WHAT WE NOW KNOW ABOUT **Perspectives** JEWISH on Research for Practice EDUCATION

Edited by Paul A. Flexner, Roberta Louis Goodman and Linda Dale Bloomberg

Torah Aura Productions

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MANUFACTURED IN THE MALAYSIAS

Dedication

We dedicate this work to those who came before us, who instilled in us the inspiration to pursue our Jewish learning:

Israel Friedlaender (1876–1920)
Israel Lippert (1902–1974)
Julia Esther Lippert (1906–1997)
Marian Gugenheim Flexner (1914–1987)
Rosalind Anne Diamond (1941–1978)

And to the next generations, our children and grandchildren, in the hope that our commitment to Jewish education will inspire them and their children:

Carla, Brent and Adam Bloomberg Shoshana and Evan Goodman Charles and Leah Rosenthal

Contents

Dedication	111
What We Now Know about Jewish Education	
Foreword	1
Preface—Roberta Louis Goodman	3
ISSUES IN JEWISH EDUCATION	11
The Current Moment in Jewish Education: An Historian's View—Jack Wertheimer	. 13
Vision-Guided Jewish Education—Daniel Pekarsky	. 21
Jewish Education in the Age of Google—Jonathan S. Woocher	. 31
Jewish Education in the World of Web 2.0—Brian Amkraut	. 39
The Place of Israel in North American Jewish Education: A View from Israel—Rachel Korazim	. 45
The Jewish Message as Medium:Jewish Education in the Information Age—Joel Lurie Grishaver	. 51
LEARNERS	57
The Demography of Jewish Learners—Bruce Phillips	. 59
Identity and Jewish Education—Steven M. Cohen	. 75
Outreach and Jewish Education—Kerry Olitzky & Paul Golin	. 87
A "Who-ness" and a Wholeness: Optimizing the Learning and Development of Elementary Children—Michael Ben-Avie, Ph.D.	
"A Moment of Developmental Triumph?" Adolescents in Jewish Education—Michael Ben-Avie	
Special Education in the Jewish Community—Sandy Miller-Jacobs	
Jewish Learning on the University Campus—Clare Goldwater	
Jewish Family Education—Jo Kay & Evie Rotstein	
The Jewish Education of Parents—Betsy Dolgin Katz & Mitchell Parker	
Adult Jewish Learning—Diane Tickton Schuster & Lisa D. Grant	
Jewish Spirituality and Adult Spiritual Development—Linda Rabinowitch Thal	
Jewish Education and Adult Jewish Women—Shulamit Reinharz	
EDUCATORS	. 197
Jewish Educational Personnel—Roberta Louis Goodman and Eli Schaap	
Learning to Teach—Sharon Feiman-Nemser	213
Supervision for Improving Teaching—Nehemia Ichilov	223
Mentoring Jewish Educators—Renee Frank Holtz	
Professional Development Requires a Discipline for Seeing Wholes—Cyd Weissman	247
The Voice of the Principal—Elissa Kaplan	
CURRICULUM	. 269
Hebrew Language Instruction—Lifsa Schachter & Adina Ofek	
Teaching Jewish Texts—Jeffrey Schein	
Nurturing Jewish Values—Carol K. Ingall & Jeffrey S. Kress	
Teaching Tefillah—Amy Walk Katz	299
"Whad'Ya know?" About Teaching the Holocaust: Not Much, You?—Simone Schweber & Debbie Findling.	.311

WHAT WE NOW KNOW ABOUT JEWISH EDUCATION

	Technology and Distance Learning—Peter Margolis.	.317
	Early Childhood, Media, and Jewish Education—Lewis Bernstein	.327
	Incorporating the Arts in Jewish Education—Ofra Backenroth	.335
	Experiential Jewish Education—Joseph Reimer & David Bryfman	343
	The Cultures of Jewish Education—Judah M. Cohen & Leah Strigler	.353
_	CONTEXTS	262
	Central Agencies (Bureaus) of Jewish Education—Gil Graff.	
	Early Childhood Jewish Education—"If Not Now, When?"—Ilene Vogelstein	
	,	
	Congregational Education—Steve Kraus	
	The Jewish Day School—Joshua Elkin & Bonnie Hausman	
	Summer Camps as Jewish Socializing Experiences—Amy L. Sales & Leonard Saxe	
	Jewish Education in the JCCs—Patricia Cipora Harte, Richard Juran & Alvin Mars	
	Jewish Educational Travel—Shaul Kelner	
	VEULAI—AND PERHAPS: Israel as a Place for Jewish Education—Barry Chazan	
	Jewish Education in Australia—Suzanne D. Rutland.	
	Jewish Educational Israel Experiences—Susan Wall & Sally Klein-Katz	
	Developments in Religious Education—John L. Elias	459
F	PLANNING AND CHANGE	. 469
	Informed and Passionate Dialogue: Transformative Community Change Initiatives—Patricia Bidol Padva .	471
	"Don't Conduct, Improvise!" New Approaches to Changing Congregational Schools—Susan Shevitz	487
	Finding New Models: Alternatives to Religious School—Rob Weinberg	499
	Communal Planning—Continuity Efforts—Beth Cousens	507
	Program Evaluation in Jewish Education—Wendy J. Rosov & Leora W. Isaacs	517
	Creating an Effective Lay Leadership—Samuel K. Joseph	. 527
	Philanthropic Funding for Jewish Education: Unlimited Potential, Questionable Will—Sandy Cardin &	
	Yossi Prager	.537
_	TOSUBS	552
_	LOSURE	
	Jewish Awakening and Jewish Education—Gerald Bubis	
	Shaping a Research Agenda by Building on What We Now Know—Linda Dale Bloomberg	
	Jewish Education and the Jewish Future—Paul A. Flexner	
	Afterword: Where To From Here?	
	Biographies	. 589

What We Now Know about Jewish Education

Foreword

I remember sitting in my home in Berkeley editing the first volume while smelling smoke from the fire that was burning in the Oakland hills. The year was 1992, and the windows were closed, but the pungent odor was everywhere. Now, fifteen years later, much has changed in Berkeley and in Jewish education. Then thirty-two authors contributed. They were most of the names associated with research about Jewish education in this country. Now sixty-six authors are included. Of great interest is that only ten contributed to both. To what is this stunning growth in the number of researchers attributable? And, more important, how has Jewish education changed, matured or remained constant? In this new edition there are new subjects that are explored and new categories that have been added. Do these developments reflect a new field of inquiry that was not in evidence in 1992—or merely an attempt to be more complete?

A more interesting question stems from the original intent of the book, which was "to provide a useful tool for both practitioners and policymakers." Did this original focus meet its goal? Throughout the years many individuals have told me how useful the essays were—but the comments have been general at best. In what ways have research findings about Jewish education actually impacted those to whom they are addressed? Have these essays truly bridged the gap between the lay and the professional communities?

About a year after the publication I formulated five generalizations that, I believe, may still be relevant (or at least need further exploration):

- 1. Competition for "Jewish time" is ferocious.
- 2. Research that focuses on only one variable invariably does not adequately portray the whole, which may simply be impossible to do.
- 3. Formal education is out; non-formal education is in.
- 4. The plateau myth suggests that all day school education is the same or that all congregational Jewish education is the same. This is simply not true.
- 5. Not enough research is being conducted.

My estimate in 1992 was that the shelf life of the book would be five to ten years—at which point the book would move from the realm of sociology to that of history. The essays provided a snapshot of the state of Jewish education at least in North America at the beginning of the 1990's. The degree to which things have changed, matured, or stayed the same is for you, the reader, to judge. All I can offer is my deep gratitude to Paul Flexner, Roberta Goodman and Linda Bloomberg for providing another snapshot of Jewish education. May these volumes continue so that those who follow may glimpse the state of the field at periodic intervals and build on what we have learned.

Stuart Kelman Berkeley, California Pesa<u>h</u> 5767

Preface

Roberta Louis Goodman

When What We Know about Jewish Education was published in 1992, it was the first significant review of research related to and about Jewish education collected in a single place. At that time Jewish education was emerging as a Jewish communal priority. The Mandel Commission on Jewish Education in North America's Think Tank report, A Time to Act (1990), called for urgent and radical reform to Jewish education concentrating on personnel, lay leadership and funding. Shortly following that publication, the 1990 National Jewish Population Study claimed an intermarriage rate of 52% for recently married Jews, prompting a focus on Jewish education as the way to address Jewish continuity and to revitalize, strengthen, and deepen the knowledge and commitment of Jews to Judaism. What We Know about Jewish Education was written to help inform the deliberations about and initiatives in Jewish education. The book's intended audience included Jewish decision makers—institutional, communal, continental, and even international (primarily Israelis)—as well as Jewish educators in formal and informal settings involved in meeting the challenges of the 1990s.

Since Stuart Kelman's initial volume, the amount of research in Jewish education, the interest in that research and even the number of people conducting the research has grown exponentially. The result is that this volume is far more extensive than the original. We have included many new topics that were barely on the horizon as issues in Jewish education. We have also turned to many new researchers (while including a number of those from the previous edition) who have entered the field during these fifteen years. Thus the contents of this volume incorporate a level of research that is reflective of Jewish education as we approach the end of the first decade of the 21st century.

How is the term "research" understood? The emphasis in this book is on empirical studies with a focus on how something works, combined with several philosophical and historical studies. Research comes in many forms, including evaluation and needs assessment. Perhaps the main distinction between "classical" research studies on the one hand, and evaluation and needs assessments on the other, is their purpose. Research studies are conducted to increase our knowledge of an aspect of a phenomenon (e.g., recruitment, funding, teaching text). Evaluation studies are done on behalf of a particular entity (institution, organization or group) to measure how well a program or person has succeeded. Similarly, an organization or institution will conduct a needs assessment to help inform its work. Even though the generalizability of evaluation and needs assessments may be limited, since the scope and population studied may be narrow or small, this type of investigation contributes to the overall knowledge of a phenomenon (e.g., recruitment, funding, teaching text). The authors draw upon studies that were primarily conducted as research, evaluation and needs assessments. Therefore, throughout this book the word "research" will be used to refer to any type of study that contributes to our knowledge of a phenomenon, inclusive of evaluation and needs assessments.

This preface has three objectives: 1) to explore the ways that research in Jewish education can aid and enhance the field, 2) to examine the growth of research in Jewish education since the initial volume and 3) to present the organization and thinking behind the structure of the book and its contents.

ROLE OF RESEARCH IN JEWISH EDUCATION

What are the ways that Jewish education research advances the field of Jewish education? On a basic level, research contributes to knowledge about Jewish education in particular, and about the

North American Jewish experience overall. It raises and answers a wide range of questions about how Jewish education informs Jewish identity and commitment and the ways in which Jewish educational practice makes a difference for educators and learners. This research only contributes significantly to the field if policy makers, planners, funders, educators, and students of Jewish education are familiar with it and apply it to their decision making processes and educational practice. Policy makers and funders may use this knowledge to inform the direction in which a community, institution or foundation allocates resources and implements a vision for its constituents. Practitioners may turn to this information to strengthen their practice and help them grow as professionals.

Research is a tool that contributes to lay leaders and professionals being both well informed and critically reflective. Knowledge produced by research serves as a balance to intuition and experience. Research often introduces new ideas and perspectives, challenging a person's or group's assumptions and presenting different ways of thinking. Research also confirms and reaffirms previously held notions of how things can or should be. Reviewing research has the potential to overcome individual or institutional isolation by connecting the reader to a larger framework and creating an awareness of what others have learned in a variety of places.

Examining research is part of the quest for pursuing quality and excellence in Jewish education. Educational research, whether philosophical or empirical, presents theories and explores practices, often creating the link between the two. Research is often conducted by recognized experts—both theoreticians and practitioners—in a particular area. The reports, books and articles that these researchers write provide people in the field with many of the most important ideas, concepts, theories, and approaches of a particular era. While many theoreticians and practitioners tend to look for materials that identify best practices, all thinking needs to be analyzed and applied to the specific context or situation in order to improve it. Research adds to what we know and augments familiarity of Jewish education with the understanding that results are subject to interpretation.

GROWTH OF RESEARCH IN JEWISH EDUCATION

Many indicators attest to the growth of research in Jewish education. Two are used here to illustrate this expansion—the professionalization of researchers in Jewish education and the financial security of a serious publication for Jewish educational research in North America. First, in the early 1980s, the then Coalition for Alternatives in Jewish Education (now the Coalition for the Advancement of Jewish Education) started a network that focused on research in Jewish education. The attendees at the first network pre-conference could easily fit into one classroom. Now, over two decades later, the Network for Research in Jewish Education is an independent organization with nearly two hundred active members. Second, the Network has assumed the ownership of the *Journal for Jewish Education* and recently secured funding from the Mandel Foundation for its continued publication. The *Journal* provides an important vehicle for sharing significant research in Jewish education both for the members of the Network and for the community at large.

What do we NOW know about Jewish education that we did not know when Kelman edited the initial volume? What has changed about research in Jewish education and in Jewish education overall? What has remained the same? In order to answer these questions, a range of other questions about research in Jewish education need to be addressed:

- Why is research being conducted?
- Who is doing the research?
- What is the focus of the research?
- Who is sponsoring or funding research?
- What are the challenges of conducting research?
- What are the challenges in applying the knowledge learned from the research to the field at large?

WHY IS RESEARCH IN JEWISH EDUCATION BEING CONDUCTED? WHO IS DOING RESEARCH IN JEWISH EDUCATION?

The days when research in Jewish education was primarily the domain of graduate students writing master's theses or doctoral dissertations in order to obtain degrees as Kelman intimates in 1992 are over. In the 21st century, research is conducted by consultants to address particular issues or evaluate programs locally or nationally and by academics who are well positioned to formulate theories and guide practice. Graduate students, perhaps even more than in 1992, also continue to write theses and dissertations and publish articles based upon their work. Others hold positions that include conducting research in Jewish education and communal life.

The connection between the significant increase in funding for Jewish educational programs and organizations and the demand for accountability by their funders has contributed significantly to the growth in research. As a result, research and evaluation are now viewed as integral rather than additional or non-essential parts of planning, policy making and program implementation. With the research often driven by these new funding sources, it is focused primarily on outcomes, a popular way of assessing the merit of an investment by its impact on the intended target population. Other purposes of research and evaluation include surveying a particular topic, conducting a needs assessment and contributing to program improvement. Many of these studies become reports or papers that are widely circulated through the Internet and are intended to inform local and/or national work.

The new funders, whether they are federations or philanthropists, are, in many ways, the driving force behind the expansion of research through their grant processes. Built into many grants is the requirement for an evaluation of the project or program with some including designated funds to cover the added expense. These evaluations increase our knowledge about the practice of Jewish education and have the potential for influencing practice in the field. The only major limitation to the influence of these evaluations is that they are often not publicly shared. It is imperative that this limitation, which is a prominent theme throughout this volume, be addressed in the near future.

A major side benefit of the changing role of research and evaluation is the growth of full-time research and evaluation staff, either experts in the field or program officers, within the larger organizations and foundations. The greatest growth is in the number of people commissioned to conduct research and evaluation projects either as independent consultants or as staff members of research centers. They include individuals who primarily work in Jewish communal life, or university settings or who do most of their work outside the Jewish community.

Another factor contributing to the increase of research is the growth of university programs and centers, both Jewish and secular, offering degrees or certificates in Jewish education on the bachelors, masters, and doctoral levels. This expansion of university programs has led to more students matriculating and writing about Jewish education. With this expansion of programs, new faculty positions in Jewish education have been created, which in turn leads to additional research in Jewish education.

Finally, there are a growing number of academic positions in related areas, such as Judaic studies, general education, religion, history and sociology. Often these academics have an expertise in Jewish education. The emergence of faculty members who connect their areas of primary research with Jewish education is an indicator of the value placed on Jewish education for understanding the larger American experience.

The overall growth of faculty with an academic interest in Jewish education impacts the amount of research conducted and published, as these efforts are often connected to promotion and tenure. This research is often supported through research grants that are obtained from foundations both within and outside of the greater Jewish community. Thus, the study of Jewish education within the university is an indication of the new role that it is offering to the creation of knowledge in related fields.

WHAT IS THE FOCUS OF THE RESEARCH? WHO IS SPONSORING OR FUNDING RESEARCH IN JEWISH EDUCATION?

Over the last two decades research has expanded to cover a wide spectrum of topics in Jewish education. It is difficult today to think of a topic or area that has not been studied or evaluated. While these studies have been conducted and some of the results have been disseminated, our knowledge in some areas remains relatively limited.

To a great extent, the topics of research studies are a result of the interests, demands and agendas of the funders and organizations paying for the research. While researchers have recommended creating a comprehensive or coordinated research plan that fills the gaps of knowledge and expands on what is known for either all of Jewish education or a particular area, this has yet to happen in a meaningful way. In fact, several studies sponsored by different organizations have tapped the same respondents or population groups on a similar topic within the same time frame. This replication of effort is an unfortunate by-product of the lack of a coordinated effort to create a research agenda that will have impact on the entire field.

WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGES TO CONDUCTING RESEARCH IN JEWISH EDUCATION? WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGES IN USING THE RESEARCH PRODUCED?

There are three main barriers related to conducting and utilizing research: sources of funding, publishing and the lack of a Jewish education database.

