturing into their act of creation—of self-expression. Along with the inevitable struggles, they may also experience the "pleasure of the medium" and get a glimpse of the gift of the Hebrew language."

Janice Silverman Rebibo
Israeli poet and past judge of
RAVSAK's Hebrew Poetry Contest

תחרות השירה העברית



The only thing that can save the world is the reclaiming of the awareness of the world. That's what poetry does.

Allen Ginsberg

School Quality Depends on Teacher Quality

[CONTINUED FROM PAGE 25]

fer teachers the types of support and development they need. While some teachers, strongly committed to the Jewish community and their students, will stay in the field even under adverse conditions, well designed and sustained professional learning can strengthen their commitment and quality of teaching.

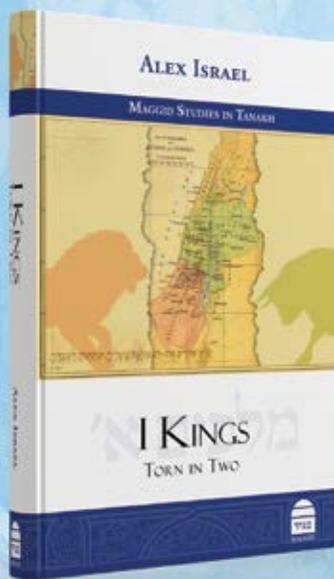
Moreover, it is plausible to expect that under different circumstances and with more professional support, some teachers who were identified as *disengaged and unsupported* (and on their way out of the profession) could develop into satisfied effective teachers who would want to stay and contribute to their school and students. One way to approach this important issue is to track not only the teachers who stayed in Jewish day schools but also those who left the profession and compare them in terms of demographic background, personal commitments, teacher preparation experience and school conditions.

In 2007 I established a comprehensive survey system that tracks Jewish day school teachers who graduated from the DeLeT program at Brandeis and HUC-JIR to help the field understand which factors are most prominent in explaining teacher retention and attrition. When analyzing the findings I compared the DeLeT teachers who stayed with those who left and found clear indications that those who left were significantly more likely to have received lower levels of support from their administrators and peers at school. Naturally, this was not the only factor explaining teacher attrition. We also found that

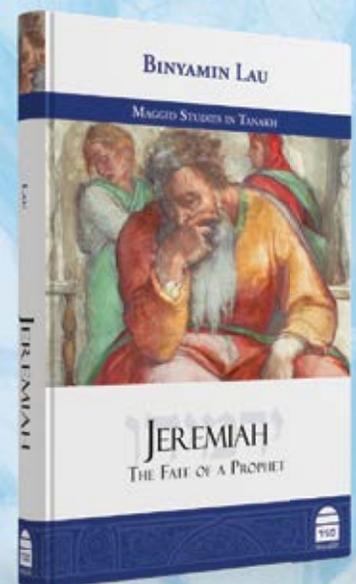
those who stayed had significantly stronger commitment to serve the Jewish community and greater perception of effective teacher preparation experience.

What can school leaders, those who fund Jewish education, and those who shape communal policy learn from these findings? The first lesson is obvious. Day schools should pay more attention to teachers, because investment in teacher quality is the most cost-effective approach to improving student learning and maintaining day schools as a viable option for upper and middle class Jewish families. In particular, it is imperative for day school leaders to consider whether the structure and schedule of teachers' work serve their school, and whether redesigning it may help teachers become better at what they do. In order for that to happen schools might need to consider moving resources (not necessarily increasing them) and building frameworks and infrastructures that put the professional growth of teachers as a top priority for the school.

The second lesson, which is perhaps less obvious, is that training, supporting and developing the most effective teachers is a shared responsibility of the programs that prepare teachers and the schools that hire them. Schools and teacher preparation programs have a vested interest to interact and build closer partnerships, which could help create a more sensitive recruitment system that attracts the best candidates in terms of Jewish background and commitment to the Jewish community, as well as preparing and supporting these candidates in learning to teach their subject matter successfully in particular day school settings. ■



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What Makes a Jewish Day School Teacher? The Connection Between Passion and Teaching

■ by SARAH LEVY

Day school teachers conceive of their roles as models in various ways that mirror their own practices and beliefs. This article suggests ways for schools to empower teachers to incorporate modeling more thoughtfully into their pedagogy.

We all know that no one enters the field of Jewish education to get rich, or at least we hope that no one does as they would be sorely disappointed. So why, then, do those who enter the field do so? More specifically, who are Jewish day school teachers and why do they enter the field? How does that affect their classrooms? And, most relevant for practice, how can we use this information to best impact our students?

Who are Jewish day school teachers, and why do they enter the field?

Researchers have shed some light on the reasons why teachers in general, and religious studies teachers in particular, enter the profession. Robert Serow, Deborah Eaker, and Krista Forest determined that teachers are interested in student development both in the particular subject material and also in their own identity formation (*I Want to See Some Kind of Growth out of Them*). Along those lines, Mike Younger, Sue Brindley, David Pedder, and Hazel Hagger found that teachers choose their profession out of a desire both to challenge themselves intellectually and to transform the youth with whom they work (*Starting Points: Student Teachers' Reasons for Becoming Teachers and their Preconceptions of What this Will Mean*). According to these researchers, those who enter the field of teaching are committed not only to students' academic learning but also to connecting with students and fostering their maturation and development in the world in general.

Regarding religious studies teachers, Roisin Coll shows that religious teachers' identities are deeply ingrained in their content knowledge and comfort level regarding the religious subjects they are expected to teach (*Student Teachers' Perception of their Role and Responsibilities as Catholic Educators*). As such, because Jewish studies contain both academic and value-laden content, these teachers infuse their particular subject matter with their personal identity, making the two almost indistinguishable and bringing that infused identity into their teaching on a regular basis. Focusing specifically on Jewish day school teachers, Laya Salomon similarly found that teachers' religion plays an important role in their decision to become teachers in a Jewish day school in the first place, with those more closely connected to Judaism choosing to enter the profession, again showing that, for religious studies teachers, their personal religious beliefs play an important role in their personas as teachers.

No one made a conscious choice to become a Jewish studies teacher. Rather, Judaism was so central to their lives that their careers followed an organic progression.

In doing research for my own dissertation, focusing on the perceptions of Jewish studies teachers at a community day school, my findings were in line with those of previous research. Of the partici-

pants I interviewed, none consciously made a choice to become a Jewish studies teacher at a Jewish day school. Rather, for each of them, Judaism and Jewish culture were such a central part of their own lives that their careers followed an organic progression, ultimately leading each of them to be teachers at a community day school.



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How does it affect their classrooms?

The decision to be a day school teacher is closely connected to the teachers' own Jewish identities, and each of them brings their specific Jewish identity into the classroom. As such, as shown by researchers, they each bring their own goals for the students and have a lasting impact on the students. Ruth Butler shared that teaching is an interpersonal endeavor, not just personal endeavor, and that teachers' goals are closely related to teachers' roles in the classroom and their approach to instruction (*Striving to Connect: Extending an Achievement Goal Approach to Teacher Motivation to Include Relational Goals for Teaching*), showing how personal and individual the art of teaching can be, especially when tied to teachers' Jewish identities.

Norman Friedman expresses that Jewish studies teachers continue to develop their own content knowledge while teaching, stating that "Jewish content is usually learned in the act of teaching, a kind of continuing education effect" (*On the "Non-Effects" of Jewish Education on Most Students: A Critique*), emphasizing the value and goal of lifelong learning for both the students and the teachers. Peter Kash, in his dissertation *A Linkage of Student Satisfaction in High School Classrooms and Future Jewish Identity*, also explains that teachers play an important role in Jewish education of the students because their satisfaction with Jewish education and the experience they receive

while obtaining that education will shape their identity. The more positive their experience, the more likely they are to have a strong Jewish identity.

For the community day school teachers I researched, teaching is a very personal act, and they constantly, usually subconsciously, infuse

their own identities and personalities into their classrooms, which is both unavoidable and helpful in that it leads to deeper, more genuine connections with their students. Additionally, their own personal values are projected into the classroom. For example, one

teacher-participant places instilling a commitment to community and communal participation as a high priority, and this is reflected in her own life through her considering the community's needs when developing her curriculum and through her own active affiliation with communal organizations.

