

הידיעון

HaYidion

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CIVIL
discourse



IN THESE TIMES



PRIZMAH

Center for Jewish Day Schools

HaYidion

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IN THESE TIMES



ELLIOTT RABIN

May you live in interesting times. —apocryphal Chinese curse

In these times, this famous curse seems to be visited upon us. No matter where we live, the people we befriend or the shul we daven in (or not), we cannot help but be touched by the currents that have been running through our social and political worlds. The turbulence has swept over not only the United States but countries around the world as well. No one is an island, and no country or community is immune.

This issue of *HaYidion* departs from all of previous ones in its focus on contemporary matters. Usually, *HaYidion* explores questions of education, pedagogy and day school management that are more or less timeless, altered only by a new perspective or innovation every few years. This issue starts, instead, with the conversations all of us are having—at the water cooler, over the dinner table, during soccer games. Everywhere we've gone, day school leaders have told us that they are addressing these changes that are washing over us with a volume rarely ever seen before. It's time, they said, for *HaYidion* to wade in.

Schools are, by their very nature, lower c conservative institutions. They are places dedicated to passing on a society's knowledge, skills and outlook to the next generation. They work to preserve the values and traditions of the community in which they are embedded. Despite ringing bells, time in schools is measured over a long span of years, describing the arc of learning from pre-K to high school, and the impact of an education on alumni's lives. They aim to be always proactive, not reactive, to frame issues in a way that empowers students to act with intelligence, thoughtfulness, consideration.

In these times, such qualities are invaluable for helping people keep their heads above water. Schools provide the vital knowledge and perspective to help students place particular events in larger contexts, informed by guidance from timeless Jewish sources. Jewish schools in particular are attuned to the supreme value of community—of *kehillat hakodesh* and *keneset Yisrael*; they understand the long historical ride that our community has traveled together, the ways that it has often been buffeted from without and within. And they know the importance that our tradition holds of working with others, near and far, to achieve the collective good of peace and prosperity for all.

We begin with articles addressing challenges that can tear at the fabric of a school community, issues of power relations and maintaining civil discourse. **Freundel** frames the discussion by exploring contemporary challenges to civil discourse and offering strategies

for addressing them. **Cohen and Fridman** consider one prevalent rhetorical strategy that undermines constructive board conversations. **Groen** describes a school's campaign to embrace more families that cannot afford day school, and **Corvo** presents a lesson that enables students to map the diversity in the room. The next few articles go inside the classroom: **Cook and Kent** offer teachers guidance to puncture power dynamics and empower student voice; **Levy** gathers advice from teachers in managing conflicts among students; and **Rose** balances the opportunities and challenges of teachers serving as role models.

The next section focuses on the education of civics, of the larger systems and structures in our society. **Tweel and Bressman** propose three pillars of civic awareness that schools should teach. **Mann** reveals faculty PD to raise awareness of racial issues, and **Apter** discusses how he approaches these issues in the classroom. **Ben-David, Cook and Krieger** portray an administrative initiative to create support structures for student diversity. In an excerpt from her memoir, **Blumberg** recalls the experiences of her day school students with a homeless man whom they encountered near their school. **Ament and Lookstein**, in the first of three pieces that look at responses to the Parkland massacre, present their school's solution to the challenge of standing for values with a school community that has significant fissures. **Soskil** depicts how his students' encounter with Jewish students in Hungary gave them a new perspective on their own society.

The school spread presents programs and initiatives that schools have undertaken to address some of these contemporary issues. In the final section, authors examine issues of gender in day schools. **Feldblum** argues for increasing opportunities for women to rise to leadership positions. **Schwartz and Ladon** show how an Israeli boys' school uses talmudic texts to spark conversations about Jewish notions of masculinity. **Nadler** suggest ways to cultivate self-confidence and passion for STEAM among girls. **Ablin** proposes a harmful paradigm describing the way that boys are treated in our culture. The next two deal specifically with sexuality: **Herskowitz** surveys a schoolwide initiative for LGBTQ inclusion, and **Mirvis** (reprinted) offers a groundbreaking approach to the subject rooted in Jewish values.

By keeping to our mission, vision and tradition, may all Jewish schools give students the wisdom and strength to weather these times with dignity and civic-mindedness, and the disposition to work with others in service of the highest values of Judaism and our country.