Even though funding for Jewish education has increased, there remain a limited number of organizations and foundations willing to invest in research, with much of the research being supported by the same few funders. This is in contrast to the R&D—research and development—initiatives that are common to much of corporate America as well as to many fields in the social services sector. Thus support for research in Jewish education remains sparse, especially among the foundations outside the Jewish world. Second, many of those who fund research in Jewish education fund research for the part of the system that they care about most passionately, and not the field as a whole. Third, many research and evaluation projects are underfunded due to the limited size of the programs that require evaluation. Many organizations are forced to get by on what they can afford rather than on what a thorough research project really warrants.

The barriers to publishing and disseminating results are the second issue. The Internet has greatly improved the diffusion of information and ideas across all disciplines. For research in Jewish education the Internet provides an inexpensive and readily accessible dissemination route and is frequently the method of choice. Yet many studies are not shared at all, and others appear in such a poor format, in terms of both writing style and graphics, that they are difficult to understand and digest. Not enough attention and finances are devoted to preparing studies in a readable and usable manner that would appeal to a broad range of readers. To address this weakness, funds need to be allocated to engage editors and graphic designers to prepare executive summaries and design reports to have greater impact on the field. The few reports where there has been funding for design and distribution have demonstrated the value of the investment through their significant impact on Jewish education.

In addition to the formal research reports mentioned above, shorter, more focused articles published in one of the many Jewish magazines add to the knowledge base for the field and the community as a whole. This is particularly true of evaluation studies where there is a distinction between the information required by the sponsoring organization to improve the program and the knowledge gained that would be most helpful and useful to a larger audience of policy makers and practitioners. Only rarely do the researchers receive the time or funding to translate their work into articles for publication. Also, although there are many publications serving general readers in the Jewish community, there are only a few that focus specifically on the results of research and evaluation. As a result, many institutions, organizations and researchers are now turning to the Internet rather than print media in order to share these "second tier" writings. Unfortunately, for many readers, publication on the Internet carries less status than being included in an official publication. For the foresee-

able future, we need to turn to both the print and electronic media for distribution, as is the case in most fields of scholarship in North America, if we wish to reach the widest audience.

Finally, the lack of a database for Jewish education affects the researcher, the programmer and the wide array of readers. Search engines on the Internet facilitate locating research and evaluation reports, but they do not replace the usefulness of a rich and detailed database devoted to Jewish education. Some organizations have attempted to create electronic "libraries" or "collections" of research either in a particular delivery area or for Jewish education as a whole. These efforts have yet to fulfill the role of a database whose purpose is to collect and annotate the wide range of research and evaluation reports and studies for researchers, educators and policy makers to access.

RATIONALE FOR AND ORGANIZATION OF THE BOOK'S STRUCTURE AND CONTENT

The purpose of this book is to present the latest empirical and to some extent philosophical research that informs a wide range of Jewish educational topics. Our target audience includes lay leaders, professionals, policy makers, planners, funders, practitioners, students, researchers, evaluators and anyone with an interest in or role connected to Jewish education. Authors were asked to present the key research on a topic in Jewish education as well as any relevant research and literature from sources outside of Jewish education that were significant in terms of understanding the issues involved. The authors were asked to select the key studies conducted primarily in the time since the initial Kelman volume appeared. The authors are essentially the filters through which the research was selected and reviewed.

The overall organization of the chapters and the content within each chapter are patterned after the original Kelman volume.

Since this book is a collection of chapters written by multiple authors, having a format that each author followed was important in the creation of a consistent experience for the reader. The similarity of format for the chapters in all but the initial section helps the reader compare and contrast the accomplishments, issues and challenges for the wide variety of areas covered. The chapters follow an internal organization that includes setting the context, review of the key research, implications and policy recommendations, additional research questions, future directions for the field, a conclusion followed by bulleted highlights, placement of the topic in a larger context and finally an annotated bibliography of the most significant resources and references.

The book is divided into six sections. Four of those sections come from Schwab's four common-places of learning—learner, teacher, curriculum and milieu—which was used in the Kelman volume. While Schwab uses the term "milieu" to refer solely to the classroom environment, we, like Kelman, view the "milieu" of Jewish education as being the context both within and beyond the formal classroom, including the entire school system, informal educational settings such as camps and Jewish trips and the larger organizational and communal structures and factors affecting Jewish education in North America. Moreover, we extend the reach of the context in several directions. This volume adds a chapter on Jewish education in Australia as an attempt to inform and create dialogue beyond this continent, multiple perspectives on the role of Israel as an educational setting and a chapter that relates Jewish education to the broader field of religious education.

The two new sections are significant expansions of and departures from Schwab's framework. First the introductory section, entitled "Issues in Jewish Education," was added, providing a backdrop to some of the larger issues that frame and influence all of the commonplaces of Jewish education. Second, we have added an entire section on planning and changing Jewish education. This section speaks to how the delivery system in Jewish education has evolved over the last fifteen years or so. Many initiatives have focused on institutional, communal and even continent-wide Jewish educational planning. Other initiatives emphasize changing and improving the delivery system for Jewish education, including the lay leaders, educators, institutions and funding. The rise of new types of Jewish educational institutions, the expansion of other institutions and other shifts in the field make a section on planning and change important to understanding Jewish education in the 21st century.

Finally, a special addition to this volume is the final chapters by two of the book's editors. Linda Bloomberg's chapter analyzes and synthesizes the key research issues that emerge from this volume's chapters. Paul Flexner's chapter discusses Jewish educational topics. These closing chapters serve to capture the lessons learned about Jewish education to date and the implications thereof and in so doing provide a platform for launching the sequel to this volume. Indeed, with the rapid pace of change and development that is occurring and the explosion of new research and evaluation studies that are being conducted, Jewish education would certainly benefit from a third volume of *What We Know about Jewish Education* within the course of the next decade.

THE AUTHORS

The increased number of chapters in this volume from the original work is another indicator of the growth of research in Jewish education and the increase in the number of researchers. Many, but not all, of the key personalities conducting research and evaluation in Jewish education have authored chapters in this volume. We attempted to include the "veteran" or "well-known" researchers as well as some of the emerging researchers who will take the field in different directions in the future. Many of the authors wrote for the Kelman volume. Interestingly, only a very few revised chapters on the same topic for this volume.

A special note of thanks to the authors must be included here. We are grateful for the time and commitment that each so generously gave. The book took an inordinate length of time to complete. Many contributors were patient in waiting to see their chapters in print, and others were kind enough to write quickly under time constraints as chapters were added at later stages to enrich the book. What all of the chapter authors share is the sense of importance that this volume contributes not just to the research and evaluation endeavors, but to the field of Jewish education as a whole. Hopefully, what is presented to you, the reader, is a critical and helpful, yet compassionate and passionate, rendering of the field.

THE PUBLISHER

While we as the editors are wishing that this book makes a big splash, that it is read by more than just our own graduate students, Torah Aura deserves its own acknowledgement for the desire to further research in Jewish education. Primarily a publisher of curricular materials, Torah Aura has an understanding of the significance of research to quality Jewish education and a vibrant Jewish community. We are appreciative of the academic freedom that they afforded us, as no constraints were placed on either authors or editors. To Joel, Jane, Alan, and all who are part of Torah Aura, we as the editors are grateful for your support, patience and dedication.

THE EDITORS

In undertaking this project we officially called ourselves Moadon Ha'Yanshuf—the Night Owl Club (of course, we all have our mascot owls, too), since in order to accommodate one another's schedules our telephone meetings would typically begin late at night and continue into the wee hours of the morning. We designed the book together, sharing responsibilities and sometimes splitting roles as well. Paul was the expert editor of the text and Linda the expert editor of the references and annotated bibliographies. We identified and solved issues together, always looking to strengthen the book. We remain colleagues and friends upon completing this book as well!

For the most part, we share three educational institutions that have formed and informed our work. All three of us are graduates of the AEGIS doctoral program in adult and continuing education at Teachers College/Columbia University. All three of us teach for the Siegal College of Judaic Studies, where Linda was previously a student in the program with Roberta as her advisor and teacher and Paul as one of her teachers. Two of us received graduate degrees in Jewish education from Hebrew Union College–Jewish Institution of Religion, Paul in New York and Roberta in Los Angeles, where Stuart Kelman was an advisor, teacher and inspiration to her. We are grateful to all our colleagues and students who have in some way shaped our journeys and our own Jewish education.

THE READERS

To you, the reader, we hope that these chapters will inform your thinking, inspire you and impact your activities in the field of Jewish education. We hope that you, like us, will be impressed with the growth of research in Jewish education and recognize how it has made and continues to make a difference in the design and delivery of Jewish education, and that you will carry forward even further the multiple ways that this research can contribute to the field. In line with the view that research is an ongoing conversation, we always are open to your reactions, suggestions, feedback and comments! We are reachable through the publisher!

Issues in Jewish Education

The Current Moment in Jewish Education: An Historian's View

Jack Wertheimer

The field of Jewish education has undergone significant transformation over the past two decades. Broad new social trends have remade the larger environment of Jewish communal life and have also complicated the task of delivering a strong Jewish education. In response to altered social circumstances, a number of creative programs and bold champions have emerged to lead the field in new directions. Innovative thinking has enlivened the discourse about Jewish education. And some communities are addressing Jewish educational needs in a far more purposeful fashion.

Viewed within the longer historical trajectory since 1945, the extent of change is even more dramatic. After enjoying a period of expansive growth (particularly in its supplementary sector) and much optimism in the post-war decades, the field of Jewish education suffered from declining morale in the late 1970s and early 1980s due to a sharp decrease in enrollments and severely critical reports about the inadequacy of the synagogue school (see Wertheimer, 1999, 37–42). It did not help matters that despite promises of increased funding for Jewish education, neither the federation world nor Jewish philanthropists invested seriously in the field. But in the mid-1980s a new mood took hold. The Jewish Community Center movement began to focus more attention on Jewish education; family education came into vogue; a few pioneering federations engaged with local educational needs in a more concerted fashion; and the first glimmerings of new funding materialized.

Once the 1990 National Jewish Population Study riveted communal attention on the so-called "Jewish continuity" crisis, the momentum for change accelerated. Day schools attracted new champions, and greater numbers of parents outside the Orthodox world enrolled their children in such schools. Most medium and large city federations created a "continuity commission" to engage in planning for the improvement of local educational work. Funders conceived of a series of new initiatives to strengthen Jewish education. And various agencies devised programs to reach under-served populations and Jews-at-risk. Though it is too early to gauge the long-term impact of these efforts, it is possible to discern the contours of change and the important new initiatives in the field.

THE SOCIAL CONTEXT OF JEWISH EDUCATION

We begin with recent social trends that have reshaped the work of Jewish education, with perhaps none more apparent than the surging incidence of intermarriage. Both the 1990 and 2000–2001 National Jewish Population studies tracked the massive growth of this phenomenon over the last third of the twentieth century, demonstrating that nearly half of all Jews who wed in the late twentieth century married a non–Jew. One consequence of this new reality is a decline in the number of children enrolled in Jewish educational institutions of any kind, because the large majority of intermarried families do not provide their children with a Jewish education, although one study suggests that intermarried Jewish women tend to the Jewish education of their children in rising numbers (Phillips 1998; Saxe, Kadushin & Phillips 2006, p. 23; Cohen, Ukeles & Miller 2006). Still, even with these losses, an unprecedented number of children from intermarried homes are now enrolled in Jewish educational institutions. (Approximately 18% of intermarried families enroll their children,

mostly in one-day-a-week synagogue-based programs [NJPS 2000–01]). This novel social reality has created new dilemmas: for example, should a synagogue school enroll a child who simultaneously attends a church school? More broadly, it has necessitated a rethinking of the language and categories employed in classes. Non–Jewish parents often approach religious education with a very different set of expectations than do parents who were born Jewish. Whereas the latter tend to think of Judaism largely as a matter of family and festivals, the former place a far greater emphasis on faith and feelings (Wertheimer 2005). Parents may not necessarily be in synch with the outlook and goals of the school or with one another, thereby adding further pressures to the work of educators.

The 1990 NJPS also demonstrated the growing extent of Jewish geographic dispersal (Goldstein & Goldstein 1996). The consequences of this mobility for Jewish education are considerable. New schools are springing up in locations that previously had small Jewish populations. Who would have imagined the extent of day school growth in the San Francisco Bay area, Las Vegas, Atlanta and southern Florida? And who would have expected some of these burgeoning communities to be at the forefront of educational experimentation, while institutions with venerable histories in long-established communities of the Midwest and Northeast are losing ground? Equally noteworthy, Jewish mobility is dispersing the population *within* communities at ever greater distances from local educational institutions. This complicates the delivery of Jewish education, for either young people must travel a long way to study or satellite schools must be built in the far-flung exurbs.

Still a third social development reshaping Jewish education is the high level of labor force participation by women (Hartman & Hartman 1996). In the postwar era stay-at-home mothers made themselves available for carpooling duties; but with the high incidence of dual-income families, parents are hard-pressed to deliver their children to congregational schools. These time constraints of *parents* are one in a series of pressures accounting for the reduction of school hours in supplementary settings. Parents are simply not available to drive their children to the synagogue several times a week. To be sure, other factors also account for the contraction of school hours in the supplementary system, such as the high priority many parents place on their children's involvement with sports and other extracurricular activities. All of these family considerations are serving to pressure supplementary schools to cut back on their hours, which, in turn, is forcing tough decisions affecting the use of reduced class time: Should schools give *priority* to teaching about the liturgy in order to enable children to participate in religious services, to preparing young people for their bar/bat mitzvah celebrations, to building Hebrew language skills, to fostering identification with the Jewish people or to providing positive Jewish experiences?

The labor force participation of Jewish women has also depleted all kinds of Jewish educational institutions of personnel. In the past, Jewish women were available for part-time teaching jobs or for volunteer work in schools. This is far less likely today as Jewish women seek full-time employment and substantial levels of remuneration. Undoubtedly they do so both for reasons of financial necessity and out of a desire to engage in full-time rather than part-time work. But for the field of Jewish education, with its limited resources and inability to offer competitive rewards, the consequences have been dire. Schools must scramble to insure teacher recruitment and retention, and in the process they often compete with one another to attract personnel from the shrinking pool of available educators and school directors (see also Aron, Zeldin & Lee 2005, pp. 160–163; Shevitz 1988).

On a more positive note, changing social attitudes are prompting greater parental involvement in children's Jewish education, from the selection of schools to playing an active role in reinforcing school lessons. Whereas Jewish parents at mid-century enrolled their children in the closest synagogue school, today's families are more apt to insist on just the right fit between *each* child and the type of schooling they choose to deliver that education. Thus it is hardly unusual for parents to enroll one child in a day school and a second child in a supplementary school and then to hire a tutor for their third child. This approach reflects the consumer orientation of today's parents and also their greater insistence on quality.

Parents are also far more engaged today in programs of Jewish family education and, more recently, in adult education. Whereas studies of the mid-century synagogue school portrayed a parent body dropping their children off at the curb outside the synagogue building, today's affiliated parents

are far more likely to partake of some forms of Jewish education themselves and to enter the portals of Jewish education (see Fishman, Kress, Pomson & Prell in Wertheimer 2007a; Wertheimer 2007b; NJPS 2000–2001). Thus, even as educational programs struggle to cope with evolving social patterns, they often benefit from heightened parental participation and concern.

RETHINKING THE DELIVERY OF JEWISH EDUCATION

The field of Jewish education has worked hard to address the new realities of the American Jewish community. To begin with, the field has diversified the types of schools and programs that educate Jews about their religious civilization. The 1990s, for example, witnessed an expansion in day school options. Where once such schools were almost exclusively the domain of the Orthodox community, the Conservative movement now runs fifty-seven Solomon Schechter schools, some of which have expanded into high school education over the past decade. There are now nineteen day schools under Reform auspices; their umbrella organization is called PARDeS. A spurt of growth in the communal or so-called "pluralistic" sector has resulted in a total of ninety-five such schools, surpassing the combined number of day schools in the Conservative and Reform movements. Collectively, day schools now educate approximately 205,000 students, almost as many as are enrolled at any given moment in supplementary schools. To be sure, Orthodox day schools educate eighty percent of the day school pupils, but many more school choices are now available (see Schick 2004).

New options have also come into existence in the supplementary school sphere. Congregations are experimenting with various configurations to accommodate the needs and interests of families. Symptomatically, the educational arm of the Conservative movement identified six alternative ways for its synagogue schools to deliver an education (see "A Framework for Excellence"... 1998). Reform temples have also rethought the time allocated to schooling, many requiring Saturday attendance so as to teach synagogue skills. These options, in turn, are supplemented by a growing number of schools sponsored by the Chabad-Lubavitch movement, which runs several hundred supplementary schools offering great flexibility of hours and in settings outside of the synagogue community. By the early 21st century attention has shifted to the post-bar and bat mitzvah years as communities and synagogues experiment with new models for engaging their teenagers in both formal and informal Jewish activities. Thus providing more options for parents is a guiding principle in the supplementary school enterprise.

Equally important, the sphere of informal education has received a new infusion of funding and attention. One important outcome of the continuity commissions was expanded funding by federations of synagogue-based teen programs, teen trips to Israel or Jewish summer camping (Sales & Saxe 2002 and 2004; Keysar & Kosman 2004). (Communities generally did not add additional funds to all three.) The underlying assumption guiding investments in these programs was that exposure to informal Jewish education during the teen years was particularly beneficial for nurturing long-term Jewish commitments. Indeed, research in the 1990s highlighted the important role of peer relationships during adolescence in solidifying lifelong Jewish engagement (Phillips 1998, pp. 35–40).