Another participant is deeply committed to imparting a love of life-long learning to his students; he models this value through his own constant learning, often including the students and encouraging them to select topics of interest. A third participant is closely connected to Israel and feels that all students should share a connection to Israel, being familiar with the history of the land and people and showing some comfort level with the language of modern Hebrew.

[CONTINUED ON PAGE 50]

One teacher who places a high priority on communal participation considers the community's needs when developing the curriculum.



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[CONTINUED FROM PAGE 49]

His students are cognizant of Israeli current events and well versed in Jewish history. For all of the teachers I interviewed, their own values and identities shape their classrooms and their students.

How can we use this information to best impact our students?

Given the nature and motivation of many of our Jewish studies teachers, our schools should work to recognize the unique role these individuals play in students' lives and capitalize on the specific field of teaching in a day school in order to benefit our students. Although this is no simple task, here are three suggestions to begin the conversation.

Provide opportunities and resources for Jewish studies teachers to continue their personal development as well as professional development. Yes, working on differentiation and technology integration and pedagogy are important for the ongoing development of teachers, but given that Jewish identity and a commitment to studying Jewish texts plays an essential role in a Jewish studies teacher's entering and remaining in the field, and because of the value of learning that we instill in our students, our schools should be fostering lifelong learning among its faculty. Through these ongoing learning opportunities, not only will teachers be able to authentically model lifelong learning for the students, but they will return to their classrooms refreshed, encouraged, and ready to continue to inspire the students.

Give Jewish studies teachers the opportunity to broadly impact the students beyond their own classrooms. Encourage these teachers to interact with the students outside of their Tanakh (or rabbinics or Jewish thought) classes through interdisciplinary programs and lessons, showing the students that Jewish studies and Jewish identity do not need to be compartmentalized into allotted chunks of 45 minutes per day. The research shows that day school teachers become day school teachers because of the way that Judaism has become a part of their own personal identities, so our schools should aim to provide opportunities, through extracurricular activities and other programs, for these teachers to use their identities and interact with students in different ways. If the students have positive associations with Jewish studies and see that these subjects are applicable beyond the specific classes, they will be more likely to infuse them into their own identities and draw on them in the future.

Allow Jewish studies teachers the freedom to impact students' identities, free from academic constraints. If, as the research suggests, one of the main roles of Jewish studies teachers is to affect personal development and identity formation, alternative forms of assessment should not only be allowed, but they should be encouraged. Accurately translating a text from Hebrew or Aramaic to English can be measured through a test. Comparing the commentaries of

Rashi and Radak can be measured through a test. Personal development and identity formation cannot and should not be assessed through a test.

As such, because of their commitment to instilling

and fostering Jewish identity within their students, Jewish studies teachers tend to be less concerned with traditional measures of academic success such as grades and college admissions, focusing instead on the long-term effects of day school education such as community involvement, evidence of lifelong learning, and daily decisions that reflect a sense of Jewish identity. Jewish studies teachers structure their classroom goals in a way that aims to prepare their students for personal success in the greater world through strengthening their identity and helping them to form a knowledge base through which to make their decisions. Their assessments, then, should reflect these goals.

Rather than restricting Jewish studies teachers to doling out letter grades, encourage them to have their students create portfolios of their work, apply their learning to the world outside of the day school, and internalize the material rather than cramming for a test. Through allowing these teachers the freedom to assess their students through more authentic means, they can more accurately determine the actual impact their classes (and the Jewish identities that they bring with them) are having on the students.

William Arthur Ward once said, "The mediocre teacher tells. The good teacher explains. The superior teacher demonstrates. The great teacher inspires." Within our day schools are many great teachers who inspire our students on a daily basis. They do this, largely, because they want to have an impact on students and help them to develop, both academically and personally. Each of these teachers infuses his or her own personality and identity into the classroom, aiming for the greatest impact possible. Through fostering ongoing personal development, providing opportunities for the teachers to be involved in the school beyond the classroom, and allowing and encouraging flexibility in assessment, our schools can help our great teachers to inspire the next generation. ■

Encourage teachers to have their students create portfolios of their work, applying their learning to the world outside of the day school.

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Each issue of RAVSAK's monthly newsletter, eRAVSAK, is chock full of great articles and videos, shared learning and important news from RAVSAK and the day school field.

Sections include:

- RAVSAK News: See what new information RAVSAK has for our network
- The RAVSAK Book Bag: Hear about new books for the day school community
- Student Profile: Meet a star student from one of RAVSAK's network school
- Fieldwide Programs: Learn about innovative programs making a positive impact on students
- Job Board: Check out new opportunities to advance your career
- Social Media Resources: Find news from the world of Facebook and Twitter about Jewish community day schools.

In case you missed it, here are some excerpts from recent issues of RAVSAK's monthly newsletter. Don't miss out on eRAVSAK! Each issue is chock full of great articles and videos, shared learning and important news from RAVSAK and the field. To subscribe, send a request to info@ravsak.org.

From October 2013: "Educational Games in RAVSAK Classrooms." Dorit Zmiri, Boston's Jewish Community Day School: *Advisory Games*

Last week, JCDS middle school students participated in the first annual advisory games. This two-day competition between the four advisories, Sabra, Esh, Tsufit, and Nahar, consisted of relay races, a water balloon toss, team performances, and plenty of ruach. While the competition itself was a fun activity that built team spirit and pride, it also opened the door for a wider conversation of this year's Facing History and Ourselves theme of membership. In classroom reflections, students analyzed different aspects of the competition and how they reacted emotionally. They were posed challenging questions, such as what it means to be in a

group, and if it is better to be in a group or act as an individual. The discussion, which will extend through the rest of the school year, went deeper to examine the psychology of insiders versus outsiders, and managing the human instinct of stereotyping others to simplify and reduce them. "The easiest unifier is to put the others down," Pete Sperber explained to the students in Nahar as they reflected on their win, "but

is that a good reason to form a bond with someone?"

From September 2013: Review of Miriam Raider-Roth's *Trusting What You Know: The High Stakes of Classroom Relationships*, in the RAVSAK Book Bag. By Rabbi Joshua Rabin, Schechter School of Long Island, Williston Park, NY

As I read this book, I focused upon how we might expand the theme of trust in education as a critical quality in building environments of Jewish learning where students feel ready and comfortable to explore their Jewish selves. By the time students reach high school, they will likely have big questions about their theology, religious practice and connection to the Jewish people, questions that are typically raised by their own experience in a Jewish day school. How educators respond to these doubts and concerns is inextricably related to ensuring that students feel trust in their knowledge.

From August 2013, "Shitufim: Upstate New York JDS Consortium," by Shira Brown, Kadimah Jewish Day School, Buffalo, NY

Smaller schools have unique challenges. Could the joint hiring of consultants, curriculum advisers or development directors be a possibility? What about cooperative distance learning? Could a unified and enhanced Judaics curriculum be created? ■

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Jewish Educators *Walk the Walk*

■ by **FRUMIE POSNER**

Just as teachers serve as role models, they also need role models. Posner draws upon teachings from Pirkei Avot and midrashim about Moses to find guidance about the meaning of a Jewish role model.

Recently, I read a eulogy written about a young member of our day school family. To paraphrase the writer: “Perhaps instead of studying Pirkei Avot, one should have spent a day with this wonderful man.” The writer’s point being that this man exemplified the lessons that Avot teaches. Why study the text when we can study the person?

As Judaic teachers, our mission may be to exemplify the character traits we strive so hard to teach. Students carefully watch the way we conduct ourselves *bein adam le-chaveiro*, between man and his fellow. At times, children will equate their relationship with their Judaism with their relationships with their Judaic instructors.

I often think of the well known advice to parents: *Do not worry that your kids do not listen to all you say. Worry that they watch all you do.* As Torah teachers, we need to worry less that our students are not listening to all we teach and more that they watch all we do. We do not want to be viewed as “talking the talk but not walking the walk.” Here are some lessons from Pirkei Avot that we should embody.

“Judge every person favorably.” When a student has a hard morning, when a parent misses a conference or does not respond to an important email, this is an opportunity for us to judge our students and parents favorably.

“Greet every person with a cheerful countenance.” When our students walk into our classrooms in the morning, do we greet them with a cheery “good morning” or do we bark orders at

them? Do we greet the custodian with the same respect that we greet the president of the board?

“A teacher who is too strict cannot teach.” We must be patient with our students. Long after they may forget the Torah we taught them, our students will remember the way we treated them when they did not “get it” the first time.