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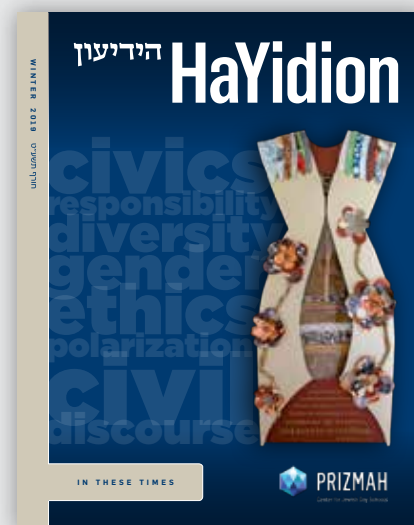
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MORDECHAI SOSKIL

This 5' tall piece, called "The Gardener," was one of two large works commissioned for the Endowment Project at The Weber School in Atlanta and was the joint work of a group of five students: Mollie Bowman, Liam Jones, Caroline Lee, Sophie Schneider, Frank Spira. It honors Felicia Penzell Weber, z"l, the school's founder. Felicia diligently planted, sowed and nurtured the garden of Jewish education. The teachers of the course that produced this work, Jewish Women in Modern America, are Sheila Miller and Barbara Rosenblit.

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FROM THE CEO

THE MIRACLE OF JEWISH DAY SCHOOLS



PAUL BERNSTEIN

This issue of *HaYidion* is being published between our two “miracle” holidays—Hanukkah and Purim. We insert the *Al Hanissim* (“on the miracles”) prayer into our liturgy on these two holidays, saying that we thank Hashem “for the miracles, the redemption, and the triumphant victories, and liberation which You have wrought for our fathers **in days of old, at this season.**” The ending phrase, *bayamim ha-hem, bazman ha-zeh*, literally “in those days, at this time,” makes me think that when we acknowledge the miracles of Hanukkah and Purim, we are also acknowledging the miracles that are with us here and now, at this time. I concede that this is not necessarily the most literal understanding of the idea, but allow me to be expansive in my belief in the miraculous.

Our shared endeavor—Jewish day schools—are places where miracles do take place every day. Perhaps not at the scale of the Maccabees or Mordechai and Esther, but there is no doubt that every day, in every day school throughout North America, the Jewish future is secured, child by child. What we need to overcome may have changed from those Hellenizing forces or threats of destruction. All day schools share a passion to bring Jewish miracles into their students’ lives. How our school leaders address any number of contemporary challenges, some of which are addressed in this issue, is just as critical to a vibrant and stable Jewish community for the next generation.

As our strategic plan for Jewish day schools highlights, Prizmah exists to support schools and communities to tackle the challenges on their path to success. We are here for the important conversations: enabling leaders and educators to engage with crucial challenges and share ideas; leveraging formal and informal networks so we may learn, grow and create together; helping our schools thrive.

The world that today’s kindergartners will face when they reach adulthood will be different in ways we can’t yet see. Our world is changing fast. Issues that appear to come out of the blue and seem existential today were likely not even imagined even a decade ago.

I recently read *Middle Britain* by Jonathan Coe, a contemporary novel charting the path to Brexit and its impact on British communities. The story not only reflects current political realities; it focuses in on the responses of individuals. We discover longstanding, deep divisions that surface even within families and among friends. After radical and rapid changes, in jobs, economies, demographics, relationships, beliefs and norms, suppressed differences not only cause conflict between different communities but literally rip families apart. The protagonists’ inability to communicate, to handle their differences,

and to grapple with those changes leads to a bleak picture for their communities and even their closest relationships.

Our Jewish day school community is diverse, our differences not particularly obscure. We may not even agree on what the most relevant challenges are; we certainly will interpret them differently and may reach contrasting conclusions. However, we can succeed in facing those issues if we are able to reflect on our past—*bayamim ha-hem*—and interrogate our current realities—*bazman ha-zeh*—with the benefit of what our history and texts teach us and an awareness of the miracles at stake in our common endeavor.