Informal educational programs were given an important boost when the 1990 National Jewish Population Study demonstrated the enduring effects of multiple Jewish exposures on later Jewish participation. Adults who had participated in a combination of informal educational experiences in addition to their formal schooling tended to be involved with Jewish life far more intensively than those with fewer educational exposures (Cohen 1995; Cohen & Kotler-Berkowitz 2004; Kosmin & Keysar 2004). Moreover, adults who had been enrolled in informal educational programs were inclined to replicate the experience for their children by sending them to the kinds of summer camps they themselves had attended or signing them up for teen trips to Israel (Wertheimer 2005, pp. 8–11). This research, in turn, encouraged funders to invest in informal education far more than had been the case prior to the 1990s.

Jewish philanthropists have also taken more notice of college-age students. Hillel, the Jewish campus organization, went through a remarkable expansion in the 1990s, garnering serious funding to house its programs in sparkling new facilities and involving Jewish campus youth in new types of programs. The Hillel network now operates in a far more deliberate fashion to nurture a new genera-

tion of Jewish leaders. Allied to these efforts is Birthright Israel, a ten-day trip to Israel provided free of charge to young Jews between the ages of eighteen and twenty-six. Designed to introduce Israel to young people who have never taken an educational trip there, birthright tours intentionally seek to raise the Jewish consciousness of young Jews and to strengthen their identification with the Jewish State and their own Jewishness (Saxe, Kadushin, et al. 2004).

Rounding out the multiplication of Jewish educational options are a series of new national initiatives in the realm of adult Jewish education. Educators have long debated whether much of significance can change in the field without serious parental involvement. The role model parents can provide their children as engaged learners is invaluable in demonstrating the seriousness of Jewish education. Moreover, the well-educated parent, it has been argued, might serve as a powerful advocate for higher educational standards. Anecdotal reports suggest that the investment in adult education is in fact leading to enhanced parental participation in their children's schooling (Shuster & Grant 2003; Grant et al. 2004).

Leading the way, the Florence Melton Adult Mini-School was created on the premise that a two-year intensive study program would make a difference in the lives of Jewish adults. Over the last twenty years thousands of adults in communities across the continent have graduated the program, with many continuing their study beyond the initial two-year curriculum. At the same time, the Wexner Heritage Foundation organized intensive two-year seminars of adult Jewish education in communities around the country—albeit for a hand-picked group of potential "Jewish leaders." More recently, the Meah program was developed at the Hebrew College in Boston with support from the federation and the central agency to serve as a gateway program into more intensive Jewish learning within the congregational structure. The Meah program is expanding to other communities as a way to engage more adults in Jewish study. Graduates of these programs are now serving as leaders in local and national efforts to improve Jewish education for children.

THE ALTERED ROLE OF JEWISH EDUCATION IN JEWISH FAMILY AND COMMUNAL LIFE

Collectively, these efforts suggest a new approach to Jewish educational thinking now gaining currency. One key idea is that Jewish education must be understood as a life-long enterprise if it is to engage children and if adults are to regard Jewishness as an organizing principle of their lives. Rather than view each program as discrete, communities are supporting education for Jews of all ages and are encouraging multiple forms of engagement with Jewish education. This is most evident in the expansion of adult educational curricula taught by Jewish studies professors, rabbis, and communal professionals for the Melton and Meah programs. At the other end of the life continuum, early child-hood education is now benefiting from new thinking and investment. The larger agenda is to enrich such programs and use them as portals of entry into Jewish life for both children and their parents. But there is also new thinking about how the time in early childhood programs can be used: two remarkably innovative efforts are an immersion program in Hebrew to encourage language acquisition pioneered by the Jewish Theological Seminary and the adaptation of the Florence Melton Adult Mini-School to the needs and interests of parents of pre-school children in order to create a parallel learning track for both generations (Lipman 2006).

With more intensive Jewish learning taking place among the very youngest and adult learners, new initiatives aim to remake schooling for those in between. Nowhere is this more evident than in supplementary schools, which are housed mainly in synagogues. Over the past decade several new considerations have reshaped attitudes about such schools:

- 1. Synagogue revitalization efforts have spurred new understandings of how the synagogue school ought to function in the life of the congregation. Rather than segregate the synagogue into a sanctuary and a separate school wing, efforts are underway to integrate all activities within the congregation.
- 2. Today's parents are also more likely to demand more of the synagogue school. Contrary to the folk wisdom that parents tell their children "We suffered in Hebrew school and expect you,

our kids, to suffer through it, too," in many synagogues parents are insisting on better Jewish education for their children.

- 3. There has been a sea change in how supplementary education is defined. When the mission was mainly the acquisition of skills and knowledge, supplementary education was always found wanting. Today the rules of the game have changed. Schools are valued not only for the cognitive knowledge they impart, but also for the good experiences children have, the Jewish memories schools create, how much good fun parents and children have in the school preparing for celebrations and the like. This orientation has opened new avenues for supplementary education to compete more effectively with other Jewish and non–Jewish activities.
- 4. The new emphasis on wholesome fun has also raised morale within schools. Observers frequently comment on the improved spirit within schools among children, their parents, and the teachers. "It's far easier to do good things," claims one long-time educator.

These and other factors have prompted several new initiatives to re-create the supplementary school (Wertheimer 2007). Some projects seek nothing less than "systemic change," which will involve the entire congregation in restructuring the way it delivers Jewish education to learners of all ages. The most sustained of such projects has been the Experiment in Congregational Education, a national initiative, based at the campus of the Hebrew Union College in Los Angeles (Aron 2000). Two local community initiatives to spur such change are NESS and La'Atid, sponsored by the central agencies for Jewish education in Philadelphia and Hartford, respectively. On the denominational level, both the Reform and the Conservative movements have issued new curricula to upgrade the quality of learning in synagogue schools within their movements, the former known as the Chai curriculum and the later as Etgar. These national initiatives have been matched by equally innovative efforts within individual congregations to rework their schooling by reconfiguring hours, setting new goals, or adopting the model of informal education and even creating synagogue schools along the lines of camping models (Reimer 1997). Each of these initiatives is partially the result of a dramatic reduction over the last two or three decades in the time that children and families spend in the school and synagogue.

None of these approaches would have been possible without the infusion of new capital and prodding by philanthropists. The latter have created new umbrella bodies to link particular sectors within the field of Jewish education—the Partnership for Excellence in Jewish Education for day schools, the Foundation for Jewish Camping, the Jewish Early Childhood Education Initiative (JECEI), and the Partnership for Congregational Education. Day schools in several communities have received multimillion-dollar gifts from local benefactors to build impressive new facilities, substantially boost their compensation packages, offer across-the-board tuition reduction or in other ways upgrade their programming. Further enhancements of the field have come as several foundations such as the Avi Chai and Jim Joseph foundations have embraced Jewish education as their primary mission; others of greater and lesser size, such as the Shusterman Foundation, the Jewish Life Network, the Covenant Foundation, the Wexner Foundations and others, channel a portion of their largess to Jewish educational causes. The new Jewish philanthropy embodied by these foundations has transformed the financial landscape in which Jewish educational institutions operate.

For all these significant strides, the field of Jewish education continues to struggle with several perennial dilemmas.

- 1. While it is true that new types of funding are now available for national and local initiatives, the funds directed by philanthropists to Jewish education are still woefully inadequate. Although it is true that some champions of Jewish education with deep pockets have surfaced in particular communities, benefactors in general have not taken on the challenge of insuring a successor generation by directing their resources to improving the quality of Jewish education for all.
- 2. Jewish educational institutions are contending with a growing shortage of trained personnel due to the low wages paid to Jewish educators, inadequate benefits in the area of health, retirement and life insurance, and the relatively low status of the profession within the Jewish

- community. An upwardly mobile Jewish population will find it hard to recruit educators unless the monetary and status rewards it offers are substantially upgraded.
- 3. The field of Jewish education is weakened by its highly diffuse organizational structure. Remarkably scant attention is paid to the task of channeling families from one educational option to the next in their home communities. On a national level, no agency has the authority or financial clout to set goals for the field. Even more globally, the voluntary nature of American society impedes attempts at coordination and instead fosters diffusion.

These factors and the erosion of commitment to Jewish life make it difficult to project the long-term future of Jewish education in North America. Still, developments over the past two decades attest to the dynamism of the field and its responsiveness to a changing community. Much has been accomplished; much more remains to be done.

Key factors influencing the changing nature of Jewish education:

- Jewish education operates in a social environment that poses many new challenges.
- These challenges have forced a rethinking of how Jewish education is delivered.
- In an age of choice, the field of Jewish education now offers many new options; day schools have proliferated, as have new models of supplementary schooling.
- Informal education assumes a greater role in the field, as does adult education.
- Jewish education is now seen as a life-long enterprise, involving the very youngest early child-hood pupils, students in formal and informal educational programs, teens, college students, and adults.
- The field has benefited from new philanthropic investment and from the prodding of donors.
- Several endemic problems persist, including an insufficiency of funding, a dearth of champions
 who advocate on behalf of Jewish education, a shortage of personnel, and the wide diffusion of
 energy.

As it attends to the needs and challenges of the new century, the field of Jewish education has much reason to celebrate its recent achievements. A significant infrastructure of schools and programs has been put in place, new ideas have emerged to improve the delivery of Jewish education and some new champions have embraced Jewish education as a cause, insisting that Jewish communal leaders attend to the needs of the next generation. Still, important challenges remain. Even as schools are seeking to improve, a large gap remains between the school and the synagogue—with many families, including day school families, remaining aloof from the latter. New evidence also suggests that graduates of various types of programs absent themselves from organized Jewish activities from their entrance into university until they marry and bear children, a hiatus of at least fifteen to twenty years, which increasingly lasts a lifetime. And one of the most important concerns of Jewish educational programs—building a strong sense of connection between the individual Jew and the collective needs of the Jewish people—also seems to be an uphill struggle in an age when the social glue holding together most sectors of American society appears to be weakening. All of these factors suggest a gap between what Jewish educational programs seek to impart and the actual engagement of their students with Jewish life. For all the important strides made in the field, Jewish education in the coming years will have to pay far greater attention to moving Jews of all ages from embracing Jewish learning to active Jewish living.

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Vision-Guided Jewish Education

Daniel Pekarsky

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The role of guiding visions in advancing the cause of quality education has been a prominent theme in recent discussions of Jewish education. At work in these discussions is the principle that more money, higher-quality educators, more informal education, more intensive forms of Jewish education and/or other variables that have been suggested as the key to improvement are insufficient to produce high-quality education in the absence of another critical ingredient. This critical ingredient is the presence in an educating institution of a vision that is inspiring to a critical mass of stakeholders and that is also concrete enough to give guidance to practice.

Unfortunately, discussions of the role of vision in education are confused by vague and sometimes competing interpretations of what "vision" refers to. In the literature on Jewish education this problem has been remedied by a number of attempts to specify the meaning of the concept of vision and its relevance to educational deliberation, practice, and evaluation. In this discussion "vision" will be understood in two senses. First, an *existential vision* refers to the conception of the kind of person and community that are to be cultivated through the education process. An educating institution's existential vision answers the question: What outcomes would we count as success? What kind of person and community are we hoping to foster through the educational process? Second, an institution's *educational vision* includes not just the existential vision at its core but also those ideas that jointly define its approach to the effort to actualize this vision under real-world conditions. These will include, but not be limited to, ideas about human nature, motivation, learning and development, as well as ideas about the cultural background and communal context out of which learners and teachers come.

Against this background a vision-guided institution can be described as one that is informed both by an existential vision and by a stance toward the best way, everything considered, to actualize this vision in the circumstances in which we find ourselves. Whether we find the educational vision that is at work in a practice, program, or institution compelling will thus depend on our assessment of its guiding existential vision and of the assumptions and theories that inform its efforts to actualize this existential vision. A corollary of this is that as our ideas about what is desirable and about the ways to achieve what is desirable change, our educational vision is, over time, also likely to change.

Those, including the author, who believe in the importance of existential vision in education typically hold that vision is indispensable in three ways. First, the presence of a clear, shared, and inspiring vision affords the stakeholders who carry forward an educational initiative a powerful motivation to continue in their work in the face of all the obstacles that confront anybody who seeks to change the status quo in significant ways. Second, having such a vision is an invaluable tool in the effort to make non-arbitrary decisions concerning such diverse matters as specific goals, curriculum, pedagogy, hiring and budgeting priorities. As an example, if my aspiration is to cultivate "labor-Zionist" types, or Buberian Jews who privilege I/Thou relations, or individuals who believe Gmilut Hesed is at the heart of a well-lived Jewish life, my calculations and decisions along these various

'A less stringent definition of a vision-guided institution does not insist on coherence between vision and practice; but it does require that, although there may be substantial weaknesses, the institution is committed to an existential vision and is seriously engaged in efforts to use this vision as a guide to its practice.

fronts are likely to vary in substantial ways. Third, the presence of a guiding vision offers educators a non-arbitrary basis for educational evaluation—i.e., for deciding what would count as success (as opposed to relying on the criteria announced by external testing bodies or the social conventions of the community).

Against this background, we are in a good position to identify some of the critical questions in this domain.

- First, what criteria must an adequate existential vision satisfy? For example, how inspiring, how concretely specified, how widely shared (and by whom) must it be?
- Second, how do such visions arise, and, related to this, who is to decide what guiding vision should inform the work of an educating institution? More specifically, are visions the product of charismatic leaders? Are they the result of an educational/social process that members of an educating community go through? To what extent should these visions arise through a relatively democratic process of collective values clarification? To what extent should the process incorporate learning activities—and what kind?
- Third, what communal arrangements encourage and discourage the emergence of vision-guided practices?
- Fourth, there are questions from the skeptic. For example, is it really true that educational effectiveness requires the presence of guiding existential visions? And might it be the case that designing educational arrangements around a guiding vision of the kind of person to be cultivated might be indoctrinatory, manipulative or otherwise ethically problematic? If so, are there ways to guard against such possibilities?

Ш

My own interest in the place of vision in education grows out of my work in the philosophy of education. Though it would be a serious mistake to believe that philosophers universally embrace the idea that education should be guided by a self-consciously articulated, inspiring vision that identifies an educating community's core aspirations, this idea sits very comfortably at the center of the educational theories of a number of philosophers and philosophers of education. The most important of these is Plato, whose *Republic* identifies not only an existential vision with individual and social dimensions that should inform education, but also a broader educational vision that includes a constellation of systematically integrated beliefs concerning human nature and growth that jointly move Plato toward a conception of the educational process. That is, Plato's *Republic* offers us an example not just of an existential vision but also of an educational vision. Educational philosophers like Jean-Jacques Rousseau, the author of *Emile*, also offer us examples of educational visions. More popular examples of vision-guided institutions can be found in books like A. S. Neill's *Summerhill*, B. F. Skinner's *Walden II*, and Aldous Huxley's *Island*.

Persuaded by the arguments for vision in this tradition of philosophy, and having come to the view that Jewish education is a field in which vision is under-represented both in discourse concerning education and in educational decision-making at communal and institutional levels, I have come to believe that this state of affairs needs remedying. For this reason, my own research and more practical efforts in Jewish education have increasingly focused on remedying this problem.

It may be relevant to add that my interest in vision has also come to influence the research and teaching I do in general education, especially the work I do in the University of Wisconsin's educator-preparation program. Having discovered that those preparing to be educators are typically asked to pay very little attention to the larger purposes of education and to the relevance of such purposes to educational planning and practice, I have sought to remedy this problem by introducing educators-in-training to a range of powerful but often competing ideas concerning the whys and wherefores of education. Among the challenges I put to them are the following: What differences in practice does it make if I choose this guiding idea rather than that one? If I choose E. D. Hirsch or John Dewey or Nel Noddings as my guide, what practical difference does it make? More fundamentally, which if any of these guiding ideas—or what combination of these ideas—seems most reasonable for communities

and educators to adopt? What criteria should govern this selection? What individuals or body (e.g., parents, educators, the youngsters that will be affected, the State, etc.) should be empowered to make such decisions on behalf of the children of the community, and why?

Ш

I mentioned earlier that there is a tradition dealing with the role of guiding visions in education that stretches all the way back to Plato's *Republic*. But as already intimated, in both general and Jewish education there have been significant stretches of time in which educational theorists, teacher-educators, and practitioners have skirted questions of vision, as though the enterprise of education and the training of educational leaders and front-line educators could proceed without making decisions concerning guiding purposes. In the view of some, this has resulted in educational institutions that embody an unproductive mish-mash of this and that. Prominent among those who have expressed this view are Powell, Farrar, and Cohen, whose *Shopping Mall High School* (1985) embodies a powerful discussion of the failure of American high schools to make decisions at the level of basic purposes; instead, they argue, American secondary schools solve the problem of deciding basic purposes by claiming to embrace a great many of them—with the result that they make little progress on any of them. The authors urge that little progress is likely to be seen in American education until this situation is rectified. In their own words:

By promising to do everything well for everyone, educators have contributed to the growing sense that they can do nothing well for anyone.

There is one last, unhappy reason that educators have not pointed to certain misdirections. In the current crop of reforms: one cannot point to an incorrect direction without some sense of the correct one. But American school people have been singularly unable to think of an educational purpose that they should not embrace.