“Who is wise? He who learns something from every person.” We must tell our students that we learn from them and from others every day. We must be humble and allow our students to know that we did not invent the wheel. We learn from our students, our colleagues, and our parents.

Long after students may forget the Torah we taught them, our students will remember the way we treated them when they did not “get it” the first time.

While maintaining professionalism, it may be an idea to talk about Jewish life outside of school. At times we may be attending a brit milah, or a bar or bat mitzvah. We may have the opportunity to care for an elderly parent or person with special needs. Perhaps we can share memories of our own bar or bat mitzvah and what it meant to us. We can talk about Shabbat and holiday dinners, the stories, the divrei Torah, the special guests, and more. These are opportunities for our students to see that Judaism is a 24/7 tradition that is most definitely not limited to the classroom.

Moshe was our first leader. He is referred to as Moshe Rabbeinu, Moses our teacher. Why was Moshe chosen to be the leader of the Jewish people? Was it because of his eloquent speaking ability? Probably not. We know Moshe had a serious speech defect. Was it because of his leadership experience? We know he was a shepherd, not a people person. Was it because of his populari-



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ty amongst the Jewish people? He fled Egypt because Datan and Aviram had slandered him to Pharaoh and talked ill about him to his Jewish brethren.

A midrash in Shmot Rabbah relates: *When our teacher Moses was tending Jethro's flock in the desert, a little sheep ran away from him and he pursued it. At last, the little sheep found a pool of water and stopped to drink. When Moses caught up, he said: "Little sheep, I did not know that you were running because of thirst. You must be tired." He took the little sheep on his shoulder and led him back to the flock. Said the Holy One Blessed Be He, "You have shown compassion in tending the flocks. By your life, you will tend my flock Israel."*

It was not Moshe's charisma, eloquent speech nor his leadership qualities. It was his compassion and concern for a lost little sheep that influenced God to choose him to be our leader and our teacher. Who are the lost sheep in our classrooms? These students are often dis-

Moshe's compassion for a lost little sheep influenced God to choose him to be our leader and our teacher. Who are the lost sheep in our classrooms?

ruptive as they cry out for help. Can we muster the strength to show compassion and support in a Moshe-like fashion?

Moshe later became our greatest advocate as highlighted in the events which transpired in the desert. We can learn from

Moshe to be our students' advocates to their parents and to other teachers. Moshe knew his talents and abilities. He understood how privileged he was to lead the Jewish people, to teach them Torah and to speak "face to face" with God. And yet, Moshe was the most humble man who ever lived, as highlighted in the last few sentences of the Torah.

Ashreinu! How fortunate we are to come "face to face" each day with the Godly sparks within our students. And how humbled we are to be a link in the chain of Jewish educators who for generations have "walked the walk" modeled for us by Moshe Rabbeinu. ■

חג אורים שמח

RAVSAK's Board and Staff wish you a happy Hanukkah

What Day Schools Need Is... More Cool Teachers

■ by **JUDD LEVINGSTON**

Levingston offers yet another perspective on modeling: a “cool” teacher is a good listener, receptive to the initiative and energy of students, committed to them and their learning, and who always looks for ways to keep the material fresh and meaningful.

Our day schools need more cool teachers. Not necessarily the kind of teachers who wear high-top sneakers and hipster jeans, though there’s nothing wrong with that if that happens to be your style. Our kids need teachers to embody a different kind of cool.

When I interviewed small clusters of middle and upper students at my school and asked what makes a teacher “cool,” they used words like “funny,” “nice,” “understands us” and “doesn’t treat us like babies.” Being cool means not being aloof or indifferent, and it also means being willing to play a little with the students on their terms out at recess or in the kinds of on-task classroom games that make class lively, suspenseful and highly interactive.

For the students I interviewed, teachers who exude cool exude its opposite: warmth.

Quite tellingly, the students added, teachers who exude cool also exude something authentic. They age gracefully and they don’t color their hair or try to hide their half-glasses. Cool teachers keep the focus not on themselves but on taking students seriously as young scholars. Students think it is pretty cool when a teacher shares a passionate pursuit of knowledge.

Some of my students over the years have told me that they like it when a teacher isn’t *just* their teacher. They like knowing something about who their teachers are outside of school. Students chafe, though, when a teacher shares TMI (that’s short for “Too Much Information”). Students only want to know so much about their teachers, and most importantly, they want to

know if the teacher has life experience, likes kids, and can show empathy. If the teacher struggled and succeeded, then the student can, too, but if the teacher seems too smooth and doesn’t show any rough edges, then the students will put up their own walls and conclude that they cannot learn from someone who isn’t a role model for learning.

If the teacher struggled and succeeded, then the student can, too, but if the teacher seems too smooth and doesn’t show any rough edges, then the students will put up their own walls.

While our 2000 year-old Jewish tradition doesn’t directly address a concept as relatively new as cool, there are some passages in the Tanakh and in rabbinic literature that speak to some of the same qualities our students want to seek in their cool teachers.

Psalm 34 describes an individual who embraces life and who sees the good in things: **מי האיש החפץ חיים אוהב ימים לראות טוב** *Who is the one who desires life, who appreciates his days and sees the good?*



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Desiring and embracing life is a sure way to be cool because cool for a middle or high school student is not at all cold. It is committed and affirming.

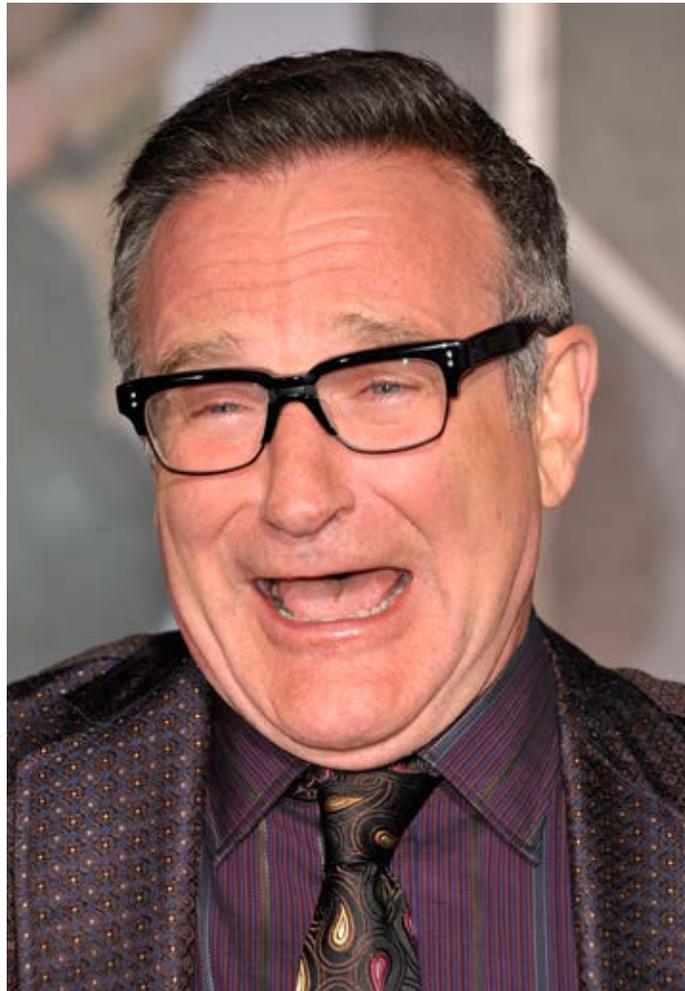
Another passage that comes to mind comes from Pirkei Avot 2:6, where Hillel teaches, *במקום שאין אנשים תשתדל איש להיות איש* *In a place where there are no worthy people, try to be a worthy person.*

When chaos swirls around us, like at 2 pm on a rainy Friday afternoon in the middle school, right when students are within an hour of dismissal and nothing stands between them and Shabbat but a class, being cool means being sympathetic and level-headed (not always easy!), but not succumbing to the chaos, remaining the adult in the room.

There are ways in which being cool also means showing modesty. In the now classic movie *Dead Poets Society*, Robin Williams plays a teacher named John Keating who seeks to inspire his students to join him in tearing up their textbooks, discarding the curriculum they have been handed and seizing the day instead. He touches the hearts of his students and he excites their passion for learning with his charisma. On reflection after I viewed the film recently, I came to wonder if the teacher Mr. Keating leaves enough room for the students to develop their own identity, or are they asked to accept the teacher's outlook too readily?