The greatest advances in Jewish life have historically come from rich debates, addressing diverse opinions, interpretations and world-views. We are blessed with a talmudic tradition that sets up the Jewish people to discuss, disagree, and resolve the trickiest issues. In the face of the challenges within and beyond the Jewish community today, we will be stronger and better able to respond to all we face if we engage actively in the discussions that matter to each of us as Jews and as educators, and can do so in a spirit of *kavod*, respect. We will not resolve all of the structural and religious differences that inform our opinions, neither may we necessarily even agree on which issues to tackle, the language we use, and sometimes the principles that guide us. Which discussion we each choose to participate in, with what beliefs, and the conclusions we reach will be guided by each *hashkafah*, the outlook that determines who we are and what guides our individual schools.

What I hope is special about discussions in Prizmah is that we can provide the space for important conversations that matter to us as Jewish educators and to the long-term success of our schools. We can talk and learn more thanks to our interactions with our close peers and those from other kinds of schools. We can each do so grounded in our beliefs, particular circumstances and practices. Our environment is one where we respect each other, and our differences. Not every subject or the approach to every subject is relevant to us individually, yet we are, I hope, able to join those difficult conversations that are important for us. When we do so, we gain from our peers, without pressure to compromise our differing beliefs. Our discourse will not be monolithic or imposed, much as our North American community is not homogeneous.

Like the rabbis of the Talmud whom our students study and strive to emulate, there are undoubtedly manifold opinions and interpretations. What matters is that we continue the important conversations.

FROM THE BOARD

B'YACHAD: TOGETHER TOWARD A VIBRANT JEWISH FUTURE



ANN PAVA,
CHAIR OF
PRIZMAH



SAM MOED,
CO-CHAIR OF THE
STRATEGIC PLAN

The starting point of the Prizmah strategic plan, titled *"B'Yachad, Together: Towards a Vibrant Future for Jewish Day Schools,"* is, in some ways, the same as its aspiration: Nothing is more important than putting day schools and the day school field on a solid trajectory over the coming decades.

All of us who worked on the plan, all of the hundreds of people who completed surveys, sat in interviews or contributed to focus groups, shared the same basic belief that Jewish day schools are a critical element for ensuring a thriving Jewish future. In the words of Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, "The Mesopotamians built ziggurats. The Egyptians built pyramids. The Greeks built the Parthenon. The Romans built the Colosseum. Jews built schools. That's why we're still here, still strong, and still young while all those super powers in their day have been consigned to history."

When Prizmah's board embarked on the planning process, we knew that our relatively new organization needed its own plan, a roadmap for making the impact for which we were formed. We also suspected that this plan would serve the day school field's needs in a deeply existential way.

By identifying and studying the many talents, resources, ideas and partnerships currently powering the diverse day school field, we came to three conclusions that informed the structure of the emerging plan:

- 1) There is incredible achievement and progress taking place in day schools. Dynamic leaders and innovative approaches are prevalent. At the same time, there are sobering needs across nearly every school and community.
- 2) The day school field is complicated and complex—geographically, financially, denominationally, pedagogically, communally. As a national organization, Prizmah must carefully develop broad solutions for different constituents and respect the individuality of each school and community.
- 3) The passion we feel for day schools is ubiquitous (if not universal). Across North America, we are part of a large community of inspiring day school advocates who believe in our core that day schools are essential for future Jewish identity, continuity and community.

As Mem Bernstein, Chair of The AVI CHAI Foundation, recently shared with a gathering of day school investors:

By being a national funder, I was being offered the opportunity of a lifetime. I was able to make a difference on a scale I could not have imagined. I was investing in the talents of thousands of educators and leaders instead of dozens, and I met thousands of people who, like me, believe in the power of their day schools to make all the difference.

With these insights, with the input from hundreds of individuals, and with the goal of forging a "north star" from which to steer Prizmah's work in the day school field, we launched our strategic plan, focusing on four priorities: deepening talent, catalyzing resources, accelerating innovation and networking to learn.

Over the coming months, Prizmah's alignment along these four areas will result in opportunities for individual leaders, schools and communities. As the strategic plan's title reads, B'Yachad—Together—we will collaboratively build our schools and our field toward a vibrant Jewish future.

Visit the Prizmah website at prizmah.org/who-we-are/prizmah-strategic-plan to read the full B'Yachad Strategic Plan.