...High schools seem unlikely to make marked improvement...until there is a much clearer sense of what is more important to teach and learn, and why...If educators could agree on such purposes, they would be better armed for debating about education and for deciding that some things cannot be done because others are more important (1985: 305–307).

The view of these authors was foreshadowed in a well-known article by the former dean of the Harvard School of Education, Patricia Graham entitled, "Schools: Cacophony about Practice, Silence about Purpose." According to Graham:

In the absence of a coherent and audible message about the rationale or purpose of education from today's professional educators, the governing educational philosophy on which practice is implicitly based remains the remnants of progressive education, which was the explicit message of a previous generation of educators. I will argue that the time has come for educators to emerge from this dark night of the soul, to find their voice, to join that discussion, and to argue, as only they can, what they believe that schools ought to do and how they ought to do it (1984, pp. 31–32).

Another former dean of Harvard's Graduate School of Education, Theodore Sizer, shares the view advanced by the authors of *The Shopping Mall High School* that American high schools are unlikely to be successful unless they make thoughtful decisions concerning those few important things that they have a good chance of doing well and then set about doing them. Guided by this idea, Sizer launched a movement called "the Coalition of Essential Schools", made up of institutions that have agreed to identify their mission with a particular set of core aspirations and to work with one another on their achievement. This movement continues to exist today.

One might ask whether the insistence of those calling for vision in general education is more than blind faith. The answer is that, in addition to the support of common sense, there is a measure

of empirical evidence behind the claim that vision has the potential to enhance educational quality. As an example, in an important article entitled "Systemic School Reform," Smith and O'Day (1991) suggested, based on empirical evidence, that one of the major differences between successful and unsuccessful schools is that successful ones are suffused down to their very details with a vision that is shared by the various stakeholders.²

Not everyone shares the view of Powell, Farrar, and Cohen that there is no coherent conception of the aims of education at work in American schools. According to others (for example, Jules Henry [1963] and Philip Cusick [1983], as well as some Marxist educational theorists), beneath the appearance of incoherence there is a logic to the design of existing educating institutions in the United States as if by an invisible hand, they are guided by the ideal of preparing materialistic, competitive individualists to meet the needs of the American economy. Though Americans may be loath to acknowledge that this is what they want their youngsters to become, such thinkers argue that their educational institutions bear witness to these (perhaps unconscious) aspirations.

Under any interpretation, there is widespread agreement that American educating institutions are not informed by clear, coherent, inspiring ideals and aspirations, sufficiently concrete to give guidance to practice, that are also the product of thoughtful educational deliberation. There are, of course, exceptions. A famous vision-guided institution is the one developed by John Dewey near the end of the 19th century in Chicago. The Dewey experiment is described in compelling ways in his own writings, as well as in a wonderful book entitled *The Dewey School*, authored by two sisters, Mayew and Edwards (1966), who taught in the school for many years. More recent examples of educating institutions informed by strong visions—indeed very different visions—can be found in Sarah Lawrence Lightfoot's *The Good High School* (1983). Another example is offered in Deborah Meier's account of East Central Park School in New York City in *The Power of Their Ideas* (1995). This example is particularly important because it is situated in the world of public schools, an arena that, in the view of many, is singularly uncongenial to the emergence of vision-guided practice.

IV

The account offered thus far has emphasized research on vision and education that has been going on in general education; but it is now time to turn our attention to important work in this area that has been going on in Jewish education. This is especially important, because although it is sometimes the case that Jewish education follows in the wake of trends in general education, in this case, research in Jewish education has in fact been substantially ahead of, and may indeed be influencing, the work in general education.

That this is true is largely due to the wisdom and insistence of one individual, the late Seymour Fox (may his memory be a blessing). Through his work at the Jewish Theological Seminary, later as dean of the School of Education at the Hebrew University, and then for many years, until his death, as the guiding spirit of the Mandel Foundation's educational agenda, Fox was consistently a strong catalyst for important research and educational initiatives that have energized the field of Jewish education over the last half-century. More than thirty years ago Fox pointed disparagingly to the pareve quality of Jewish education and began urging those in the field to begin addressing larger questions of purpose. Fox's impact is to be seen in many arenas, including a variety of leadership-development programs and, increasingly, various educational initiatives being undertaken in local Jewish communities around the world. In the present context I focus not on these lines of influence but on the research that his work has spawned.

More specifically, Fox's pioneering work on the role of vision in education has catalyzed important kinds of research, especially in the last ten years. Most important of all is a volume edited by him, Israel Scheffler, and Daniel Marom entitled *Visions of Jewish Education* (2003). This book contains a number of different strands that illuminate the nature of vision and vision-guided education. At the center of the

Note, though, that for Smith and O'Day, "vision" refers not to a guiding existential vision, i.e., to a conception of the kind of person we hope to cultivate, but to an institutional vision, to a coherent conception of what an institution at its best will look like. Moreover, their conception of success lays heavy emphasis on success with standardized achievement tests. In contrast, the concept of vision that I am emphasizing is that of existential vision, with the suggestion that our understanding of "success" needs to be based on the ideas in this vision that identify qualities of heart and mind, as well as community, that we should be striving to achieve.

book are a number of articles written by individuals who represent very different conceptions of the aims of Jewish education, as well as some important ideas concerning the way these aims are likely to be achieved. In addition to offering illustrations of what guiding existential visions of Jewish life are, the existential visions represented by these authors as well as their efforts to situate them in the context of more general educational conceptions offer readers a wealth of ideas to wrestle with as they attempt to clarify their own ideas about the larger purposes of Jewish education. These articles are accompanied by other important pieces. Especially worthy of note is an article in which Fox addresses the complex challenges of translating guiding visions into educational practice and highlights the ways in which differences in conception give rise to different approaches to practice (2003: 253–295). There is a also a powerful, empirically based account of a Jewish elementary day school that is struggling, with the aid of the article's author, Daniel Marom, to clarify its own guiding vision and to more effectively embody it in practice (2003: 296–331).

Since its publication *Visions of Jewish Education* has attracted considerable attention, especially within the field of Jewish education. Levisohn (2005) provided a thoughtful discussion and review, which was followed by a series of essays further commenting on the concept of creating a vision for Jewish education (Cohen, E.R.S. et al., 2005). Levisohn's discussion and those of the various respondents succeed in bringing out many important insights, as well as questions in need of further examination.

Other research has been inspired by the work pioneered by Fox and his colleagues in the Mandel Foundation's *Visions of Jewish Education* project. In making the case for vision-guided practice, Pekarsky (1997, 1998) clarified the concept of vision by drawing a distinction between existential, institutional and strategic visions. Simply put, existential visions refer to conceptions of the kind of person one hopes to cultivate; institutional visions refer to conceptions of what, at their best, educating institutions look like; and strategic visions refer to conceptions of what needs to be done to advance from current reality to institutional arrangements that show promise of achieving our favored existential vision. More recently, as a result of conversations with Fox, Marom, and Scheffler, Pekarsky (2006, 2007) has drawn explicit attention to the distinction between existential and educational visions and to the relationship between visions in these two senses. Pekarsky's (2006) study of a vision-guided school in New York complements other recent portraits of vision-guided Jewish educating institutions—notably, Marom's study in *Visions of Jewish Education*, referred to above, and Fox's study of Camp Ramah, *Vision at the Heart* (1997). Such studies exhibit what vision-guided educating institutions are and are a rebuttal to the skeptic's view that such institutions cannot be developed under real-world conditions.

There is, of course, a need for continuing research relating to vision and Jewish education. First—although, as indicated above, we already have documented examples of vision-guided institutions that thrive in the real world—it would be useful to document examples and analyses of educating institutions that have *transformed themselves* into vision-guided institutions, as well as to analyze the conditions, activities, and personnel that have facilitated this transformation. Studies of this kind are important not just because they might offer practical guidance to those who would reform Jewish education, but also because they would respond to the concern of skeptics who believe that it's impossible to significantly change existing institutions (and that therefore those interested in creating vision-guided institutions need to build them from scratch).

Second, it would be important to document examples of vision-guided education in settings other than camps and day schools. In particular, it would be useful to find, write up, and analyze vision-guided congregational schools (i.e., "Hebrew schools" or "religious schools"), with attention to their emergence and their impact (as compared with the standard fare).

Third, the field of Jewish education would benefit from the development of additional existential visions—that is, of additional conceptions of the agenda/aims of Jewish education that might inspire and/or challenge contemporary Jews in North America, Israel and elsewhere as they struggle to identify the kind of existential vision that is appropriate for their particular educational institutions. Fourth, there is a need for research that focuses in a more systematic way on the relationship between an existential vision and educational practice. In the belief that we tend to radically oversimplify what needs to be taken into account in the effort to move from conception to practice, Seymour

Fox was, before his death, deeply immersed in an effort to address this problem. It continues to be a pressing need today.

V

If, as those who have contributed to the literature I have been discussing have suggested, progress in Jewish education depends on a willingness to tackle questions of vision, then it is important to develop strategies that will result in putting the challenges relating to vision at the center of the Jewish community's educational agenda. But it's also important to note that some progress in this direction has already been made. For example, readings and questions relating to vision and education are presently part of the curriculum for Jewish educators at the major training institutions—places like Brandeis, Hebrew Union College, the Jewish Theological Seminary, the Mandel Leadership Institute, the Melton Centre for Jewish Education at the Hebrew University, Siegal College in Cleveland, and the University of Judaism. Related to this, the Mandel Foundation has convened a group of teacher-educators from these institutions to discuss issues relating to the teaching about vision-guided education in professional development programs. Another index of the importance that the theme of vision has come to occupy in the landscape of Jewish education is its place on the agenda of national and local conferences for Jewish educators and lay leaders.

For those interested in the advancement of vision-guided Jewish education, these developments are to be applauded but offer no good reason for complacency. The current interest in vision within the field of Jewish education could, after all, only represent the latest in a series of fads, after which attention will focus on some other promising ways of improving the field. The present interest in vision is perhaps best viewed as a window of opportunity during which the potential of vision-guided practice to enhance educational quality and the possibility of growing vision-guided institutions can be demonstrated.

Beyond demonstrating such things, advancing the cause of vision-guided education also requires another important ingredient. At a time when congregations, schools and camps appear to be more interested in thinking about larger questions of purpose and the relevance of such matters to their educational practice, it is essential that ways be found to help institutions and communities make progress in this area. If the stakeholders of such institutions come together to struggle with questions of vision and find themselves bewildered about how to proceed or overwhelmed by their diversity of opinion; or if their months of deliberation lead them no further than where they were before they started, or to a laundry list of aspirations that is pie-in-the-sky; or if, having struggled meaningfully with questions of vision, they have no idea about how to think about the implications of their thinking for practice—if such are the outcomes of their deliberations, the effect may be worse than "no progress".

These considerations make it important for those who believe in the power of guiding visions to improve Jewish education to develop tools (literature, documented processes and other resources) that will give institutions and communities that want to make progress in this arena the necessary scaffolding. Especially useful would be the development within the Jewish world of a cadre of individuals who have been trained to help facilitate the process of developing vision and vision-guided practice in different kinds of educating arenas. Such individuals could be brought in by interested communities to help them with their work. Alternatively (or perhaps in addition), short-term educational programs designed to pass on useful skills and resources might be developed for those individuals who have been designated by their communities to lead a process of becoming more vision-guided. In the absence of such developments, it may, unfortunately, be naïve to think that the unguided efforts of educating institutions are likely to bear fruit, though this may happen on occasion.

VI

Several key points developed in the preceding discussion are worthy of emphasis in this concluding section:

- An existential vision—i.e., a conception of the kind of person and community that the process of education should strive to realize—must be genuinely inspiring to the relevant community of stakeholders, as well as sufficiently clear and concrete to give real guidance. When it satisfies these conditions it offers an indispensable and powerful basis for educational planning and decision-making as well as evaluation.
- While the presence of an existential vision is critical, it is not sufficient to give rise to a vision-guided educating institution. Also needed is a constellation of ideas that jointly define a conception of the way the process of education should be organized to realize the ideals identified in the vision with the particular populations that are to be educated, given cultural, economic, and technological realities. This conception, which includes but is broader than what is identified in the existential vision, is what I earlier called an educational vision.
- A body of research has developed that a) explains the concept of vision and the case for vision-guided practice and b) offers examples of vision-guided institutions that thrive in the real world. But there is a need for additional kinds of research—research that identifies and seeks to understand institutions that have evolved into vision-guided institutions; research that examines instances of vision-guided practice outside the world of camps and day schools (for example, in congregational schools); and research that helps us to better understand the complex steps that mediate the relationship between vision and educational practice.
- There is a need to develop human and other kinds of resources that will be available to educating institutions (schools, camps, congregations, etc.) that are interested in becoming more vision-guided than they now are. Otherwise there is a risk that the recent surge in interest in the place of vision in Jewish education will dissipate with little to be shown for it.

In conclusion, it must be emphasized that, although attending to the challenge of vision is essential if we are to make substantial progress in the field of Jewish education, addressing this challenge adequately is neither easy nor a panacea. Achieving clarity about what, as communities and educators, we should be striving for is a challenge quite apart from the difficulties that accompany the effort to build bridges between our ideas about the aims of education and our practice. It is difficult because it requires us to give serious, honest thought to what we, as individuals and as a community, think the enterprise of Judaism and Jewish life is fundamentally about. The difficulties being substantial, it may be that we will end up making only limited progress in this arena; but this may be an instance in which the old saying applies, "The perfect is the enemy of the good." That is, even a little bit of clarity at the level of vision may be sufficient to make a world of practical difference.

Turning briefly to the second point, let us suppose that we achieve clarity of existential vision and have some reasonably good ideas concerning how they can meaningfully inform educational practice. Although this is a significant and important achievement, it is not sufficient to make for quality education. Human, financial and technological resources will still be necessary, as will the serious engagement of relevant stakeholders, including the families whose children are being educated. More generally, though it is a critical ingredient in an effective educational reform mix, successfully addressing the challenges of vision is not a magic bullet.

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Jewish Education in the Age of Google

Jonathan S. Woocher

Type the words "Jewish education" into Google and you will get—the header tells us—approximately 34,800,000 results. (This amounts to around two and a half web links for every Jew in the world.) "Torah" is somewhat less popular, apparently, yielding only 7,020,000 hits. "God" does better—176,000,000 results—though not as well as "Israel"—250,000,000—the interpretation of which I will leave to the reader.

In one sense, this is nothing more than a curious exercise. Yet in another, the ease with which I conducted the searches, the speed with which I received the results (less than a tenth of a second), the incredible variety of listings to peruse under each heading, the time it would take (years) to pursue all of the links (and the fact that they would change again and again while I was doing so) and your immediate comprehension of what I am talking about all tell us much that is highly relevant to any effort to understand the state of Jewish education today, its future and the challenges it faces.

The last quarter century has seen the world change dramatically for everyone, and perhaps even more so for Jews. The number, scope and implications of these changes—geo-political, socio-cultural, economic, technological, and religious—far exceed what could be catalogued, much less fully assessed, in a short paper. But consider just a few examples:

- In 1981 the United States was locked in a Cold War with the "evil empire" of the atheistic Soviet Union and its bloc of vassal states, and as Jews we struggled to help our fellow Jews trapped in the USSR escape to freedom. Today our enemy is global terrorism fueled by religious, largely Islamic, extremism, while as Jews we celebrate the renewal of Jewish life in the FSU and Eastern Europe even as Israel and our own communities have been transformed by the millions of Jews (and non–Jews) who have migrated from the FSU over the past decades.
- In 1981 baby boomers were in their peak years of child rearing, and the millions of Jews among them were enjoying the fruits of their and their parents' successful passage into the mainstream of American life. Today Jewish baby boomers' children are forming families of their own, families that include non–Jews, partners of the same gender, and children from diverse racial and religious backgrounds far more often than those of their parents.
- Since 1981 America and its Jews have been through a complex journey of simultaneous secularization and spiritual renewal. Individualism, multi-culturalism, universalism and neo-tribalism shape a generational culture among young Jews today that both celebrates and downplays difference and that elevates personal choice and non-judgmentalism to the summit of its value system.
- And underlying or overarching the changes in politics and in social, cultural, and religious norms and mores is a quarter century of technological change that only science fiction authors could have dreamed of. In 1981, personal computers had barely spread beyond groups of techno-hob-byists; today, they are ubiquitous and link together billions of users around the globe via the Internet. Fewer than 5,000 Americans had cell phones in 1981 (they were available in only three cities); today you can not only call anyone anywhere on phones smaller than your hand, you can browse the web, download your email, listen to music and watch TV. In 1981 cable television

had just reached the point where its first true non-broadcast network, HBO, felt it worthwhile to offer programming twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. Today cable and satellite bring us hundreds of programming choices every minute of every day, and On Demand services and DVRs have placed us in virtually complete control of what we see, when.

Amid such changes, and a host of others that could be listed, Jewish education has hardly been static. It has responded primarily to two broad changes in American Jewish identity over this period: first, the perceived weakening of Jewish identification and of traditional forms of Jewish expression that came to be called the "crisis of Jewish continuity"; and second, the simultaneous growth of a segment within the Jewish population that is open to and even actively seeking a more intensive relationship to their own Jewishness. These two phenomena complemented each other and encouraged those guiding Jewish education to promote the expansion of intensive educational experiences as the key to strengthening Jewish identity. The results of this effort may be seen in the growth of Jewish day schools, in the drive to get more young people to Israel that has culminated in Birthright Israel, in expanded investment in Jewish summer camping and in the rapid spread of new programs like Melton, Meah and Wexner that expose adults to high-level Jewish learning on an ongoing basis.