Some of the coolest teachers I observe in the school where I work don't stand on their desks to get attention. Instead, they ask the students to put the texts they study to music or they ask the students to make a plan that will take what they learn in the classroom to a new phase beyond the classroom walls. Cool teachers allow disagreement and they invite many sources of information in the classroom that build a community that respects academic discourse.

In her book *Quiet: The Power of Introverts in a World That Can't Stop*



Does Mr. Keating (Robin Williams) leave enough room for the students to develop their own identity, or are they asked to accept the teacher's outlook too readily?

having faith in their potential to grow into mature adults. We teachers should stay limber and try not to get weary of our work so that we can sustain the coolness that our students need. If we can go the distance with them, it will give them strength to persist and go the distance themselves. That kind of commitment and persistence can be cool, too.

When our students come back as proud alumni, they don't want to see us frozen in time in the same skinny ties or denim skirts that were cool "back in the day." They want to see that we are up-to-date, but that we still embody the values that we passed on to them when they were hungry students in our classes.

Our schools need cool teachers, the kind who are authentic and who want more than anything to nurture the next generation. ■

Talking, Susan Cain describes the ways in which introverts are good listeners, good systems thinkers and effective at helping others to find their voices. As much as we need teachers who will be like a Mr. Keating and excite the kids, I have observed that some of the coolest teachers in the school where I work don't stand on their desks to get attention. Instead, they engage the students as partners in learning and they inspire them to put the texts they study to music, to find the delicious ironies in stories about our biblical patriarchs and matriarchs and to dig deeper to express themselves more completely in a second draft. Cool teachers allow disagreement and they invite many sources of information into their classrooms, building a community of learners that values academic discourse.

One final verse comes to mind when I think about what makes a teacher cool. The prophet Isaiah describes the strength that comes from a certain kind of faith: *ירוצו ולא יגועו, ילכו ולא ייעפו* *They shall run and not grow weary; they shall march and not grow faint.*

Being cool means going the distance with our kids and

How RAVSAK Uses the Global Day of Jewish Learning to Bring Art and Teaching to Students

■ by **LISA INBERG**, RAVSAK Student Programs Coordinator

(article appeared originally in eJewish Philanthropy)

One day he (Honi the Circle Drawer) was journeying on the road and he saw a man planting a carob tree, he asked him, How long does it take (for this tree) to bear fruit? The man replied: Seventy years. He then further asked him: Are you certain that you will live another seventy years? The man replied: I found (ready grown) carob trees in the world; as my forefathers planted these for me so I too plant these for my children. Babylonian Talmud Ta'anit 23a

This year's Global Day of Jewish Learning is Sunday, November 17th and will unite hundreds of Jewish communities around the world through study of our shared texts, this year around the theme of Creating Together. Inspired by Rabbi Steinsaltz's vision that Jewish texts be available to all Jews, the Global Day is a project of the Aleph Society. For several years, RAVSAK has partnered with the Global Day to bring the curriculum's texts and accompanying discussion questions to the students at the 130 Jewish day schools in our network and has launched an art contest to inspire the students to creatively interpret these texts in personally meaningful ways.

Learning the aforementioned talmudic text through the Global Day curriculum one is challenged by questions including: Why is the man planting fruit? What does the concept of legacy mean to you? What are the deeper levels of meaning that inspire you and those you are learning with? The carob is a very resilient tree that survives with little or no water when everything else begins to wither, the carob lives. The carob tree can

survive many generations, providing for our children and grandchildren. No wonder that the man chose to plant a carob tree. Jewish texts themselves are like the carob tree: time-



less and durable, they provide us with sustenance, knowledge and life. At RAVSAK Jewish text study plays a central role in framing all that we do in our programming for students and school administrators.

As a non-native American (I grew up in Australia), I am charmed by the fact that the new school year is aligned with Rosh Hashana. It is a shared time to reflect on the importance of our work as Jewish educators and reinvigorate ourselves for the educational opportunities that portend the beginning of school. My declaration in 5774 is that, like the man, I will continue to plant seeds for our students, passing on the blessing of learning as it was given to me.

Rabbi Steinsaltz notes that God created the world in order for man "to do." Although God created the world thoughtfully, God nonetheless created the world incomplete. Instead, God created mankind to be partners in perfecting this world for ourselves and our future. RAVSAK takes that message literally, working as dedicated partners with our network schools in making it a more perfect world for all. This creative act of God is one we hope to inspire in our network of Jewish students. The Jewish Art Contest nourishes the creative spirit, empowering our students to learn and interpret Jewish texts in meaningful ways.

The program represents a creative collaboration between RAVSAK and the Global Day of Jewish Learning. The program engages students in a multidisciplinary study of Jewish studies and art combining intensive text interpretation leading into the production of visual art. Students create an artist statement explaining how their study led them to produce their work. The contest is open to elementary through high school students with separate categories of competition in fine arts and photography/digital imagery.

Reading and seeing the student's interpretations of the Global Day curriculum sources attest to the positive impact of studying Jewish texts on student's lives.

Danielle S. from Frankel Jewish Academy in West Bloomfield, Michigan, a finalist in the 2012 art contest, studied texts on the theme of "Blessing the Bad":

The Mishnah tells us "one is obligated to recite a blessing for the bad that befalls him just as he recites a blessing for the good that befalls him." At first, it was very difficult for me to find the good from the death of my grandfather because I just wish he could've been alive a bit longer, however what I learned from my Papa was to accept the things that happen in life despite how tough they may be. This lesson didn't hit me until after he had passed and I read these texts.

Liana G. from Donna Klein Jewish Academy

in Boca Raton, Florida, and another finalist in this year's art contest, reflects upon Job 40:9 from the Global Day curriculum:

God tells Job the majesty of his ways, His power, His omniscient knowledge. He learns that God alone knows the workings of the universe and the ways of the world. The random occurrences of luck and hardship are not in the realm of our understanding as humans and because of this, we must bless all that happens. Who are we to say what is bad?

By observing the students' works and reading their artistic statements, one can see how students creatively represented the meaning and understanding they took from the texts they studied.

Our students are not only studying, interpreting and creating pieces of artwork from the text, but are also finding ways to

make Jewish learning a relevant and meaningful part of their lives. The RAVSAK Art Contest engages students both by studying Jewish texts and inviting students to think critically and act creatively, with the freedom to explore what these texts might mean for them personally and in the wider world.

Just as the man plants the carob tree for his children, our work at RAVSAK is driven by the idea of the fruit being reaped by those who come after us. We will continue to develop meaningful programs and build strong relationships with our partner organizations that plant seeds in the minds of our recipients that produce a love of Jewish learning, a proud and strong Jewish identity and a desire to pass this message onto the next generation. Only by continuing this tradition can we ensure that our efforts will always bear fruit. ■

RAVSAK's Art Contest is in full swing. This year, we have almost tripled the number of schools participating in this innovative program.

Schools have received the curriculum and materials from Global Day of Jewish Learning, our partners on the project, and the response has been nothing short of phenomenal. We expect to have over 1,000 submissions for our expert judges to review!

The 28 schools in the 2013-2014 RAVSAK Art Contest are:

- Saul Mirowitz Jewish Community School, St Louis, MO
- Jewish Day School, Seattle, WA
- Addlestone Hebrew Academy, Charleston, SC
- The Agnon School, Cleveland, OH
- American Hebrew Academy, Greensboro, NC
- Donna Klein-Rosenblatt High School, Boca Raton, FL
- Scheck Hillel, North Miami, FL
- Frankel Jewish Academy, West Bloomfield, MI
- Pardes Jewish Day School, Phoenix, AZ
- Austin Jewish Academy, Austin, TX
- Charles E Smith JDS, Rockville, MD
- Gideon Hausner Jewish Day School, Palo Alto, CA
- JPPS Bialik, Montreal, QC
- Emery/Weiner School, Houston, TX
- Rockwern Academy, Cincinnati, OH
- Portland Jewish Academy, Portland, OR
- Hannah Senesh, Brooklyn, NY
- Hyman Brand Hebrew Academy, Kansas City, MO
- Chicago Jewish Day School, Chicago, IL
- Carmel Academy, Greenwich, CT
- NE Miles Jewish Day School, Birmingham, AL
- Hebrew Academy of Tidewater, Virginia Beach, VA
- Bernard Zell Anshe Emet Day School, Chicago, IL
- San Diego Jewish Day School, San Diego, CA
- Akiva School, Southfield, MI
- Syracuse Hebrew Day School, Syracuse, NY
- Charlotte Jewish Day School, Charlotte, NC
- Jewish Community Day School, Boston, MA

Mentoring: A Key to Teacher Retention

■ by **JAMIE FAITH WOODS**

In this section, authors emphasize the importance of professional growth for teacher satisfaction and retention. Here, Woods presents the benefits of mentoring to the teacher-mentor, not just the mentee.