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SHARON FREUNDEL

Kinder, Gentler Discourse

Years ago, I heard two fifth graders speaking to each other, clearly parroting their parents' views of the Israeli-Palestinian situation. One said in a dispassionate voice, "Don't you know what the Palestinians are doing to the Israelis?" and the other responded, equally emotionless, "Don't you know what the Israelis are doing to the Palestinians?" Their conversation unfolded into a reasoned discussion. Would such a civil conversation be possible in today's zeitgeist?

This question invites others. What does Judaism say about civil discourse, and what current issues are getting in the way? How can we tackle these issues so students learn to assert their own voices, while compassionately listening to opposing ones? How do we help them develop the ability to understand a position with which they vehemently disagree? Below, I offer sources and responses to these pressing questions.

ISSUE #1: CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY DEMONSTRATES WEAK CIVIL DISCOURSE SKILLS.

The Babylonian Talmud (BT) Hagigah 16a lays out the need for multiple opinions. The Mishnah says, "Hillel and Menahem did not differ. Menahem went out, Shammai entered." This demonstrates that a hevruta must offer different perspectives in order for people to hone their own ideas. Of course, too harsh a rhetoric between even close hevrutot can have disastrous results, as in the case of Rabbi Yochanan and Reish Lakish (Bava Metzia 84a). Rabbi Yochanan shepherded Reish Lakish in his journey from being a brigand to becoming a great scholar. During a dispute, Rabbi Yochanan invoked Reish Lakish's shady past, which upset Reish Lakish so much that he died. Subsequently, upon being unable to learn with Reish Lakish as his treasured hevruta partner, Rabbi Yochanan also died.

This story, probably apocryphal, illustrates potential negative effects from today's general lack of civil discourse. Our language and that

of our leaders has become coarse and vulgar, full of ad hominem attacks. This contributes to a lack of healthy communication, and it emboldens people to act on their worst inclinations, mirroring the trends in the larger society that is becoming coarser and crasser in speech.

ISSUE #2: PEOPLE TODAY OFTEN CONFUSE PHILOSOPHICAL DEBATES WITH MORAL ONES.

BT Eruvin 13b explains that for two and a half years Bet Shammai and Bet Hillel disputed the philosophical topic of whether or not it was best that people were created. Together, they ultimately decided it would have been better for the human race not to have been created. However, since humans do exist, they felt it was essential to examine our past deeds and future actions. Even with this debate raging for years, the Talmud tells us that each house married into families from the other house (BT Yevamot 14a). Although their debates carried numerous moral overtones, the discourse remained philosophical in nature with each side understanding the other, even when disagreeing with the conclusions.

Today there is often a perception that philosophical issues are the same as moral issues, resulting in the idea that someone who disagrees with us is ignorant, misinformed or worse, immoral. Shouldn't we get back to the place in which two people can disagree

on fundamental issues and still respect each other and their right to have differing perspectives?

ISSUE #3: SOCIETY'S CURRENT APPROACHES TO PERSUASION ARE IMBALANCED.

Society no longer follows Aristotle's measured approach to the art of persuasion. He encouraged an equal use of ethos, ethical appeal to convince an audience of the author's credibility or character; pathos, emotional appeal to persuade an audience by appealing to their emotions; and logos, appeal to logic to convince an audience by use of reason.

Pathos now takes the lead, followed closely by ethos. In many precincts, logos has completely fallen into disuse. We hear many arguments today based either on emotional appeals or on a cult of character following the proponent of a particular ideal. While using their hearts, people also need to use their heads to independently arrive at conclusions about their own beliefs and values.

ISSUE #4: FACTS ARE HARDER TO DISCERN THAN EVER BEFORE.

Rabbi Moses Feinstein, in his introduction to his books of responsa, *Igrot Moshe*, says that one of our tasks on earth is to approximate the truth as closely as we can, while understanding that only the Master of Truth can fully embrace it.

This is perhaps the thorniest issue. The proliferation of information in this technological age has made it harder to ascertain the truth and separate fact from fiction. Social media, software like Photoshop and commentary charading as news have blurred the lines between what is real and what is not, between what is objective and what is subjective. How can anyone conduct a discussion or a debate when there is not even agreement on the facts? Imagine how much more virulent today's Holocaust deniers would be if we had been able to digitally remaster photos in the early 20th century.