At the same time, persistent voices have reminded the Jewish community that these intensive educational experiences still reach only a minority of Jews. Although the debate over how much effort and resources to put into "outreach," especially to intermarried families, has continued to agitate the community, nearly everyone agrees that initiatives to engage Jewish families early on and to try to reengage young adults on campus or post-college must also be part of any viable "continuity" strategy. Hence the expansion of Jewish early childhood education, the revitalization of Hillel and the spread of Jewish studies and (to a lesser extent) the launching of a variety of other endeavors targeted at Jews in their 20s and 30s and at interfaith families have also won attention and support from educational activists and funders.

The landscape of Jewish education clearly has changed over the past quarter century, and for the better. But has it changed enough? There are disquieting as well as encouraging elements in the overall portrait of North American Jewish education today. Enrollment in part-time Jewish education is declining, and not all of the decrease can be attributed either to defections to day school or reduced cohort sizes. A majority of teens continue to exit the educational system between bar/bat mitzvah and high school graduation. And though solid research is lacking, there is good reason to believe that the quality of Jewish education in nearly every setting, though improving, remains inconsistent, with pockets of excellence co-existing alongside expanses of mediocrity.

Should we tie these persisting weaknesses to a failure to respond fully and appropriately to the changes of the past quarter century? It's difficult to say. On the one hand, Jewish education has certainly responded to some of the events and trends of the era by trying to incorporate new content into its curricula, whether relating to the role of women in Jewish life or to the changing relationship to Israel. Yet at the same time, most of what is taught today is similar to what was taught twenty-five years ago—updated and often improved, but essentially the same. Pedagogically, Jewish education has hardly ignored the technological revolution (recall those millions of web links). All manner of multimedia and distance learning is now available. Yet again, the times, places, and ways in which Jewish education is delivered remain primarily those that were dominant twenty-five years ago. New technologies have been a "gloss" added to a system that remains fundamentally unchanged.

This inherent conservatism is not necessarily a bad thing. For a thirty-five-hundred-year-old enterprise to rush to redefine its fundamentals based on a quarter century of not unambiguously positive change would be, at the very least, hasty. Yet there is an equal danger in assuming that the changes of the past twenty-five years can be accommodated *without* rethinking at least some of these fundamentals. Jewish education has spent insufficient time reflecting deeply, critically, and self-critically on the developments of the last quarter century, at least some of which may present far more pro-

found challenges and opportunities with respect to how Jewish education is designed and delivered than has been generally appreciated. Google is not just a neat search engine or a symbol for a new technological age. It is a signpost pointing toward new realities in how the world operates, in how knowledge is defined and delivered and in how people live and control their lives.\(^1\) Jewish education ignores these deeper changes at its peril. And if it can tap into the new sensibilities and habits of behavior that Google and its like both foster and feed upon, Jewish education may discover new ways to expand its impact and effectiveness.

So what are some of the most salient characteristics of the "age of Google," and what might they mean for Jewish education?

IN THE AGE OF GOOGLE, INFORMATION IS PLENTIFUL AND EASY TO ACCESS (BUT NOT NECESSARILY EASY TO ASSESS).

Information, slews of it, is literally at our fingertips today. For teachers and students both, the ubiquity and ease of accessing hundreds or thousands of sources and resources on virtually any topic calls for a fundamental rethinking of how learning is designed and implemented. Learners are liberated from their dependence on a handful of textbooks or what teachers are able to tell them under the pressure of limited time. The democratization of learning that the ancient rabbis first promoted and that the printing press made imaginable has come to fruition in the age of the Internet and multimedia technology. Learning literally can become an adventure as both the number and types of resources available to students (and teachers)—and the pathways through them—multiply exponentially.

At the same time, however, the challenges of determining what information from what sources is truly reliable and worth knowing multiply as well. The call from educational theorists for transforming the teacher's role from that of "the sage on the stage" to "the guide on the side" preceded the age of Google. But now this is no longer simply desirable; it is a necessity. The shift from defining teaching primarily as the transmission of content to a definition that sees teaching as the facilitation of enthusiastic, adventurous, but responsible and discerning self-guided learning is not an easy one to make pedagogically. For Jewish education it is perhaps equally challenging philosophically. Our tradition of learning places great value on accurately transmitting (and then elaborating upon) the teachings of one's predecessors. This tradition need not be lost; in fact, the availability and ease of searching the canon of traditional texts that DVDs and the Internet have made possible can open up these texts to today's students in manifold ways that were previously unthinkable. But the processes and premises of learning and teaching are changing. Teachers will not hold a monopoly on determining what is worth knowing in a world where Amazon and Epinions encourage users to provide their own reviews to complement those of the "experts," and the former are often more trusted than the latter.

Can Jewish education adapt to a world where every student (and parent) has access to the equivalent of a university library in her or his bedroom or den? Can we take advantage of the possibilities this opens up and learn how to re-craft our programs and pedagogy accordingly? We have begun to answer these questions, but there is still more to be done before we can confidently respond in the affirmative.

IN THE AGE OF GOOGLE (AND DELL AND AMAZON), "CUSTOMERS" EXPECT TO BE ABLE TO GET WHAT THEY WANT, WHEN THEY WANT IT AND AT A GOOD PRICE.

If the industrial age was the era of mass production and consumption, the age of Google—the age of information—is the era of re-customization². We expect today that producers and sellers will deliver the products that we want, when and where we want them, and that the purchase itself will

^{&#}x27;Indeed, a colleague suggested that "living in the age of Google means that SEARCHING is a legitimate, life-encompassing activity!" (personal communication from Renee Rubin Ross). Whether there is a correlation between the ease and ubiquity of computer searching and the apparent popularity of more existential and spiritual questing, I do not know. But we should not quickly dismiss the possible links between our daily and our religious habits and dispositions.

²The term often used today is "mass customization"—the use of sophisticated information technology to create personally tailored messaging and to give customers options to customize their purchases, within carefully prescribed limits, while preserving the efficiency of operation that true customization cannot achieve.

be simple, efficient, and a bargain to boot. In the commercial world, and increasingly in nonprofit settings as well, the provider who can deliver the best "customer experience" wins more often than not.

We are beginning to learn this lesson in Jewish education, but there is still a considerable distance to go before we can honestly say that we have put the customer at the center of the educational experience. Part of the challenge is in the products we offer, and part lies in our modes of delivery. In both respects, despite the large number and variety of providers, Jewish education remains largely a "take what we give you, when and where we offer it" proposition. Programs are packaged by the provider, with few opportunities for the consumer to select the components or change the time and place of delivery. Most congregational schools offer similar curricula, and these are determined far less by what congregants want than by a top-down view of what their children need. The ability to construct one's own educational experience by mixing and matching the offerings of many providers is severely constrained by a lack of information regarding what is available (a sharp contrast to going on Amazon and finding a list of customized suggestions for books to buy based on your last order) and the need to "join" many institutions in order to access their programs (rewarding customer loyalty makes sense; requiring a pledge of loyalty in advance seems counterproductive).

The exceptions to these general propositions prove the rule. Chabad, which emphasizes responding directly to what its customers want and asking for little up front, is thriving as an educational provider for children, families, and adults. Youth groups are moving from membership-based models to more open frameworks for programming. And cultural events—film festivals, concerts, plays, exhibits—are drawing crowds of Jews who are not prepared to make extended commitments to institutions and programs.

Of course, the reality is far more complex than the picture sketched above. Institutions cannot survive on intermittent patrons, and the Jewish community cannot possibly offer every potential configuration of content, method, time, and location that prospective learners may seek. Customization in the marketplace is driven by large volumes and vast databases that allow diverse customer needs to be met efficiently—but as anyone who has dealt with impossible-to-navigate phone menus and interminable waiting times can testify, we confuse such customization with true personal attention at our peril. The marriage of marketing and education is inevitably a problematic one. Is good education nothing more than giving consumers what they want? Most educators, including Jewish ones, would argue vociferously that it is not. Education is about learning important things, and it requires effort and commitment. Though we cannot impose contents or methods upon unwilling recipients, we abdicate our responsibility both to them and to the institutions and tradition we represent if we turn Jewish education into nothing more than an exercise in customer satisfaction.

Still, it is easy and increasingly dangerous to underestimate the extent to which those whom we seek to serve are legitimately asking more of us. We can do a far better job of lowering the barriers to Jewish educational experiences, of providing useful guidance to those who are uncertain about what modes of learning are available to them and what they can expect from these. We can provide more differentiated offerings and a greater variety of options and opportunities to try these. And we can make the entire experience of Jewish education more responsive to what people are seeking as well as to what we so earnestly want to give them. A Jewish education that is more customer-centric and customer-friendly is a necessity today; else the very people on whom we pin our hopes for the future will turn elsewhere.

IN THE AGE OF GOOGLE (AND XBOXES AND IPODS) LEARNING IS A MULTISENSORY, MULTIDIMENSIONAL EXPERIENCE.

In the fall of 2005, the hottest holiday shopping item was the Xbox 360—Microsoft's latest effort to best Sony and other rivals in the arena of video game playing devices. The introduction of the Xbox was accompanied by a spate of articles in the popular media describing the video gaming culture that now includes millions of young and not-so-young people around the world. Lest we be tempted to dismiss this as a pop culture story without educational significance, we should note that at the same time as purchasers began scrambling to get their scarce Xboxes, one prominent educational periodi-

cal led its issue with an article on "Video Games and the Future of Learning" that claimed that such games "give a glimpse into how we might create new and more powerful ways to learn in schools, communities, and workplaces."

Though the notion that video game parlors will replace classrooms anytime soon surely constitutes hyperbole, both the observations and the reasoning on which the article is based deserve to be taken seriously. Video games aside, the past quarter century has seen a revolution in learning theory that focuses on the diverse ways in which we use our multiple senses and multiple intelligences to make sense of the world. As Jews we proudly wear the mantle of People of the Book, but learning no longer comes from the written word alone. We may not be ready to abandon the study of traditional texts for interactive gaming where avatars play out complex scenarios in syn-worlds. But Jewish education surely must adjust to a world in which multisensory and experiential learning is becoming the norm.

Again, this is a process that to some extent has already begun. Certainly the concept of "experiential" or "informal" education has entered the mainstream of Jewish educational thinking and practice. So too have we seen an expanded interest in the use of the arts as a vehicle for serious Jewish learning (viz. projects like Avodah Arts or Storahtelling). And of course, the technological revolution has not passed Jewish education by: Increasingly sophisticated use is being made of technology's ability to bridge time and space by making it possible for students to encounter in their classrooms and homes cultural artifacts, historical events and personages that once could only be read about in textbooks or seen in museums.

Still, the larger challenge remains. In an era of constructivist learning, multiple intelligences, and diverse learning styles, can Jewish education keep pace with an educational environment that is rapidly generating new types of materials and new modes of teaching and learning? It is fair to say that what has been achieved in this regard thus far demonstrates the potential for redesigning Jewish education as an encompassing set of experiences of touching, seeing, hearing, feeling, making and doing, as well as listening, reading, speaking and writing. But, this potential is still far from fully realized. To do so will require a major investment not only in programs or materials, but in people. This is now underway in domains like camping and youth work where experiential education has long been the norm. But in other areas like the use of arts and technology, the serious work of preparing a generation of adept educators has barely begun.

Someday soon—if not already—our children, and some of us, will be carrying devices that operate as cell phones, PDAs, MP3 players, PlayStations or Xboxes, Wifi Internet devices, DVD players and TV receivers all in one. Perhaps these devices will even emit pre-selected odors to accompany whatever one is seeing, hearing or doing. For certain, our children will be expecting the education they receive to be as rich, inviting and diverse a sensory experience as the rest of their lives. We had better be prepared to deliver.

IN THE AGE OF GOOGLE (AND INSTANT MESSAGING AND FRIENDSTER), CONNECTIONS CAN BE FORMED READILY ACROSS MULTIPLE BOUNDARIES, AND "VIRTUAL" COMMUNITIES CAN COMPLEMENT AND SUPPORT "REAL" ONES.

Anyone who has watched teenagers for any length of time—including observing them from the back of a classroom—knows that alongside whatever visible and purposeful activity is taking place, one can often detect a stream of silent communication flowing. Whether it is instant messages from "buddies" popping up on the computer screen or text messages whipping back and forth on cell phones, distance and time no longer serve as barriers to immediate connection with whomever one wants, whenever one wants. From a larger socio-cultural standpoint, this immediacy of communication reinforces the rise to prominence of networks as primary vehicles for organizing human activity and relationships, both as a supplement to and a substitute for more formal types of organization. Such networks, both "virtual" and "real," not only strengthen existing ties, but open up connections that might otherwise never be made and allow for the emergence of new types of community among individuals otherwise unlikely to come into contact.

³David Williamson Shaffer, Kurt R. Squire, Richard Halverson, and James P. Gee, "Video Games and the Future of Learning," *Phi Delta Kappan*, 87:2, October 2005, pp. 104–111.

In a networked world of easy and immediate communication, the social dimensions of education can be dramatically expanded to encompass many more individuals. For Jewish education in particular this is a boon of enormous potential. As a group both few in numbers (comparatively speaking) and widely dispersed, Jews are in a position to make especially good use of the power of communications technology to create virtual connections and communities to complement face-to-face ones.

Such efforts are being made. In a bold move to re-position both itself and the entire domain of Jewish youth group activity, BBYO has launched a website called b-linked, billed as a "BBYO online community." The site functions as a Jewish version of Friendster, allowing teens to register their profiles and connect via the web with other teens based on mutual interests rather than geography. It also includes a variety of "portals" that allow teens to blog, get help with college admissions, post photos, find out about events in their areas and who is signed up for them and connect with Israel and their "spiritual side." B-linked follows on the considerable efforts to build similar electronic connections for young adult alumni of Birthright Israel through its website. Other recent innovative technology-based projects include efforts to connect Jews here in North America with counterparts in Israel and other parts of the Jewish world (e.g., a project called Bavli-Yerushalmi sponsored by an Israel-based organization called Kolot, in which groups of Jews in North America and in Israel study common texts and share their insights via email).

Yet even these notable efforts constitute only small down payments on what eventually could and should be invested to take advantage of the new networked world we live in. Computers, cell phones, wireless email and instant messaging are wonderful tools. But for Jewish education, networking is not ultimately about technology. It is about expanding Jewish conversations, creating a context in which communication among Jews flows freely and individuals can find others with whom to carry on discussions that are personally meaningful and culturally generative. It is about building communities around discovered shared interests and using a variety of modes of communication, both face-to-face and electronically mediated, to create and re-create connections, some temporary, some enduring.

The re-emergence of informal "Jewish salons" in several communities over the last few years, the success of ventures like Reboot and Kol Dor that connect Jewish young adults from diverse backgrounds, together with phenomena like b-linked and Birthright Israel, are perhaps the harbingers of a new era of Jewish "networking." In such an era, Jewish education should be re-imagining itself as a global enterprise for facilitating a myriad of Jewish connections and conversations using all means available. If this spirit of open and free-flowing discussion were really to take root, perhaps instead of IM'ing their friends in the next row about this weekend's party, we might even imagine students IM'ing friends in distant cities to share opinions about the latest events in Israel or ideas on how to interpret a particularly knotty piece of text. In such an environment teachers might even forgive the occasional ringing cell phone.

IN THE AGE OF GOOGLE (AND LINUX AND WINDOWS), GOOD PLATFORMS CAN BE EVEN MORE POWERFUL (AND PROFITABLE) THAN PROGRAMS.

Since its debut as a search engine for the web, Google has spawned a slew of spin-offs and extensions that allow users to search their own hard drives, look for academic articles in journals, read a customized version of the day's news, view satellite pictures of one's neighborhood, shop and, it is promised, access the collections of some of the world's great libraries. Microsoft's Windows dominates the world of personal computer operating systems because thousands of programs—most not authored by Microsoft—run on this platform. Its chief rival today, Linux, goes Windows one better. As "open source" software, it has mobilized an army of programmers to continuously improve the platform itself in a remarkable self-sustaining, self-policing collaborative effort that in turn makes possible an ever-expanding array of programs that many claim are better than anything that runs on Windows.

The lesson in these endeavors is that building a great platform, one that can grow and xpand and that draws out the talents of others, is even better than creating a great program. This is a lesson that Jewish education would do well to heed. Too often educational institutions think only about how

to design and implement new and better programs. But if these institutions—e.g., synagogues—saw themselves as platforms and sought success by attracting as many other talented programmers as possible to make use of their platform, the entire ecosystem of Jewish education might function dramatically differently, and with far greater effectiveness.

A successful platform does a few fundamental things very well and meshes seamlessly with other programs that do specific tasks far better than the platform itself could alone (ever tried to write a paper with Windows' Wordpad?). A good platform makes it easier for programmers to write good programs, and good programs in turn make the platform far more valuable to its users. Jewish education by and large does not emulate this formula. Institutions try to do too much on their own (sometimes for fear of sharing and possibly losing their users, sometimes because they simply don't know what is or could be available). Creative individuals or groups with excellent programs have difficulty breaking into the marketplace. The result is wasted energy and resources and a product that is not nearly as good as it could be.