The proverbial seven year itch often applies to teachers' relationship with their profession. Outstanding classroom teachers who leave the classroom but remain in schools frequently move on to become administrators. Some do so not because that is where their passions lie, but because the need for change is so great. In order to retain our best teachers, schools need to consider multiple pathways for their growth. Mentoring is one such path. Preparing the mentee to become a reflective practitioner who is beneficial to our schools has merit in and of itself. Additionally, the act of mentoring serves to nurture and enhance the mentor in a profound way.

The teachers who begin mentoring solely with the mentee's needs in mind are likely to continue to mentor because the act of mentoring serves them well. After they've taught for many years, they often experience the need to keep intellectually challenged by the profession. While each school year brings the routine yet complex challenges involved in teaching, like meeting individual learner's needs and executing new plans and projects, master teachers who remain in the same grade have a decreasing number of challenges in that their content knowledge, understanding of the developmental psychology of the given age of their learners, and the number of tools in their teaching toolkit are all quite high. Many need the intellectual stimulation that closely examining one's practice and helping a novice grow into a beginning teacher provide. To remain in the field, to stay teaching in a day school, teachers desperately need this increased intellectual stimulation.

Mentoring helps to keep teachers engaged with the profession of teaching. The excitement of wrestling with philosophy and practice that teachers did in teacher preparation programs becomes a distant memory for many experienced teachers. Mentoring entails frequently revisiting one's beliefs about teaching and making the connection from philosophy to practice a fluid one. Since mentors must serve as models of best practices for their interns, mentors must have strong teaching stances and

solid teaching pedagogies. They must be able to clearly articulate pedagogical reasons for their teaching moves. This is what mentors learn and master while serving as mentors for beginning teachers.

In order to model best teaching practices, mentors must stay current on new and emerging teaching research. Ideally, all teachers should, but mentoring makes one feel truly invested and thus engaged. The act of returning to one's roots of being a teacher who learns about the field is an engaging process. Mentees in quality teaching preparation programs are on the forefront of cutting edge research about the field, and mentors have a much greater exposure to the work in education that is coming out of universities.

Mentoring challenges one both personally and professionally, and thus leads to significant personal and professional growth. Being a reflective practitioner is challenging work. Dewey teaches, "We do not learn from experiences ... we learn from reflecting on experiences." In turn, the act of reflecting on our experiences leads to growth. In addition to modeling (or attempting to model) best practices, mentors need to be able to clearly unpack and explain every teaching move that they make. The act of looking at one's self so closely, at understanding one's own practice on the meta-level, requires one to look through lenses of both the personal and the professional.

In *The Courage to Teach*, Parker Palmer explains that we cannot separate the personal from the professional. "We teach who we are." Mentoring means reflecting on one's professional self and how it's intricately woven into the fabric of one's own self. If, according to Palmer, "Teaching holds a mirror to the soul," then mentoring demands the magnitude of that mirror to be increased. That can feel daunting, to say the least, to a new mentor, and it can make even a master teacher feel uncomfortable in that she or he may feel put under a microscope. Mentoring, ideally, lead teachers to yearn to be put under microscopes!



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Mentoring teaches an educator to be comfortable being closely observed and examined, not because master teachers are confident that every move they make is the right one, but because they are confident that teaching is one of the most complicated acts, that perfection is an impossibility, and therefore the more we can dissect, the more we can improve, which in turn will result in the improvement of learning that takes place in the classroom. The beautiful symbiosis here is that the challenges involved in and the growth gained from mentoring keep teachers teaching. The ways in which our mentors grow ultimately advance the quality of teaching and learning in our schools.



Mentoring provides multiple intellectual challenges, which help retain teachers who thrive on challenge and who, conversely, grow disinterested in a stagnant culture. Experienced and master teachers are often left alone in their classrooms, with administrators putting their attention on novice teachers. The challenges of novice teachers are great, which helps keep teaching fresh and exciting. One needs to feel stimulated to want to stay in the game. And the teachers who need and want intellectual stimulation to remain in our schools are precisely the teachers our schools both need and should want to keep.

The intellectual stimulation comes in many forms and looks different depending on the mentor and mentee. On any given day and for any given mentor the intellectual challenges might involve any of the following: learning how to make the mentor's teaching moves explicit to the mentee, essentially letting the mentee glimpse inside the teacher's thought processes throughout the day; learning how to restructure the classroom to best utilize the strengths of the mentee; understanding the mentee as a learner and adjusting the ways one mentors to be most effective; learning how to manage and balance one's time in relation to the needs of both the students and the mentee; managing the needs of both the students and the mentee in a way that honors each individual as a learner; navigating a new professional relationship and the communication skills it entails; deconstructing each aspect of the teaching process in an effort to explain it at the appropriate time for the mentee. Each of these has the potential to provide an immense intellectual challenge for the mentor and an opportunity to shine.

Teachers who don't serve as mentors can gain some of the benefits mentoring brings by adapting aspects of the mentoring mindset. Admittedly, the idea of always being watched would scare many class-

room teachers. In this still closed-door profession, many teachers would be content to know in advance the two times their administrators plan to come for a formal observation. While that's changing slowly in small pockets, for teachers who want and try and need to break down their own doors, who invite others in, and often, the radical shift can only be one of immense added value in our schools.

What if, instead of talking about our weekends, we *also* talked openly about our teaching practice, about our *problems*, with our colleagues? What if we didn't see observation as a time to model perfection, but as an opportunity to grow and learn about ourselves and our practices? For teachers who are in a place where the school culture feels too oppressive to even begin to think realistically about being a door-taker-kind-of change agent, it's time to think in metaphors.

**Picture yourself in a lab school.
How would your practice change
if you, the teacher, imagined
thoughtful curious educators
were observing?**

Teachers can imagine themselves being watched. Picture one's self in a lab school. How would one's practice change if the teacher imagined thoughtful curious educators were observing? What moves would teachers do more of and which ones might be abandoned altogether if teachers had the goal of modeling solid teaching pedagogy?

Mentors or not, let's invite other teachers to open their doors, to ease into making their practices, and their thinking, more public. By allowing ourselves to become vulnerable in this way, we also model for our students the essence of what it means to be a learner.

Mentoring is one important means of retaining our best teachers. By serving in a position that honors their expertise, mentor teachers feel valued and respected by their school communities, which leads, in part, to a desire to remain present in that particular environment. Because of all the personal and professional gains for the mentor, remaining in the classroom feels like an innate decision. ■

Every Teacher Needs a Teacher

■ by SHIFFY LANDA

Landa, a veteran teacher, models the kind of vulnerability that leads to professional growth by describing her own experiences being mentored. She shows that mentorship can be a valuable tool at any career stage.

In a recent TED talk, Bill Gates expressed his belief that everyone needs a coach. It doesn't matter whether you are a basketball player, tennis player, gymnast, bridge player or even a teacher. "We all need people who will give us feedback because that's how we improve," Gates explained. He and his wife Melinda were stunned when they heard how little useful feedback most teachers get. His research showed that until recently over 98 percent of teachers received one word of feedback: "satisfactory"! Gates said that even with the improvements made in the way teachers are evaluated today, they still receive almost no feedback that actually helps them improve their practice. He strongly advocates that every teacher would benefit from having a coach.

After reading an article in the October 3, 2011 *New Yorker* by Atul Gawande, a surgeon who wrote about teachers needing coaches, I entertained the idea of engaging a coach. Gawande, a surgeon for eight years, wrote an article titled "Personal Best: Top Athletes and Singers Have Coaches. Should You?" because he felt that his performance in the operating room had reached a plateau. He wrote that, "No matter how well trained people are, few can sustain their best performance on their own."

He described the benefits of having a coach when it comes to sports. "Coaches aren't teachers, but they teach. They're not your boss, but they can be bossy. In professional tennis, golf and skating the athlete hires and fires the coach. The coach doesn't even have to be good at the sport. Mainly, they observe, they judge and they guide." Gawande described how he benefitted from having a coach in the operating room during surgery, and how he perfected his technique by having another pair of eyes in the room with him. He suggested that teachers too could profit from having a coach.