As educators we have the opportunity to shape the direction of future discourse and to teach students how to disagree kindly; utilize refined speech; remain above the moral fray; use analytical logical arguments in discussions; and even discern the truth. Following Ross Greene's ideas in *Lost at School*, we should not assume that children will automatically engender notions of positive discourse, and we should strive to teach every student explicitly the skills necessary for healthy and respectful debate.

The approaches below are not surprising or new; I offer them in the hope that we can revisit how to embody and teach them consistently.

Strategy #1: Do not tolerate any conversation that is less than polite and kind. Sometimes it is easier to look away and pretend we don't hear one student saying something nasty to another than to confront the perpetrator. However, the path of least resistance in this case may have negative long-term consequences for the speaker, the victim and those hearing the exchange. We cannot give students the impression these are acceptable ways to speak.

Equally as important, teachers need to model proper speech practices both at and out of school. Guided by the laws of Lashon Hara, we should never speak about another person in any setting in which we can be overheard and that we should be careful even about what we say in private. Steer clear of assigning "cute nicknames" to students or giving them epithets they do not appreciate, another rule governing Jewish life. No matter how angry a student or a colleague may make us, take one or more deep breaths before responding so as not to speak in a manner that anyone would find offensive. This directly reflects Maimonides' thought that one should never become angry, since our anger will control us rather than the opposite.

Strategy #2: Help students differentiate between philosophical and moral issues, and encourage them to explore the rationale behind differing opinions. We need to instill in ourselves and in students the innate sense that most people really do want to live good lives and truly wish the best for others. Often, what is characterized as a moral argument is simply two people prioritizing competing values, rather than making deep moral statements. For example, is the priority to accept anyone who wants to enter the United States, or is the priority to protect the sovereign borders of our country as part of the covenant with which each nation is created? Having one or the other priority does not necessarily make others "stupid" or "evil"; it makes them different and worthy conversation partners.

Of course, this does not obviate the idea that students should press for those values in which they believe and take action based on those values. It means that we must teach them to appreciate perspectives different from their own and work positively with all comers. At the same time, we need to instill the confidence in students that what they believe and the values they espouse have meaning, merit and worth; if they do not, then we, as teachers, are not doing our jobs.

One idea I tried in my classroom was having students debate, taking the side with which they disagreed. They needed to research reasons supporting both sides and convincingly argue against their own beliefs. This imbued them with an understanding that there are often legitimate arguments that may oppose their own views. As adults, we should intentionally internalize these approaches in order to transmit them to students authentically; children have a way of seeing right to an adult's core and discerning what is genuine and what is not.

Strategy #3: Deepen students' critical thinking and articulation skills. It is often said that as soon as someone loses their dispassion and objectivity in an argument, they have lost the argument. And we need to get away from the cult of personality that some teachers cultivate, and influence students through our passion rather than our personae. We want to enable them to become the best selves they can be rather than to become clones of us. Intellectual passion is different from emotional argumentation. One is our internal excitement about our thoughts and ideas; the other is appealing to feelings to the exclusion of thought and is often a more powerful yet shallower approach.

Strategy #4: Build into curricula and lesson plans how to sort fact from fiction.

There are ways to teach media literacy and help students develop the emotional intelligence they need to discern truth. We can teach them how to read critically and to recognize bias or sloppy and erroneous reporting. We can coach them to look closely at the material and "read between the lines" and assure that what they are looking at has been reliably sourced. We can open conversations with them about why the truth matters, leaning on relatable examples from their own lives. We can guide them in proper and positive conduct concerning posting and reposting on social media with the reminder that anything they post should be verifiably true and something they would be comfortable saying in person—and in front of adults. And consequently, we can help keep them from developing a sense of distrust in everything by using the approach of trust but verify.

Strategy #5: Teach students the art of civil discourse by example. This includes asserting personal meaning and exhibiting compassionate listening and acceptance, especially when those elements are at odds.

One of the most important and impactful ways to pass this on to children is to model it in our own lives. One occupational phenomenon of working with children is that we never really get to take off our "teacher hats." *That includes every single individual who comes into educational contact with a child.* Students learn by observation, which means even teachers' supposed "off" moments matter. As Robert Fulghum says, "Don't worry that children never listen to you; worry that they are always watching you." Teachers should think about the kind of *dugmah*, example, they want to be and remain mindful of the overt and covert messages they send to students, especially when "off-duty."