How can Jewish education learn better how to build both strong platforms and dynamic programs? One possible answer is to introduce more of the free-enterprise model into its operation. Birthright Israel used what is in essence an "open sourcing" model, allowing a wide variety of program providers to develop specific trips (the programs) within a framework of well-codified, detailed standards (the platform) and then to compete in the marketplace for participants.

A second key is to take seriously the idea that Jewish education is (or could be) a true system in which the individual parts support one another and each contributes to the viability and vitality of the whole. Combining the concept of platforms with that of organizational networks, in which smaller, more flexible and adaptable organizations mesh their talents and do not try to do everything by themselves, is a spreading strategy for increasing both productivity and quality. In such a systemic approach, information about clients, critical success factors, and prior experiences ("source code") would be shared, not hoarded. Interfaces would be smooth (imagine synagogues, camps, and JCCs working together to provide families with full-service, year-round educational experiences). And, "bug fixes" and regular updates would ensure that the quality and usability of the product improved continuously.

A new focus on building strong platforms as well as programs would also mean investing seriously in those platforms for the long term. In the nonprofit world generally today there is a growing awareness that supporting endless streams of new programs without building the capacity of the institutions that must operate these programs to sustain themselves and to generate successive generations of new initiatives is a bad investment. (Jim Collins talks of the distinction between "telling time" and "building clocks.") For Jewish education this would mean ensuring that institutions like synagogues, JCCs, camps and day schools that should be the platforms for a continuing flow of creative programming have the wherewithal to do the fundamental tasks that they must, tasks such as building close, enduring relationships with those who pass through their doors or gates. Investments in "infrastructure," whether for adequate staff or for systems of knowledge-sharing, are notoriously difficult to sell to many funders. Yet if we are to have great platforms for great programs, such investments are vital, even as we ask the institutions themselves to become far more focused in what they do and far more open to bringing in others to add to their talent pools.

CONCLUSION

I have tried to suggest a number of ways in which Jewish education in the age of Google will need to look and work differently than it does today. The lessons I have tried to draw and the proposals I have made are hardly the only ones we might imagine emanating from the changes we have experienced over the past quarter century. I have concentrated heavily on technological changes and their social, cultural, and educational accompaniments. Some readers may disagree with my analysis and recommendations; others may cite changes in other aspects of our experience that are far more consequential than those I have pointed to and that call for different strategies to maximize Jewish education's reach and impact.

What is critical for Jewish education is not the specific menu of recommendations that I or others may produce. Rather, it is that we take seriously that the world *has* changed, and that Jewish education has not changed fast enough or far enough to keep pace with these changes. Being *au courant* or even "relevant" is, of course, not a sufficient goal in its own right. As noted above, Jewish education, like all education, serves best when it incorporates a strong element of conservatism (with a small "c").

Nonetheless, the times challenge us to not rest on the good efforts of the past, not to assume that what worked then will still work now and not to reject all new ideas and approaches as either faddish or disruptive. We do live in the age of Google, and much more. And it is an age that offers us possibilities for realizing old visions that our predecessors could never have dreamt of but might well have grasped enthusiastically. Our task, as Rav Kook argued nearly a century ago, is simple, yet endlessly challenging: It is to renew the old and sanctify the new. Jewish education deserves no less.

Jewish Education in the World of Web 2.0

Brian Amkraut

SNAPSHOTS OF CONTEMPORARY CULTURE

- 1. For the Super Bowl in February 2007, Pepsi-Cola took the unprecedented step of outsourcing, or more accurately "crowdsourcing," the creation of an advertisement for Doritos tortilla chips to be aired during the game. Consider for a moment the company's willingness to put a thirty-second spot, for which they paid \$2.5 million, in the hands of amateurs, or more shockingly in the hands of you and me. Not only was the creative content generated by a non-professional end user, but the decision regarding which ad to run was put in the hands of the online user population, who could vote for their favorite spot. The creator of the winning ad received thirty seconds of glory (and perhaps a future career in advertising) and Pepsi-Cola saved millions of dollars in the cost of creative content generation while pre-screening its Super Bowl investment to ensure viewer popularity.
- 2. The starting point for research today, for students young and old, invariably begins in one of two places: Google or Wikipedia. Most likely the results from the Google query will send the student to Wikipedia. Whereas Google depends on a mathematical algorithm to provide a list of the websites most responsive to the user query, Wikipedia provides a forum bringing the concept of "user-generated content" to the realm of the encyclopedia. Whether or not you think the collective wisdom that informs Wikipedia is a legitimate reference, that model reflects both a new reality and an important trend in terms of authority.
- 3. To kick off her run for the 2008 presidential nomination, Hillary Clinton adopted the slogan "Let's begin the conversation." While Hillary clearly has no intention of personally engaging the many millions that may join that dialogue, her campaign hopes to respond to the trend of interactive discourse, perhaps most clearly manifest in cyberspace, where millions literally do join the discussion. Whether or not one supports Hillary ideologically, this campaign strategy attempts to tap into the social culture of interactivity.
- 4. The March issue of 614, an electronic magazine (Ezine) published by the Hadassah-Brandeis Institute, asked a number of female Jewish authors to comment on recently published works that changed their thinking about being a Jewish woman. Yet instead of taking the advice of these "experts," 21st-century readers frequently receive guidance from reviews and suggestions posted on or generated by Amazon.com.

CHALLENGE OF WEB 2.0

That technology is rapidly transforming the very fabric of American society is no doubt an understatement. In a world in which broadband access and open-source software facilitate file sharing, streaming media, and the development of user-generated content, Web 2.0 represents merely the latest stage in this consistently fluctuating environment. The challenge for Jewish education—and all education, for that matter—rests not merely with ever changing technological developments—both the explosion of information available and the ability to access that information—but more significantly on the individual's changing attitude towards authority and empowerment. The collabora-

tive, interactive, and user-generated world of the new Internet enabled by Web 2.0 reflects a social and an intellectual culture in which the individual end user has the ability and is even encouraged to shape and create the frame of reference for Jewish life in the 21st century.

Jews today, both young and old, but more often young, define Judaism on their own individually generated terms, regardless of whether their perceptions coincide with the "establishment" of organized Jewish life. This phenomenon challenges the long-standing approach to Jewish life in which conceptions of community were defined by geographical parameters, and religious and cultural standards were determined by authoritative figures, most often rabbinic but occasionally otherwise. While "legitimate" Jewish authorities clearly dismiss such unauthorized attempts to redefine Jewishness, isn't it possible that this user-generated Judaism represents the latest step in a chain that includes such revolutionary but ultimately significant challenges as the havurah movement, Kaplan's call for reconstruction, Zionism, early Reform and even Hasidism? In every stage of modernity, Jews have developed interpretations and understandings of their tradition as a response to the challenge of new circumstances, and these reactions quite often build on contemporary trends in social and intellectual culture.

RESPONSES

What responsibilities do Jewish educators have in the environment where anyone can blog on Judaism's significance, Google provides the most popular answers to Jewish questions and a wiki-Judaism could soon represent a new type of religious denomination? Must our teachers and educational institutions serve, as Jonathan Woocher suggests, as a conservative force amid a sea of unrestrained individualized challenges to communal authority? While Woocher (see previous chapter) quite accurately assesses the concerns that emerge in the "age of Google," the development and proliferation of Web 2.0's infrastructure and software may already make some of those observations academic. Shouldn't we also ask whether trying to restrict or repress the individualized expressions that are helping define the age of Web 2.0—in venues such as MySpace and YouTube—is either possible or even desirable? In the minds of the champions of the information revolution, access, not merely to information, but also to the tools of production and authority, represents nothing less than the most current manifestation of freedom. When parents genetically screen embryos, are they playing God or exercising their God-given right to shape their own future? The cover of *New York* magazine from February 2007 calls the perception of freedom embraced by 21st century youth "the greatest generation gap since rock and roll."

When the landscape of Jewish life is shaped by mainstream American Jewish educators calling for conservatism, and social scientists like Cohen and Sheskin continue to measure Jewish identity almost exclusively by the yardsticks of intermarriage and affiliation, then Jewish leaders don't address the many and varied ways that 21st-century Jews are using today's cultural tools to express themselves and redefine what Judaism means for them. Cohen and others see the rejection of denominational models largely as an issue confronting Conservative Judaism, where the engaged and more educated segment of that movement feels increasingly uncomfortable in their synagogues. In a recent response Eisen, the new chancellor of the Jewish Theological Seminary, began an articulation of a clear Conservative outlook for the movement.

Cohen has also hypothesized that American Jewry can already be classified as bifurcated between the "inmarrieds" and the "intermarrieds." Yet Cohen and others ignore the fact that 21st-century adherents increasingly relate to their faith or other aspects of identity in individualized and often innovative terms. Using the many resources available, including the Internet, cable television, and even books, to chart an expression of Jewishness, they respond to their personal needs and world outlook regardless of what "organized Judaism" presents as normative. Anecdotally, a significant proportion of the "user community" posting on the many Jewish websites calls for Jewish unity rather than denominational and political factionalism.

Not surprisingly, unconventional forums allow increasing opportunities for communication and connection among Jews sharing attitudes and interests they feel are underrepresented in the main-stream Jewish establishment. While, statistically speaking, only a slim minority of young Jews cur-

rently participate in the social networks, blogs, and other venues for "user generated Judaism," the impact belies their numbers. As one colleague suggests, the historical legacy of the 1960s counterculture was not shaped by a majority, but rather by the active and engaged minority. We should not quickly dismiss the new attitudes toward Jewish community, Jewish identity and Jewish religion simply because most Jews do not yet share or even respect these innovative approaches. What is radical and revolutionary today may prove to be normative in the not-too-distant future.

E-KEHILLOT?

Jewish communal life faces numerous challenges in early 21st-century America. Judaism is a way of life in so many ways dependent on the physical presence of others to form communal institutions, so how does the phenomenon of online social networking and virtual community impact on Jewish notions of congregation or *kehillah*?

The changing nature of the individual's relationship to the collective combined with ongoing technological and economic developments demands a redefinition of the concept of community. In Jewish tradition the word community, *kehillah* in Hebrew, has deep significance and is frequently included in the title of institutions of organized Jewish involvement, such as JCCs, federations, and synagogues. But community today has new meanings with the parallel developments of globalization and virtual reality. Although contemporary trends might indicate a challenge to the conventional concept of community, the conclusions need not be pessimistic. In fact, the proliferation of new communication technologies and young Jews' facility with technology may contribute to communal strengthening, if Jewish leadership is willing to embrace new definitions. Even as people become more removed from one another physically, as survey data seem to show, the web of communication will bring people closer together, albeit in virtual space. For many Americans today an online social network does in fact represent a collection of very real relationships.

Whether an electronic *kehillah* can ever replicate the organized community of the past is to some extent irrelevant. The question is whether virtual communities can become real enough to serve the needs of Jews in the 21st century and beyond. Think back to the experimental models of the 20th century, especially the kibbutzim of all stripes as examples of innovation designed to establish new communities. With the plethora of online varieties of Jewishness in the marketplace already, 21st-century Jews are in the process of constructing their own innovative "real world" communities as well.

USER-GENERATED JEWISHNESS-ONLINE AND "REAL WORLD"

This phenomenon of user-generated Jewishness has been called, among other things, Jew-it-yourself, Jew 2.0, and Jewtube. The directions that end users take when they harness new media to serve their own Jewish needs run the entire spectrum of Jewish identification and engagement. Trying to obtain a comprehensive picture of what cyberJudaism and other innovative expressions of Jewishness look like is a monumental task, with the numbers of sites and postings expanding geometrically. Perhaps the clearest proof of the growing importance of the online community today is the number of federation websites that hope to occupy this space. (In April 2007, six of the top ten sites on a Google search for "online Jewish community" were the federations for Cleveland, Chicago, Philadelphia, Toronto, Denver, and Richmond.) In general, though, these websites represent access to information and not innovative content and probably do not appeal to a new generation that does not readily recognize either Jewish federations or synagogues as the central address for Jewish communal life.

WHAT IS OUT THERE

In both virtual and concrete space, 21st-century Jewish communities are taking on new directions and filling unconventional needs. A quick glance at a few will highlight the changing nature of this universe. But first, established Jewish social networks such as *jdate.com* are old news. Other examples, like the new havurot, while often innovative, still use well-established formats. (Please note that the

following websites and activities, while active when this article was first written, may no longer be operative, or the focus and content may have shifted over time.)

Now five years old, the magazine Zeek, available online for free, proclaims both "its independence and its expansive definition of Jewish cultural and spiritual life." What counts for "Jewish" in this environment is loosely and broadly defined. "We welcome the heretical, honor the sincere and are generally bored by in-jokes, apologetics and irony. We value independence, courage and thoughtfulness, and publish stories which say something new about that which is meaningful. Above all, we believe that an intelligent, articulate Jewish sensibility is one that speaks from its place of particularity in a far wider conversation—and true conversation requires both a fearlessness to create and an openness to change" (www.zeek.net/masthead—accessed May 30, 2007). An example of the type of people taking leadership roles with these groups includes British comedian Sacha Baron Cohen of Borat fame, who is on the advisory board.

There are sites devoted to free expression that emerge from the world of ultra-Orthodoxy, such as *thelockers.net*, a virtual community for yeshiva teens, whose self-description includes the following: "The Lockers has no agenda. It is not here to convince anyone to be observant, or to love Israel, or to *daven* every day. We will never tell you whether or not you should touch someone of the opposite sex, or whether or not it's cool to party. Not because we don't believe in observant Judaism (we do), but rather because we realize that you can't ever love anything by force." The issues raised in this environment—questions about faith, relationships, school, and self-esteem—are no different than in previous eras, but the forum is now public, and the users who post questions are turning not to a set rabbinic authority (of any denomination) but rather to the virtual community. For example, an April 2007 posting by a high school junior/senior in an all-girls Orthodox school posed the dilemma:

Okay, so here's my problem. I want to cover my hair when I'm married and I want to be shomer negiah now. But at the same time I don't want to be. I want to be able to make out with my bf, and i want to be able to go to the mall when I'm married without always weaing a hat (im not into the sheitel thing). I don't know what to do, on the one hand I am obligated to keep the Mitzvoth but on the other hand I feel that there are somethings that I am just not capable of doing. so yeah, there's my dilemna. Any thoughts? (syntax errors in original)

The "cyber-she'elah" does not demand a rabbinic response but allows the full community of users to contribute to the discussion.

A UK website, *Jewtastic.com*, calls itself "the home of Jewish pop culture covering music, TV, film, food, fashion and more." And the Jewishness of those who get to determine that culture is defined broadly. To help users navigate the site, they provide guidance, "Seen an acronym on Jewtastic when we reference someone? Don't have a clue what it means? Well, if it's an OJO, then it's someone Of Jewish Origin." How authentic is the Jewish culture that emerges from those pages? Perhaps my personal sensitivities reject the very notion, but these resources are clearly accessible and not only informing but accurately reflecting the opinions of a significant segment of the Jewish world.

On the blog *Yoyenta.com*, part of the Jmerica.com network, Yoyenta defines herself as a "clueless, winging-it-as-I-go Jew." In researching the difficulty in obtaining kosher-for-Passover Coca-Cola she provides the perfectly accurate explanation as to why certain foods known as *kitniyot*, including sodas made with corn syrup, are not technically forbidden, according to biblical and rabbinic law. Linking Ashkenazic Jewry's ban on legumes during Passover to the authority of Moses Isserles in 16th-century Poland, Yoyenta challenges its relevance for today's Jews. Questioning the need for continuing to avoid *kitniyot* is not revolutionary, but the fact that Yoyenta, an anonymous blogger, enjoys a forum that might impact Jewish practice reflects the new virtual community enabled by Web 2.0. Should young Jews be taught in school to avoid Yoyenta because she has no standing in the Jewish world? Should the next Jewish blogger be discouraged to comment on Jewish law and practice if he or she has no rabbinic ordination? Most likely, a generation being reared in this environment will not accept any curtailment of its freedom to both navigate the Internet and create the content therein.

Moishe House, funded by the Forest foundation (whose mission is fostering young leaders committed to social action based on the concept of Tikkun Olam), is a network of homes throughout North America and beyond that serves "as a hub for young adult Jewish community." The homes allow "eager, innovative young adults to live in and create their vision of an ideal Jewish communal space." While the concept resonates with echoes of early kibbutzim, the Moishe House communities have no preconceived vision of Jewish communal life while allowing the residents to develop their own unique outlook. As of February 2007 there were seven such homes in the United States and three elsewhere, serving not only as residences, but also as innovative communal centers. (Information available at www.theforestfoundation.net)

The website *Jewlicious.com* hosts a broad range of blogs and videos with Jewish content—the subtitle on the site reads "100% kosher" next to a girl sporting an "I (heart) Hashem." The site hosts postings including a heavy metal rendition of *Ha-Tikvah*, hassidic and kabbalistic commentary from "Rabbi Yonah," and an Israeli clip from YouTube that appears to be a party sponsored by *Playboy* in Israel. Jewlicious.com allows users to vote for their favorite Jewish postings in the following categories: Best Group Blog, Best Jewish Culture Blog, Best Pro–Israel Advocacy Blog, Best Slice of Life in Israel Blog, Best–Designed Blog, and Best Contribution/Blog That Made a Difference.