I immediately started contemplating the different areas in which I could use assistance. In the fall I would be teaching new material and wanted help designing my lessons, so that each of my

seventh grade students could become an independent learner and discover the thrill of inquiry based learning.

I discussed the idea of having a coach with Tom Hoerr, head of The New City School. Although they weren't using this model, his suggestion was, "A coach would be someone whose expertise makes the feedback meaningful, and whose role, not a supervisor, perhaps enables it to be better heard."

The idea of having someone coach me was certainly appealing. My teaching style has evolved over the years, from an MI (multiple intelligence) first grade classroom to integrating arts into the curriculum, and teaching new material from our Chumash curriculum would be challenging. The big question was, who would be my coach? I was looking for an expert educator with whom I would feel comfortable discussing my ambitions as a classroom teacher as well as my insecurities and failures.

I was looking for a colleague perhaps, someone who wouldn't be afraid to offer suggestions, someone who could really help me grow professionally in all areas of teaching the skills, values and content of the Chumash curriculum. I wanted a coach who wouldn't be afraid to encourage me and would agree to push me beyond my comfort zone, but at the same time support me when I made mistakes. I knew that for the coaching experience to be successful, I needed to find someone who would enjoy working with me and someone who would enjoy being a part of the process of my professional growth.

Mistakes were inevitable. Would inviting a coach into my classroom be inviting trouble? Would I expose my weaknesses and become vulnerable to criticism? Would I become defensive when a better way to design my lesson was pointed out? Would I be able to handle constructive criticism? What would my students think? After pondering these questions for several weeks, I decided that in order to have the professional development I



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needed and truly wanted at this point in my career, I was willing to take the risk.

In order for the coaching model to be effective, it was important that the coach be an expert educator and someone I could trust implicitly. It's not typical to have the head of school for one's coach, but that's whom I approached. I wasn't sure if our head, Rabbi Avi Greene, would consider my suggestion, or if he could find the time. As the Judaic studies curriculum coordinator I worked together with him on pieces of our curriculum, I had a very good working relationship with him, and we had many opportunities to discuss education. Rabbi Greene taught a Mishnah class to the same students I was teaching, he was an expert educator himself and I had a lot of respect for him. I could think of no one more suited for this role than him. You can imagine my delight when he agreed to this idea. Together we designed a coaching model.

Our objective was for me to improve and grow as a Judaic teacher by focusing on the skills, values and content of the Chumash curriculum. We decided to meet once every six weeks; we set goals to check on the engagement and interest level of all students, understanding of individual learning styles and opportunities for skill development. We planned monthly reviews on units/topics, looking at the essential questions and big ideas in my lesson plans and how they aligned with my instruction and student activities. We planned on assessing goals for progression in skill development and checking for understanding.

Rabbi Greene observed my Chumash class on six different occasions. Before each observation, we reviewed and discussed my lesson plans. We had deep discussions about different topics, such as "Did the different responsibilities of the Levite families, Gershon, Kehat and Merari, affect their relationship with Hashem?" "What is a *chok* (statute)?" "If the Jewish people complained when Miriam died, how do you think they will react to the death of Moshe?" From the story of the spies, we discussed, "Can there be cases where we determine our own punishment? What is the difference between, *punishment* and *consequence*?" I enjoyed our discussions immensely; it often felt like I was having my very own private Chumash class with Rabbi Greene. My students and I enjoyed the rich discussions I brought to my classroom.

After he observed my classes, we met and discussed his observations and feedback. Rabbi Greene made certain to document his observations so I could have written evaluations as well. I was pleased that our coaching experience was a professional one.

After having been observed numerous times I asked Rabbi Greene if he thought our coaching model was successful and a productive use of his time. I was worried about taking up too much of his time. He reassured me that this wasn't the case and expressed his desire "to look for new and better ways for teachers and administrators to reflect on what they do and the way they do it." "Many of the best models come from the business world. This method seemed to excite you and provide an opportunity to experiment with a new type of



reflection method," Rabbi Greene told me. He added, "This is clearly superior in that there are themes that we have worked to develop in your teaching and I can see how they are growing. This is better than the snapshot method of observation which is limited to what is seen in that moment alone."

He noted that with the coaching model he had a better understanding of how I teach and what I want to accomplish. "While it was not surprising, I was glad to see that you regularly turned questions back to a student for answering, often referring to the text."

Beginning in January there was a recurring theme in Rabbi Greene's evaluations. "Focus on essential questions and have all activities and lesson components follow naturally from these questions." One of his comments on my lesson plan was, "Be sure that the objective, group discussion and strategies align with the essential question."

During our very last post-observation meeting, Rabbi Greene was able to crystallize for me the area in which I most needed improvement: the way I was aligning my lessons. I felt comfortable with Rabbi Greene's feedback style and at the same time I knew he had high expectations of me.

We tend to hide our weaknesses. There were humbling moments for me in the coaching process, and it was uncomfortable at times when a weakness was exposed. Having a coach is about learning and growing more than it is about being evaluated. It's about having high expectations and striving for excellence, not perfection. I feel that I learned more about myself as a teacher with this format of PD than with any other in my teaching career.

When the school year came to a close last summer and I reflected on the benefits of having a coach, I couldn't help but wonder how I had managed all of these years without one. Fortunately, Rabbi Greene has agreed to continue coaching me. This year we will continue the same work and expand into integrating technology into my Chumash classes. I am going to begin flipping my Chumash class. I feel passionately that every teacher needs a teacher. ■

What Does It Take to Teach Israel?

■ by **JONAH HASSENFELD**

Teaching Israel effectively, Hassenfeld proposes, requires both content knowledge and relationship-building, understanding each student's relationship with Israel. He suggests that schools enable teachers to sharpen pedagogic tools for Israel education.

More and more Jewish day school teachers are asked not only to teach their subjects, but also to be Israel educators. But Israel education differs from most of what teachers teach in two fundamental ways. First, Israel education is necessarily interdisciplinary. It cuts across a number of academic disciplines including Hebrew language, literature, history and social studies. Furthermore, it naturally extends into informal contexts such as Yom Ha'atzmaut celebrations, meet-ups between Israelis and Americans and trips to Israel.

Second, the outcomes of Israel education go far beyond those of traditional subjects. Certainly, they include academic skills and knowledge, but the purpose of Israel education, as Bethanie Horowitz writes, "is to build a relationship between the learner and Israel" (*Defining Israel Education*). To place relationship-building at the heart of Israel education distinguishes it from courses like history or even Talmud. While most Talmud teachers see relationship-building as part of their work, most would probably not list it as the central purpose. In order for teachers to become successful Israel educators, therefore, they must master a new set of pedagogical approaches specific to achieving the particular goals of Israel education.

What does a pedagogy of Israel education look like? The intrinsically interdisciplinary nature of Israel education implies that Israel educators must possess both breadth and depth of knowledge of Israel's history, society and culture and the ability to make creative connections across disciplines. For this reason, Israel education seems to beg for team teaching.

But it is the second aspect of Israel education, that is, its aim of building relationships, that provides the greatest insight into what teachers must be able to do in order to teach Israel. The metaphor of relationship-*building* that lies at the heart of Israel

education can be misleading. Generally, when we build something, we start from scratch. The construction team can pick a suitable site and can prepare the ground however they like.

When it comes to building Jewish day school students' relationships to Israel, however, Israel educators almost always find a preexisting structure on the site. Students do not come to Israel education without any relationship to Israel and they certainly do not all enter it with the same relationship. Above all, therefore, Israel educators require the pedagogical expertise to mediate students' relationships to the varied disciplines and contexts in which they encounter Israel.

For several years, I taught 10th grade Modern European history at a Jewish day school. The last third of the year was devoted to a unit on the history of Israel. I was always surprised by the diversity my students exhibited in their relationships to Israel. Some read Israeli newspapers each day, listened to Israeli music, and had strong opinions on all aspects of life in Israel. Other students loved debating the history and politics of Israel. These were the students who used to ask me, "So how many of us are AIPAC and how many J Street?" Other students had extended family in Israel and visited once or twice a year. They didn't care about politics or culture, but they would excitedly tell me stories of the places they visited and the experiences they'd had.

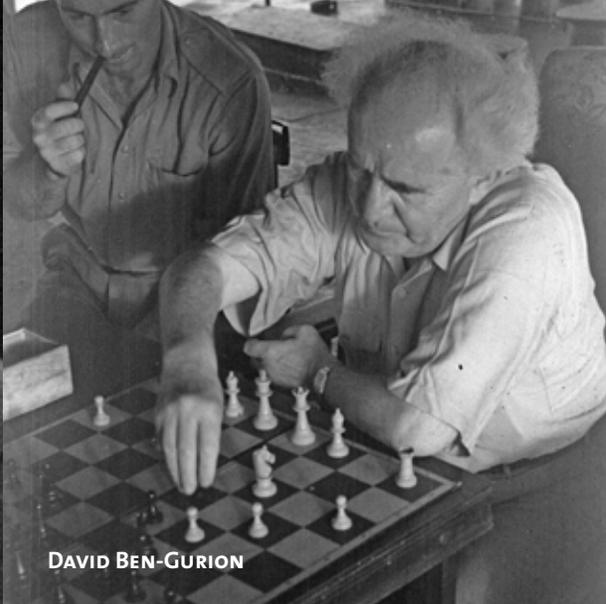
Some students felt Israel fatigue. On the first day of our Israel unit they would groan, "Israel?... Again???" Finally, there were many students with no family in Israel and no background studying Israel. These students were confused about the difference between the Independence War and the Six Day War and wondered why they had to learn about Israel at all. "After all," they protested, "we're American!" And this was in a class of eighteen.



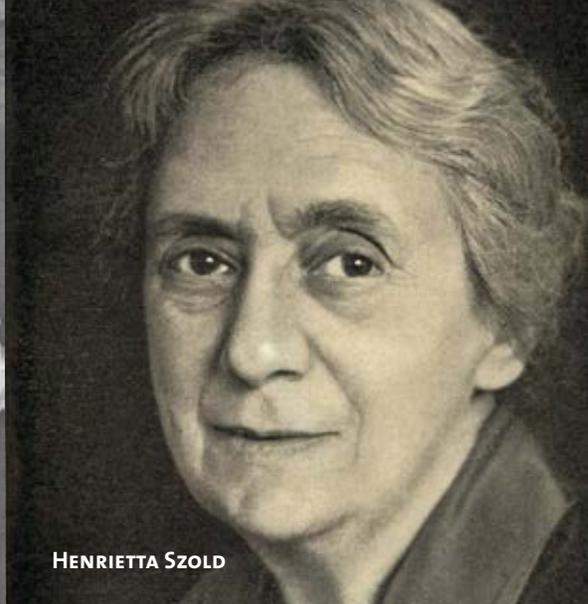
Jonah Hassenfeld is a former history teacher and current doctoral student in education and Jewish studies at Stanford University and a Wexner/Davidson Scholar researching the nature of high school students' historical understanding. Jonah. hassensfeld@gmail.com



ZE'EV JABOTINSKY



DAVID BEN-GURION



HENRIETTA SZOLD

The diversity of students' relationships to Israel represents the central pedagogical challenge that Israel educators face. I believe that it is this challenge that makes the "myth-busting" or "myths and facts" approach to Israel education seem so appealing. Both these approaches, though they tend to occupy different ends of the political spectrum, assume that the central task of a teacher is to help students learn how to discern what is true and what is not. And in many subjects, it is.

However, when the goal is relationship-building, truth may not be the ultimate criterion of educational value. Just as teachers recognize that every student is in a different place in his or her Jewish journey, teachers must recognize that students are in different places in their Israel journey as well. Students enter their Israel education with perspectives shaped by their background knowledge, level of maturity, their life experiences, and their families and communities. Even the most thoughtfully designed Israel curriculum or program will leave many of these students out in the cold unless there is a teacher capable of tailoring it to meet the needs of individual students.

Some students, perhaps those with only a vague connection to Israel, may need opportunities to identify with Israel, to learn powerful stories, and to feel that they are a part of a grand project bigger than themselves. Other students, beginning to doubt the stories they grew up hearing, may need a little more complexity. The Israel educator who knows his or her students will know what they need from their Israel education and provide it for them. At the heart of the pedagogy of Israel education is the capacity to assess where each student is at any given moment and then to differentiate the curriculum to enable as many students as possible to engage.

The differentiation of Israel education can be as simple as providing multiple pathways for students to engage with Israel in the classroom. When I taught the history of Israel to high school students, I recognized that my students had different religious and political points of view. I wanted to give my students the opportunity to find

an approach to Zionism that resonated with them, while encouraging them to develop their differing perspectives in conversation with their peers.

During our study of the Mandate period, I distributed selections from Ben Gurion, Jabotinsky and Szold to students and asked them to extract the ideological principles from each. Each student was then able to choose the set of principles that most resonated with him or her. The students sat in groups based on the principles they had chosen and discussed the principles and the reasons motivating their choice. We proceeded to hold a mock Knesset in which students debated some of the most difficult challenges facing the Palestinian Jewish community during the Mandate period. Over the course of this project and others, students had choices that empowered them to find ideas they saw as meaningful and inspiring.

For this activity to be successful, I had to know which sources to choose and where to find them. The process of choosing and locating the sources required me to draw on my content knowledge. Yet far more important to the success of the activity was the recognition that my students were in different places in the process of building their relationship to Israel. I did my best to provide them with a number of different pathways to develop their relationship to Israel and the history of Zionism.

In a mock Knesset, students debated difficult challenges during the Mandate period, finding ideas they saw as meaningful and inspiring.

But teachers cannot do this alone. Building a relationship between learners and Israel is a task that takes place in many different venues and over many years. It is a process that must be overseen at a schoolwide level. If schools are serious about Israel education, they must begin collecting data about the evolution of their students' relationships to Israel over time. In most research about students' relationships to Israel, students are asked to answer a number of multiple-choice questions about how close or distant they feel from Israel. While this data is certainly valuable, it can be reductionist. Schools should develop qualitative tools for assessing where their student

[CONTINUED ON PAGE 66]

Teaching Los Angeles / Teaching Tel-Aviv: The Lessons That Last

■ by **BAT-HEN ZERON**

After describing some of the differences between an Israeli and American classroom, and the shock of going from one to the other, Zeron draws upon the skills that enable a teacher to be effective in any environment.

“This is not a teacher training program; training is what you do with dogs. This is a teacher preparation program, to prepare you for your teaching career.” I started my teaching path with this motto echoing in my head after hearing it numerous times throughout my studies without really understanding the full meaning and implication of the words. “Teacher training” or “teacher preparation,” whatever, I kept thinking to myself. In the end it is just a matter of semantics. Little did I know that this very calculated word choice would eventually shape the essence of my current teaching identity and become the source of confidence, strength and hope in developing my teaching craft.

The distinction I make between these terms is the following. “Training” accustoms teachers to educate in familiar environments using strategies and a bank of responses that deal with scenarios they anticipate could happen. Similar to the Pavlov’s famous experiments, a teacher will use strategy “A” to navigate student’s “A” behavior or response “B” to a “B” type of circumstance. By being trained to teach with familiar variables, just like with Pavlov’s bell and saliva conditioning, we act according to a familiar stimulus to reach a desired outcome.

“Teacher preparation,” on the other hand, develops a reflective practitioner who is guided by strong educational principals. Such teachers adapt strategies, lesson plans and responses to any variable they face. Ideally, prepared teachers should be able to teach in familiar or new environments, in culturally diverse communities and in our rapidly changing world because they are flexible and resilient to teach in any situation.

It is pretty comforting to go to work and feel confident with the strategies you mastered. You hold up your hand or make a sound with the chime and voila, your “quiet signal” worked just like you were taught because the entire class became silent in seconds, is sitting down and is now ready to learn. When a student misbehaves you know to stop the lesson, point to the Class Rules

poster and state the three R’s (remind, reinforce, redirect), and again miraculously the student is focused and you can go back to your lesson plan.

There is a peaceful atmosphere of independent work time after you decide with your class how it should “look,” “sound” and “feel” during “center time.” Just as you learned in your methodology class, the centers run smoothly. There are the two magic words every teacher in Jewish day schools uses on a regular basis, “inappropriate” and “unacceptable,” which shift the class’s behavior dramatically. Finally, if necessary, scheduling a conference with the student’s parents will stop the unwanted behavior completely.