The blog site Jewschool.com describes itself as "an open revolt...Offering the latest and greatest from the bleeding edge of Jewish cultural and communal life." Among its many blogs the site includes a posting from "Y-Love" titled "Generation Moschiach" that states the following: "At the nexus of brand marketing and contemporary Torah Judaism you will find this blog [thisbabylon. net], where I ask the question, 'Who is Moshiach's target market?' Jewish tradition is replete with phrases regarding the generation to which Moshiach will come. The generation to experience the Messianic transition is to be '(brazen-) faced as a dog', is to 'thirst for the words of G-d', and so on. Today our classification systems are less likely to offer an animal analogy than they are to rely on psychographic, consumer research, or demographic data. I proffer that Web 2.0, social networking, and social marketing—buzzwords that are becoming the lifeblood of the new marketing arena—provide a uniquely pro–Messianic environment. So who is Moshiach destined for? The collaborators, the individualists, or the workaholics? The 'early adopters' or the 'echo boomers'?" In the ongoing quest to define 21st-century youth, Y-Love sees them as the Messianic generation.

CONCLUSIONS?

Can any of us reach significant conclusions regarding the nature of Jewish life and Jewish education in the future based on the ever-expanding possibilities for Jewish expression? Perhaps the most important response by educators to the engagement of Jewish youth with the interactive world of Web 2.0 is not to apply a corrective or "authentic" view of Judaism, but rather to become conversant with user-generated Judaism and become personally familiar with the media, digital or otherwise, that enables such extensive individual engagement. Should we give any weight to a possible "Long Tail" of Judaism that allows all of us to provide our "recommendations" for Jewish life, in the style of Amazon.com and Netflix? On the other hand, whether or not the "Jewishness" that flows from these sources corresponds to late-20th-century normative patterns pales in comparison to the very fact that 21st-century Jews, many of them unaffiliated and removed from serious discussions of Jewish life, some raised in interfaith or faith-less homes, now actively engage with some aspect of their Jewish identity. Even if their opinions, behaviors, and religious beliefs fail to conform to standards deemed acceptable by communal leadership, they are creating their own dialogue while attempting to participate in the larger communal discussion. In large measure the culture of Web 2.0 is merely the latest means, and perhaps the most powerful, of continuing the 3,000-year-old conversation that is Judaism.

IMPLICATIONS FOR EDUCATORS

Considering the broad ideological and religious spectrum that Jewish educators represent, detailed policy recommendations to respond to the technologically enabled social culture seem inappropriate. Of course, some institutions do attempt to control the flow of information available to

their students, but this approach hardly appears realistic. The following brief list suggests action steps Jewish educators may take on their own and collaboratively to respond to the constant changes in the 21st-century learning environment.

- Become familiar with the increasingly popular genres of technological and communal activity that currently engage children of all ages, including social networking, online gaming and usergenerated content. (You might have fun while learning a bit about your students.)
- Assess how students use technology as an information source. They will continue to Google and rely on Wikipedia, so the informed educator should understand in general terms both the mathematical and advertising basis for Google and other frequently used search engines and the communal "wisdom" that creates wikis of all sorts.
- Continually update your literacy in this space. The constant flow of information and rapidity of technological innovation means that year to year, if not more frequently, significant change will likely appear.
- Don't go it alone! Take advantage of the many resources that provide virtual community for Jewish educators to share their concerns, experiences, and suggestions for navigating this brave new world. And if you are uncomfortable with what you find, create your own and expand the conversation even further.

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SOME ADDITIONAL INTERESTING WEBSITES OF ONLINE USER-GENERATED JEWISH CONTENT:

http://www.jewcy.com

http://www.abigjewishblog.blogspot.com

http://jlearn20.blogspot.com

http://www.e-kehillah.org

http://www.opensourcejudaism.com/

The Place of Israel in North American Jewish Education: A View from Israel

Rachel Korazim

...Each bus queue can easily catch fire and turn into a stormy seminar, with total strangers arguing not only about strategy, economy and family, but about the essence of history, the importance of morality, theology, the connection between nation and God, and metaphysics. But even while disputing their moral viewpoint it doesn't stop them from elbowing their way to the head of the line.

Amos Oz

One evening I took a walk with my wife on the Tel Aviv beachfront. I noticed a board bearing the words "אָרָן בְּצִּילִ", "no savior," which translates in Modern Hebrew to "no lifeguard". But my archaic Hebrew imparted theological significance to the board: "Oy gevalt, there is no savior". Perhaps, in order to save a nation from exile, one must believe that there is no other savior. This is not what I believe. I believe that we are partners with the Almighty in Creation and in the process of Redemption.

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, Chief Rabbi of Britain

In May 2001 The Lainer Chair at Bar Ilan University held a seminar entitled Israel: Visions and Reality. The event brought together two thinkers: Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, Chief Rabbi of Great Britain, and Israeli writer Amos Oz. The debate focused on the Zionist idea and the Zionist dream. These two brief excerpts serve as the entrance point to our deeper understanding of Israel in the lives of North American Jews today. Both touch on the tension between the ideal or spiritual approach to Zion and the practicalities of everyday life in Israel.

This is the real challenge for the 21st-century Jew in North America. Whether we look at the gap between the ideal image of Israel and its ever-changing realities or at a critical reading of Israel education programs for North American Jewish audiences, we will deepen our understanding of the interconnectedness of the two countries and peoples.

IMAGES OF AN IDEALIZED ISRAEL

The land of longing and prayers, compounded by the romantic portrayal of its early years, often clashes with the less-than-perfect reality of recent years. In my professional life, working for the Jewish Agency—Education Department, I frequently visit North American Jewish communities. When asked to discuss Israeli education, I often choose to do so through the literary and artistic works of Israeli writers. In hundreds of meetings with thousands of educators, students, and lay leaders I reiterate the same message: Israel has many voices; it is complex, sometimes painful, at times not so pleasing. As a general rule these sessions involve a great deal of discussion and questions, which sometimes lead to angry words. This kind of encounter with Israel with many conflicting voices and shades is not easy. I often feel that my audiences would prefer it to be less complex. Perhaps it would be easier, if only it were possible, to draw a clear and unequivocal picture of a righteous, victorious,

delightful Israel where one is secure in the knowledge that it exists, shining with the glow of the brilliant Zionist enterprise.

My overall impression is one of sadness, even lamentation—a sense of a situation gone awry, a new generation who, unlike their parents and grandparents, is not connected to Israel. There used to be a time when things were different; the watershed events of the Holocaust followed by the birth of the state of Israel created a sense of living in miraculous times. The reunification of Jerusalem followed by the wonderful rescue at Entebbe continued a seemingly uninterrupted sequence of glory. Two generations were raised on these images. Israel, on the shores of the distant Mediterranean, was the answer to the prayers for Zion. It offered a safe haven for the persecuted and lived up to the dreams and expectations. North American Zionists could focus on clear causes and support them wholeheartedly. When my interlocutors address themselves to the other side of the equation, the youth and adults of today, they deplore the state of those too young to have witnessed the historical events that shaped bygone Israel. They are describing a void, a lack of content as compared to the past. This lacuna is always offered as the win-all explanation for the current situation, where there is no connection and very little interest in connecting to Israel.

Less attention is paid to the possibility that we may not be dealing with a void but rather with a different series of events, to some extent as powerful as the previous ones. The euphoria of the hope for peace was created by images: Palestinian kids offering olive branches to Israeli soldiers and handshakes of former enemies on the White House lawn. Unfortunately, these were swiftly followed by images of exploding human bombs, the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin and a bewildered, shattered Israeli society.

There has been little real effort to deal with the impact of the more recent images of Israel. Much more energy is invested in attempting to deal with the loss of the earlier idealized ones. This impression is further strengthened when I take a closer look at what has really transpired in Israel education in the last eighteen years (1990–2008).

For ten of these years the American Jewish educational community successfully invested tremendous energy and resources in building what we refer to as "The Israel Experience." From short-term trips for teens, families, and young adults to full-year programs at yeshivot and universities, a framework was created that placed Israel firmly at the heart of an educational process geared at strengthening Jewish identity by connecting to the land and its people. By so doing, an underlying message emerged very strongly: a real connection *to Israel* can happen only *in Israel*.¹

Planning, recruiting and delivering Israel experience programs could not happen in an ideological vacuum. A raison d'être was developed to frame the educational value of the trips. It was suggested that the trip may provide, for participants who were far removed from the Holocaust and the birth of the State of Israel, an exciting encounter with historical sites, breathtaking views of the desert and experiences that cement a sense of belonging to something greater than one's own family and community. However, it seems that in planning these voyages, Israel, the real place, was not necessarily the goal. The trips aimed at something else—American Jewish identity would be enriched, strengthened and made more meaningful by connecting to a carefully crafted series of experiences in Israel. Group or family rituals at the Kotel, on top of Massada or at Yad Vashem are an integral part of the trip, no less important than the accompanying text study sessions guided by experienced educators who assist in processing and meaning making of the tour (Grant 2001).

It may be important to note that many of the trips included a stop in Prague or Poland, reiterating the message that Israel has to be experienced in the context of the miraculous Holocaust-to-Redemption cycle.

These Israel Experience programs had an impact on Israel as well. Thousands of people—providers of services, tour guides, counselors, paramedics, guards, bus drivers and educators—encountered North American Jewish youth and their staff. As the programs developed, the need to take the participants out of the glass bubble of their air-conditioned buses and allow them to interact with Israeli youth fostered the creation of The Bronfman Mifgashim program. Mifgashim was not just another

This remark is not meant to diminish the importance of the trips, but it may point to a lesser investment in local, U.S. based Israel education programs in those years.

item on the tour. It demanded a clear articulation of how to create this intercultural encounter in which Israelis were equally engaged in learning and experiencing rather than merely serving as a resource for the Americans.

Further consequences followed from another Israeli insight. In the mid-90s Israeli political figures addressing the topic of Israel–Diaspora relations suggested that American Jewish funds might be better spent in giving American Jewish youth the gift of a trip to Israel. Yossi Beilin promoted this concept at the General Assembly of the Council of Jewish Federations (now the United Jewish Communities—UJC) in 1994 when he said, "I suggest that we make this a national project: to offer every young Jew in the world a free ticket to Israel and a variety of programs for a ten -day visit. After their visit I suggest we should maintain contact with each one of them. This way we can reach almost every Jewish youngster and can reduce the chances of losing them."

With the inception of Birthright Israel in 1998 as a partnership between major donors, Jewish federations and the Israeli government, we are presented with a well structured concept implying that even if one did not have a solid Jewish education as a child, a ten-day trip to Israel in early adulthood could still perform the miracle of creating a sense of belonging to the Jewish people.² At the beginning of 2007 more than 100,000 young adults have benefited from a Birthright Israel experience.

A second and equally powerful initiative, Partnership 2000, created during these years, linked dozens of North American Jewish communities to real places in Israel—not only mythical Jerusalem or fun-filled Tel Aviv, but Sderot, Beit Shemesh, and Hatzor. These partnership programs, based on direct involvement between North American Jewish communities and their Israeli counterparts, brought together educators and students in mutual visits to homes, schools and local places of interest. Fresh knowledge was gleaned at the cost, sometimes, of the loss of enchantment. Israelis became real, sometimes uncouth individuals, not necessarily always enthusiastic about life in Israel, and frequently ignorant of their own Jewish heritage.

A new language is in the process of being developed. There is a need to frame and articulate that which is happening: encounters with a land and its people that are meant to impact the life of Jewish communities in a distant land. *Peoplehood*, *Mifgash*, *and sites as texts* are but a few of the terms that have become codes to describe actions and meanings in this newly developing educational territory.

While well-meaning American and Israeli Jewish educators were busy creating these programs in Israel, the advent of the Internet bridged the information gap and made everyday Israel only two mouse clicks away.

Information about Israel is now abundant, readily accessible and unabridged.

Gone are the days of the exclusivity of well-edited texts with carefully selected sets of images. The information highways leave very little to the imagination.

It is not surprising that alongside these developments a need was felt to create an educational text that met the challenge of formulating a conceptual framework. In 1994, JESNA, in conjunction with the Bronfman Foundation, initiated the creation of the "Israel in Our Lives" series. This series was not the first attempt to create educational materials about the 'real' Israel.

Prior to "Israel in Our Lives" (1994), the organizing principle of most Israel education programs was either historical, from the beginning of modern Zionism to the second half of the 20th century, or geographical, from the Galil to the Negev. Rarely if ever did these programs connect to <u>H</u>umash or Navi classes: neither did they provide a framework for dealing with current events or understanding what all this information was supposed to mean to the student's life in America.

Thus one could wonder whether students realized that the land they were told about in Lekh Lekha, the place where the pioneers had danced hora and the city in which a bomb had exploded from the previous night's TV news program was one and the same place. "Israel in our Lives" presented a totally different text and context. It looked at the place of Israel in North American Jewish education and life from philosophical, existential and theological points of view. It addressed a large variety of Jewish educational frameworks, from early childhood to adult learners and from formal to informal. The suggestions for activities sprang from the philosophical framework. The units were

²The question of the lasting impact of Birthright Israel programs is still too early to evaluate. It will have to be studied in years to come.

written and evaluated by both Israelis and Americans, thus making yet another important and innovative statement. For the first time Israeli and North American educators collaborated on a joint curricular project.

The opening chapter of "Israel in Our Lives" by Eisen and Rosenak (1994) is, to this very day, one of the most important documents written in the field. Its uniqueness lies in its being one of the very few attempts to create an Israel education theoretical-pedagogical baseline, in contrast to most of the literature, that focuses on methodology and content rather then addressing the issue of the Why? and What For? of teaching Israel in North America.

Examining the role of Israel in North American Jewish educational frameworks today, one may hasten to interpret the changes as a direct result of the most recent events of the Intifada and Israel's often-criticized methods of dealing with terror. While this may well be the case, there may be other factors at work. The late 90s brought to Israel–Diaspora relations at least two additional texts. Neither was entirely new, yet both acquired added dimensions. With the growing numbers of non–Jews among the new immigrants from the F.S.U, discussions in Israel about the legalization of non–Orthodox conversions brought to the surface dissent and anger among all Jewish denominational circles in North America. Issues of state, religion and pluralism (or rather its absence) in Israel were openly and critically discussed.

Many could and did read this as a rejection or disregard of the State of Israel toward Reform and Conservative Judaism. At the same time Israel was moving in new socioeconomic directions. Free-market policies increased the gap and deepened the poverty of an ever-growing number of Israelis, particularly senior citizens and children. Needy Israel was brought to the forefront as donors were asked to support hungry children. During a visit to the United States in those years, I recall a huge poster that welcomed me in the entrance lobby of a large federation building. Under the picture of a two-year-old girl, the caption read: "She is not Reform, she is not Conservative—she is two and she is hungry". The message was clear. American Jews were called upon to disregard Israel's shortcomings and respond to its needs. A new image was now added to the ones we have previously considered—that of condescending acceptance of a poor relative.

The year 2000 was the best in living memory in terms of the number of North American Jews visiting Israel, and then came the second Intifada.

Horrific images of bombed buses, pubs and schools followed one another in rapid succession. Short-term programs in Israel came to an almost complete halt while the long-term programs continued with diminished numbers.

From my own perspective, dealing at the time with professional development programs in Israel for overseas Jewish educators, I saw an interesting phenomenon. Educators did not stop coming. Numbers remained steady, with some increase in the Orthodox sector. This became the subject of a research study conducted by JAFI's Education Department. The question was, Why did they continue to come? Since central agencies for Jewish education and other community organizations make educators' seminars happen, we looked into the reasons organizers brought educators to Israel. In other words, what did the organizers believe could better be achieved in terms of professional development for educators, during a ten- to twelve-day seminar in Israel, that could not be done at home?

In most cases the main objective was to give educators their own Jewish experience of Israel. Programs were not intended to provide educational skills or tools to deal with Israel-related issues. It was felt that the educators needed a firsthand experience of Israel. Another reason was the notion that for certain subjects, "the great teachers" were in Israel, and so they came to study with them. Third was the desire to express solidarity with Israel in difficult times. Finally, with the students not going, educators felt it was their obligation to visit and share their experiences.

Israel education programs developed in North America and in Israel in the years following the Intifada address similar needs. They deal with expressions of solidarity, supporting the Israeli economy and providing tools to deal with Hasbara (Israel advocacy) issues. Two examples out of many may illustrate this: "From Matzah to Matzav" (2002), an Internet site created by CAJE, provided a variety

of resources for educators who may need help in addressing the complexity of Israel-related issues now requiring attention. The second is the case of "Ambassador", a web-based distance learning course created as a joint project between Israel's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Jewish Agency's Contact Center. It is geared toward students on university campuses and provides four weeks of intensive training by Hasbara expert Neil Lazarus. An informative article about the course appeared in the *Jerusalem Post* on the eve of Shavuot 2002. By the following week over two hundred students had registered. The number grew to more than three thousand in just over two years. These two examples reflect both the need and the sense of urgency to deal with the immediate.

Not surprisingly, focusing on the urgent and the immediate did not eliminate the big questions of Israel education. On the contrary, when addressing a recent event the question is almost always: "How far back in history does one need to go in order to understand it?" Grappling for words when dealing with a questionable act of the Israeli government, people always tread the thin line between solidarity and critical commitment. This situation makes North American Jews re-examine their ability to identify with Israel, while Israel needs to redefine its expectations from North American Jews.