These are all well known strategies to teachers in private Jewish school environments. They are already automatic responses to anticipated student stimulus when you are an experienced teacher. The question is: What would happen in the event that a teacher encounters the same type of stimulus from students, responds in the same trained way, but does not receive the desired anticipated outcome? That is what I ask myself because in all honesty, no amount of teacher training could have prepared me for my first lesson in Israel.

As a native Israeli who lived in Los Angeles for four years, where I received my teaching credential and three years of teaching experience, I was looking forward to implementing my methods in an Israeli environment. I suspected that teaching in Israel would be different but I could not imagine how. My bank of “quiet signals” and opening sentence—“I’ll wait until you’re all ready”—could make me wait the full 45 minute lesson period in an Israeli classroom. Israelis wait for no one, they move on quickly. As anyone who knows Israelis can attest, rules are merely suggestions, and so my Class Rules poster was ignored and forgotten.

If I were to stop the lesson and address each “inappropriate” word I hear, then I would not have been able to last one full



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teaching period. Once when I decided to do so, simply stating in Hebrew that this is not *holem* (appropriate) aroused puzzled eyes and giggles. After my first week of teaching in a new environment, although it is my home, I realized that my personal teaching motivators will need to come from a different source than my familiar bank of strategies. To be a successful educator outside the doors of Jewish day schools in North America, I had to adapt.

I needed to evaluate the new environment I had to work in. Israel is a more militant culture, and many students are used to teacher responses with a disciplinary flavor. When an Israeli student misbehaves, it would be culturally acceptable for him to help the school's custodian outside of school hours before even calling for a parent-teacher conference. A logical consequence to taking up the teacher's time in a lesson is to give up your own time for the school.

Furthermore, Israelis at any age are less delicate than Americans. In Israel, I am able to declare winners and losers in any game I incorporate in my lessons without making sure to give prizes for the winners and consolation prizes for the losers to prevent any emotional distresses. I remember rushing to write e-mails to parents before their child came home from school in order to prepare them for the emotional state he or she would be in after losing the game so they could "talk the situation through" before going to school the next day. Students in Israel are well aware of the fact that not every outcome of a game will be fair to all participants, and that is acceptable. In the US, many day school parents would request to change their child's seating due to problems that child might have with another student. In Israel, students are their own advocates, and if their requests are not considered every time that is accepted.

If I were to explain a class or school rule to an American student, the conversation would end at that. In Israel on the other hand, I have come to learn that when I explain the rule it will be followed only if the student understands the logic behind it and agrees with it. Israeli third graders can talk about a personal family tragedy during shared time like they are talking about the weather. Perhaps this is because Israelis are unfortunately used to coping with national hardships; it is truly all around you. In summary, Israeli students although blunt, cynical and rude just like the society that engulfs them, are also incredibly resilient, adaptable, independent thinkers and problem solvers.

This cultural analysis still did not help me feel as though I was equipped to teach in Israel, even though I am Israeli. My biggest fear was that because I was trained in America, at the DeLeT teaching program at HUC-JIR's Riah Hirsch School of Education, I

might be able to teach only American students. But then the mantra's meaning suddenly became clear: I was a prepared teacher as opposed to a trained one.

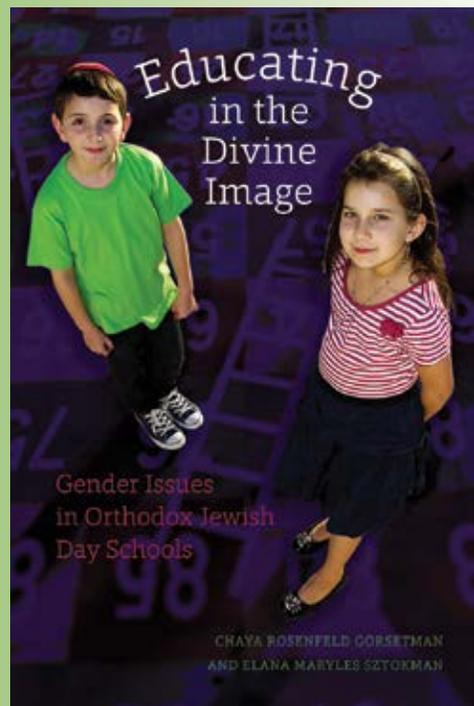
I convinced myself that my biggest strengths as a teacher are the principles DeLeT embedded in me, to name a few: teaching with the learner in mind, integrating cross-disciplinary materials, collaborating with other teachers, reflecting after every lesson, making sure to have "teachable moments" in every lesson, creating a strong teacher-parent-student relationship, differentiating materials and developing my resiliency. These principles are not dependent on cultural differences and can be used anywhere and anytime. I cannot use the quiet signal I was used to in America just as I cannot teach the California curriculum in Israel. Nevertheless, what I can and should do is teach with my principles in mind, studying the cultural cues of my new learners while creating a new bank of responses suited to their personal needs.

Embracing change is what educators need to learn to do well, because that is what will make them successful no matter where they are or whom they have as students. Preparing teachers to adapt their practice based on solid pedagogic principles is the goal. Teaching them to let go of all too familiar and comfortable training wheels is a good start. ■

Gender equality in Jewish day school education

An incisive look at gender inequities in Orthodox day schools, from Chaya Rosenfeld Gorsetman and Elana Maryles Sztokman—two of the most respected scholars in the field

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RAVSAK Welcomes Four New Team Members

Debra Shaffer Seeman joins RAVSAK as Network Weaver. Serving as a private family education and educational consultant for over a decade, Debra has also worked at myriad Jewish educational organizations as an educator and administrator, including the Rambam Atlanta Day School, the Marcus Jewish Community Center in Atlanta and Tal Torah in Israel. As Network Weaver, Debra is responsible for developing, nurturing and curating Reshet RAVSAK, our new online communities of practice program.



Jeremy Willinger joins RAVSAK as the Director of Communications. He previously served as director of communications and marketing of the Mental Health Association of New York City and as the web communications manager for The Jewish Theological Seminary. He has also worked in a variety of marketing and communications roles in public relations, design and the medical publishing fields. At RAVSAK, Jeremy attends to a broad range of communications, social media and marketing responsibilities for the organization and for the field.



Betty Winn joins RAVSAK as Director of Leadership Initiatives. Previously, she served as head of school at Abraham Joshua Heschel Day School in Northridge, California. She has worked as a classroom teacher, administrator, mentor and coach for over thirty years in secular and independent schools. No stranger to our organization, Betty was a member of Project SuLaM's first cohort and served as the VP of Development on the RAVSAK Executive Board. In her new position, Betty provides added value to member schools in the areas of professional leadership services, support and guidance in line with RAVSAK's mission.



Patrick Zagdanski joins RAVSAK as Technologist. Previously he worked as the sales and marketing manager for Sara's Homestay, LLC. He also served as a clinical pre-sales project manager at Siemens Medical Solutions in Israel, and worked as the manager of information technology and digital communications for Rutgers University. At RAVSAK, Patrick will manage our growing technology needs, oversee systems operations and advance our work in educational technologies. ■



What Does It Take to Teach Israel?

[CONTINUED FROM PAGE 63]
 bodies are in relationship to Israel at any given time. This data will provide teachers the information they need to implement effective Israel education.

To assess my students' initial relationships to Israel, I asked them each to write the history of the State of Israel in a page or less. This homework assignment provided me with a tremendous amount of information about what my students believed and how they felt regarding the State of Israel. Some students began with God's promise to Abraham; others began with the Holocaust. From the endings of their narratives, I could tell whether

they felt mostly optimistic about the future or whether they saw a never-ending cycle of violence. Some focused on the Arab-Israeli conflict; others didn't even mention it. Reading those paragraphs closely offered a deeply textured insight into my students' relationships to Israel.

If schools collected paragraphs like these on a yearly or bi-yearly basis, and coupled these paragraphs with occasional interviews and focus groups with students, they would begin to accumulate a tremendously rich resource for teachers to draw on when implementing Israel education. If teachers and departments could see the evolution of students' relationships

to Israel over the course of years, they could thoughtfully design curricula and programming tailored to particular groups of students. It would enable schools and teachers to better serve the needs of individual students.

If relationship-building is the ultimate goal of Israel education, then it will necessarily require intensive differentiation. Because relationships are so personal, each student will experience a different journey towards Israel. Supporting teachers in developing both the content knowledge and pedagogical expertise to mediate students' diverse journeys is the most pressing challenge facing the field of Israel education. ■

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