In 2003, almost a decade after "Israel in Our Lives", the North American Coalition for Israel Education (NACIE) was established to pilot new projects for expanding Israel education in North America. In 2006 NACIE was renamed *Makom*. It is a joint project of the UJC/Federation community of North America and The Jewish Agency for Israel. NACIE was started as an endeavor to create both organizational and philosophical infrastructures. During a retreat for leading philosophers, educators and lay leaders, a document was drawn up to reflect a new conceptual framework, one that would embrace the challenges and the complexity of relationships with Israel:

One opinion was that we ought to embrace the world of "high stakes"—all successful Jewish educational initiatives turned up the heat on the difficult issues. By working in this way, people are brought into the real conversation, rather than a synthetic one. An alternative perspective offered was that the challenge may be to think through and re-convey the tension between this real conception of Israel, and the notion of Israel as a tourist destination where Jews can live a normal and happy life. (Boyd & Moskovitz-Kalman2003)

Reading these lines, one may be reminded of a text we all carry in our hearts. After the first exile from Zion we were given the lines:

"On the rivers of Babylon, where we sat and wept as we remembered Zion."

These words coined the kind of longing to Zion that is rooted in suffering. Jerusalem's glory is remembered in contrast to exile's misery.

Many centuries later the poet Yehuda Halevi coined the phrase:

"My heart is in the east while I am at the end of the west."

This time it is beautiful Toledo that has to be abandoned for the sake of ruined Jerusalem.

None of these phrases, which have served Jews so well for centuries, captures the essence of the issues we are facing today. America is not a miserable exile, neither is Jerusalem in ruins. We are in search of a paradigm, one that will capture the heart and the imagination, one that will include commitment and critique and may find expression in both liturgy and honest dialogue.

What may the future hold for the two largest centers of Jewish life in the 21st century, as each is grappling with the meaning of the existence of the other for itself?

• We need a better understanding of the term so frequently used these days: *Jewish peoplehood*. It demands from American as well as Israeli Jews the ability to articulate a sense of belonging to a club much larger than the one delineated by one's state or congregation.

- We need to reopen the discussion about the place of Hebrew in North America. Israel, both the ideal and the real, is related to, prayed for and expressed in Ivrit. If we want to have a shared language of codes and meaning connected to our classical common heritage, we cannot afford to keep Hebrew at the level at which it is taught in North America these days.
- We will need to continue creating the conceptual framework for the role of Israel in North American Jewish life, not stopping before the contextual framework is filled with texts to suit the variety of possible approaches. Spiritual center? Homeland? The road not taken?
- We need to accept the uniqueness of the times we live in, not wishing back bygone days but rather embracing that which is in its full potential, recognizing the dynamic developments of a living organism that will keep calling on us to revisit, reframe and rearticulate an old connection, forever young and changing.

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The Jewish Message as Medium: Jewish Education in the Information Age

Joel Lurie Grishaver

HIS MASTER'S VOICE

When I was eleven or so I visited Shlomo Pincas' living room and saw his father's wondrous device that we could only dream of using; we weren't even allowed to touch it. This amazing technology was a recording phonograph, one that literally cut records. Shlomo's father, known as Mr. Pincas, was the bar mitzvah tutor at the large Conservative synagogue in the neighborhood. His machine allowed him to "cut records" of Torah and Haftarah portions. A year later my father borrowed a home tape recorder, one the size of a small suitcase, and my tutor, Mr. Horowitz, recorded the pieces I needed on a reel-to-reel tape for me. Only a few years later, when I was working as a bar mitzvah tutor, I got to make cassette recordings for my students.

In the article "Making Your School a Technology Friendly Place" in the Spring 2007 Jewish Education News, Terry Kaye informs us that the thing to do today is to post the bar mitzvah material on a website and attach an MP3 file. That reveals another progression. Mr. Pincas cut apart one (or perhaps two) Tikkunim a year (books containing the Torah portion with vowels and without vowels in Torah script), giving each student a printed version of the bar mitzvah material in a folder. My family, because Mr. Horowitz was not the standard tutor for my synagogue, bought a Tikkun that is still in my library. The other option was to go to the town library and pay a dollar a page for a white-on-black photocopy. Since then Xerox entered the business and lent its trade name to a technological process, just like iPod. Since that time generations of students have received CDs of their bar mitzvah portion, along with photocopies of all they have to learn, which were covered in endless pencil marks for pauses and became stained and rumpled from endless trips in backpacks, to mark the path to reach their majority. All this, we are told, is no longer "technology friendly."

Marshall McLuhan taught us that "the medium is the massage." (Yes, that playful pun was actually the title of his book.) He taught such simple lessons as "A typewriter is a means of transcribing thought, not expressing it" and the contradictory "Mass transportation is doomed to failure in North America because a person's car is the only place where he can be alone and think." The tool and the medium become a major part of the learning.

On one hand, a recording is a recording, a tool that allows a student to parrot and master the required portion. But the tool makes a difference. With Mr. Pincas' custom-made records there was no going back. One listened to the whole thing, because at that time "scratching" was not yet an art form. The tape recorder allowed students to stop, start and review, to learn the material as a series of smaller elements. When the bar/bat mitzvah moved to the iPod a different change took place: the ear buds. Up to now the recording media had essentially used speakers for reproduction. Headphones did exist, but the recordings were normatively played for everyone. Today listening has become a private experience. When I prepared to become bar mitzvah my whole family could chant the entire thing because they had been subjected to the endless repetitions. In an MP3-player world, students listen on their iPods, making preparation a private process.

One can trace the same progression in the printed text. Once families had to own "the book." It became a permanent part of the family library. Then, for convenience, books were cut apart (and

could be written on). Photocopying further privatized and desanctified the text. The requirement of Jewish law to safeguard or bury any copy of the divine name extends to all of the b'nai mitzvah folders that have ever existed. In our new, privatized world we have had to adapt the old ways to meet the new. God's name on a computer screen is not sacred; otherwise you would never be able to change the screen or turn it off if God's name came up. Several legal authorities have allowed the electronic destruction of a sacred name on our screens because it is no longer printed—it has been broken down to a series of dots, and dots can be erased.

"SPARKS" AND "IT"

Kabbalistic teaching suggests that the world is a combination of *nitzatzot* (sparks) and *klipot* (broken pieces of the containers that were supposed to hold the light that became the sparks). For a Kabbalist, *tikkun olam* (world repair) happens when individuals find, collect and share the sparks of divine light (wisdom). Martin Buber, a twentieth-century philosopher, took this model and recreated it as his classic *I and Thou*. He said that there are three kinds of relationships in the world. There is I–It, where I relate to things or relate to people as if they are things. There are I–Thou relationships, where people relate on a soul-to-soul basis. (Buber did write that people can have an I-Thou relationship with a tree, but that is another story.) Finally, Buber wrote that there is an I–THOU relationship in which, via our I–Thou relationships, we connect with God or whatever Greater Power we want to acknowledge. Buber's I–Thou is an expression of the *nitzatzot*. His I–It is another manifestation of *klipot*. And the gathering and sharing of sparks becomes the I–THOU relationship.

Let's ask a Kabbalistic, Buberian question: "What is idolatry?" In this framework it is actually easy to explain. It is mistaking a "piece of shell" for a "spark." It is thinking that an "It" is a "Thou." There is a great attempt in our society to deify technology, to believe that it is inherently redemptive. Simultaneously technology is seen as evil. Educators often blame their own technology gaps for their growing exile from their students. The simple truth is this: (1) Technology is a set of tools. (2) Tools shape the way we create and communicate. (3) Technology is not who we or our students are. Technology is an "it."

A simple story. I have a fine-motor coordination problem. Strange problem for a cartoonist, but the truth is that I basically draw and don't write my letters. When I was in seventh grade my parents gave me a great birthday present: a week at secretarial school to learn how to type. It had two benefits. First, I became a writer. That is something that could never have happened without the type-writer. By hand I could never get down on paper the things that were in my mind. My handwriting was too slow. The typewriter released the words. It made certain kinds of communication possible. It shaped the way I work. I began writing blank verse because of the carriage return, but the feelings, the words, the expression were all mine. The second benefit was spending a week surrounded by seventeen- to nineteen-year-old women. A perfect pre-bar mitzvah experience.

My process of writing changed with an electric typewriter and shifted again when I began word processing. The tool shapes the way I work, but it is not the work. "A typewriter is a means of transcribing thought, not expressing it."

COMMUNITY AS A SECOND LANGUAGE

As I was reflecting on this article I went to the graduation ceremony at the Los Angeles campus of the Hebrew Union College. There Deborah Tuttle, the student speaker, clarified my thoughts. She said:

...recent research by Steven Cohen and Arnold Eisen observes that the "first language" many Jews speak is one of profound individualism. Community, they say, has become a "second language". Our "mother tongue" has become a private one; we shop online, we dial in to conference calls, we have fewer business lunches and more home offices. In this brave new world we keep to ourselves. We don't know our neighbors, and our communities are too often virtual rather than actual. We

build individual realities where we control the environment, the content and the interactivity.

With this as our baseline, the question of learning a communal language seems as foreign as the grammatical structures of high-school Latin. How do we create and sustain courageous communities when much of the American Jewish population feels that their community connection is lost in translation?

Years ago Christopher Lasch wrote *The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations*. In it he says, "Experiences of inner emptiness, loneliness, and inauthenticity are by no means unreal or, for that matter, devoid of social content.... They arise from the warlike conditions that pervade American society, from the dangers and uncertainty that surround us, and from a loss of confidence in the future...now a desperate concern for personal survival, sometimes disguised as hedonism, engulfs (us)..."

If we are going to describe the millennial child, we know a few things. First come all the things we have said for a long time: under parental pressure, overscheduled, spending lots of time interacting with media and the like. Some of the things that are new are a de-emphasis of dating and a replacement with group experiences. We have "friends with benefits." and sex has become a "casual experience". There is a down-spiral in group membership (kids bowl alone, too) and an upturn in service learning (read: social action projects) because life is now a résumé rather than a résumé that reflects our life. All of this speaks to the truth that like their boomer grandparents, like their boomlet parents, this generation has made another turn toward narcissism and isolation. Or, in the words of Deborah Tuttle, "Community is now a second language."

Here is what we know. Technology did not create the isolation and alienation we sense in the privatization that seems evident in our students today. It may well serve and amplify that loneliness, but it is not its source. Its source is in fear and uncertainty, in a shrinking of hope, in the rise of hedonistic, self-protective reactions. Texting does not destroy communication. Rather, texting is a manifestation of less time to spend together. The electric guitar did not destroy the Grand Old Opry—rather, it took country music to a new level. Our students abandoned the news and focused on "surreality television" not out of laziness, not out of a collapse of intelligence, but as an act of survival.

Here are two simple truths: (1) Technology is not the enemy. (2) Technology is not the solution. E-mail has moved from instant communication to a glut of Viagra ads. Once Torah Aura ran exciting list-serves for middle school and high school kids. Then kids moved to IMs, texts, MySpace, and a lot of other communication formats that didn't get bogged down in the tedium of advertisements. It wasn't only because it was faster; it was also less invasive, more defensive. As more Jewish schools move to e-mail they will not only save paper, they will also escalate non-communication.

THE TWINKIE DEFENSE

I am doing a parenting session at a synagogue. In the midst of my talk a father stands up and says, "My eleven-year-old son has a busy week, he has school and sports, yada yada yada, he begs me to sleep in on Sunday, and I want to know why I should make him get up and go to Hebrew school." I have an epiphany, and I tell him: (1) Because Hebrew school is the only place he is going to learn how to heal death. (2) Because Hebrew school is the only place he is going to find his part in the redemption of the world. (3) Because Hebrew school is the one place where he is going to gain tools to turn himself into the best person he can be. And (4) because Hebrew school is the place he is going to find the connection between him, Israel, and the rest of the Jewish people. The father sits down and says "Thank you." Another father stands up and says, "If this school taught those things, my son would be here every single week." I have never forgotten that morning.

Here are some of the things I think I know.

• As Jewish educators we see our job as "Judification." We are not trying to inform our students about their Jewish skills or provide them with Jewish information. Instead we have taken the responsibility to create (or at least significantly deepen) their Jewish identification.

- We use three or four tools in order to do this. (1) We start early, because we want to build Jewish feelings. That is why preschool is so big on the agenda. (2) We try hard to make our schools either short or fun or both—because we accept the guilt that the previous generation of Jewish schools is responsible for the level of assimilation caused by the previous generation of students not feeling good about going to them. (3) We emphasize home and family not as process, but as the core context. We try to train our students to hold Shabbat, Passover, and Hanukkah at home, and we empower them to have privatized life-cycle rituals like Havdalah b'nai mitzvah ceremonies. And (4) we worship at the altar of memory rather than the altar of meaning. We operate on the assumption that if our students have enough photographs of enough positive Jewish moments, these good feelings will create the inertia needed to keep them moving in Jewish directions.
- The majority of our client families are consumers, but they have no brand loyalty. They will buy that which is most convenient, cheapest, or easiest. They are narcissists in the sense that Christopher Lasch described in *The Culture of Narcissism*. They are ruled by "The Sovereign Self" as described by Eisen and Cohen in *The Jew Within*. It is much easier and less long-lasting to help them feel good about being Jewish. Most important, recent studies show that it is completely possible to "feel positive about one's Jewish heritage" and to completely disengage one's self from the Jewish future. To succeed we should start in preschool building Jewish experiences and feelings, but if we don't make it to adulthood with a Judaism that is vocational—that offers positive contributions to Jewish life—little is gained. This next generation is not going to tell their children, "I went to Hebrew school and hated it, so you will go to Hebrew school and hate it." Instead it will be "Hebrew school wasn't worth my time, so we will not make you bother with it."
- We are in an era of post-ethnic chic. Judaism is now a Protestant religion. The bagel is now "The Great American Bagel." "You don't have to be Jewish to love Levy's rye bread." Holocaust guilt is not going to motivate late-bearing Boomers, Gen X-ers and Gen Y-ers to send their kids to Hebrew school. Neither is Grandma's Passover dinner. Judaism has got to make their lives richer, more meaningful. It has got to be vocational and productive, or it will drop away. We all know how to order Thai food, dim sum, tapas, sushi, Indian, Mexican, and the like. The deli is no longer our home, if we can even find one in our communities.

Here is my simple truth. Jewish education is going to fail unless (1) we instill a Judaism and a Jewish practice that is meaningful to adults; (2) we build a bridge from b'nai mitzvah observance to college and then another from college to adult Jewish life; (3) we make sure that our students have Jewish friends as well as Jewish memories. Unitarians can look at their old photos, too. This means that just like teachers writing objectives, we must focus on the final behaviors we are seeking before we plan our lessons and activities. Good memories alone are a meal made of Twinkies. The four questions—the ones about death, world repair, self-improvement and Jewish connection—are the ones we have to help our students answer. These are questions of meaning, not resolved by facts, not really touched by good memories. Anything less, however, is empty calories.

JUDAISM AS A MEDIUM

My rabbi, Mordechai Finley, likes to critique Hebrew schools as places that train docents for the Museum of Former Jewish Life. They are like guides in the orchestra section who can identify the oboe, the viola and the kettle drums but cannot tune or play any of them. I suspect the same is almost equally true of day schools. We teach about Judaism; we don't teach Judaism as a life process.

The solution part of this article is simple, perhaps naïve. The best possible future is when we begin to teach Judaism and do so in a Jewish way. Judaism is lot of things that transcend bar/bat mitzvah, that have a greater life impact than a *kametz katan*, that are more transformative than being able to dance *Ma Navu*. The truth is that Judaism is a lot of three things that should be familiar: God, Torah, and Israel. They are inner meaning, a sense of direction and a sense of connection. We make no impact until we get past learning about and get to learning how.

We need a Jewish education that makes a difference, that impacts the loneliness and alienation of millennial life. We need one that brings a sense of purpose and connection. That involves a lot more than knowing the festival *Kiddush*. To get there, how we teach makes a huge difference.

Every person you meet deeply desires to be treated with respect. If you listen carefully, you will hear their cry: "Please consider me an important person." "Don't embarrass or insult me." "Please listen to me when I speak."

Rabbi Yeruchem Levovitz, Da'at Hokhmah u'Mussar, vol. 3, p. 68

Jewish teaching begins with listening. It begins with respect and caring. It begins with a commitment to building community. Technology and our students' technological nature have a possibility of being useful in this endeavor, but electronics will not do the job for us. Tools never will. No overhead transparency ever made the impact of a teacher listening to students with great respect and appreciation. The truth is that Jewish life takes a community, and community starts with individual friendships. And luckily enough, Judaism believes in teaching through friendships.

A friend is someone you eat and drink with.

A friend is someone with whom you study Torah (God's word) and with whom you study Mishnah (ethics and laws).

A friend is someone who sleeps over or at whose house you can spend the night.

Friends teach each other secrets, the secrets of the Torah and secrets of the real world, too. (Avot d'Rabbi Natan)

The secret to successful Jewish teaching hasn't changed much, and technology makes little impact on the fact that pre-schoolers sometimes cry when their parents leave them for the first time; that fourteen-year-olds are angry at not being old enough; that third graders like to get the right answers. We teach students with human needs, and as we meet those needs we build connection and begin community. The truth is that rather than believing we can use technology to open the heart of the Jewish tradition, we can use the Jewish tradition to open our students' hearts and heal their brokenness in a way that technology never can.

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