As educators we can change the current atmosphere by teaching and inspiring students to create a new and better one. Many important societal changes have evolved from a movement that was bottom up rather than top down. Not the least of these is the halakhic category of *minhagim* (customs), laws that begin and are propagated by the way people do things and, in some cases, have binding influence. We have the power to make civil discourse our *minhag*. Let's use it to create a kinder, gentler, more authentic way of being so that students can continue to have measured, respectful conversations. Maybe my fond memories of those two students can again be realized with students in dialogue today.

KATHY COHEN
NANETTE FRIDMAN

Keep Power and Influence in Check and Hearsay at Bay in the Boardroom

The most common abuse of power and influence on school boards is insidious because it is difficult to see and also likely happening right under your school board's nose. You have likely seen it a thousand times, and although it may have irritated you, you would be in the minority if you saw it as pernicious. It often happens at a board or committee meeting, taking the board chair and head of school by surprise. The meeting agenda is derailed, along with productive and constructive conversation. The culprit usually sounds like some version of this: "I have heard many people say..."

It sounds so innocuous, one more piece of data to create a fuller understanding of the issue at hand. But these reports amount to hearsay, not knowledge that is obtained through thoughtful and balanced data collection. They likely reflect the values and beliefs of the storyteller/trustee, and can influence a board's point of view.

Trustees almost certainly believe that they are acting in the best interests of the school when they do this. After all, most trustees join Jewish day school boards with the intention of helping the school they love, and they genuinely believe that the information they are sharing is crucial and useful. Their "data" may in fact prove influential, as undue weight can easily be given to hearsay, but sharing information in this way abuses trustee power and influence, and can significantly undermine the good work of a high-functioning board.

Trustees enjoy the power of helping a school determine strategy to achieve its goals, manage risk and secure sustainability. Trustees also enjoy the privilege of getting insider information and having a formal process by which the head of school and high-level administrators hear their views. When trustees present hearsay as evidence of their point of view, they may exert influence that can disproportionately impact strategy and policy.

"I have heard many people say..." can mean that trustees have heard from one person or five people. They may have prompted the conversation among friends. They may not be aware that alternate points of view exist or choose not to share them. Yet the stories they

share all too often become the focus of attention and simultaneously become the board narrative about what is happening at the school or how parents feel about an issue. Accordingly, this abuse of power and privilege is difficult to recognize in the moment, especially from a well-meaning trustee.

Ideally, these anecdotes should first be shared privately with the head of school and board chair so that they can investigate the issue and inform the board accordingly. If "I have heard many people say..." is shared with the board without prior notification to head and chair, the statements may not be qualified and balanced by other pertinent information. Unless the head and chair have had time to look into the issue, productive conversation at the board level will be hindered and progress delayed. Although the board chair and head of school can look into the issue after the meeting, there may now be damage to clean up.

Resorting to such hearsay can cause real harm. Consider a school that is struggling with enrollment, and a trustee who truly believes a highly visible teacher is driving families away from the school. The trustee may bring this to the attention of the board out of genuine love for the school and the desire to retain current families as well as attract new ones. On the one hand, the trustee may be thinking strategically in all the ways a school would hope for; contemplating how to showcase a school to attract students and eliminate or mitigate issues that might drive prospective families away is an appropriate issue for a school board to grapple with. But singling out an

employee at a board meeting is inappropriate and beyond the scope of a school board's power and privilege. Saying at a board meeting "I have heard many people say that Mr. X drives prospective families away" derails not only a board's fiscal and ethical responsibilities but also a board's capacity to have a constructive and high-level strategic conversation.

Boards can manage this common challenge. It takes education, vigilance and dedication to correcting counterproductive behavior. This is often difficult because few see this behavior as abusive, and most trustees are well-meaning. To address this issue effectively, we recommend school boards take the following steps:

Train your board. Board members should be challenged to think organizationally, understand the viewpoints of the many stakeholders in the system, and be mission-driven with the goal of always advancing the school.

Educate your board. Be clear that "I have heard many people say..." is a bad habit that boards can get into with only the best of intentions. Emphasize, however, that this is a very destructive process and an abuse of power and privilege. The board needs to know that the right process for addressing what they have heard from a few people is to share it with the head of school and board chair so that the matter can be looked into properly.

Adopt board norms. Board norms should include speaking only for oneself with "I" statements during board meetings. It is also critically important that trustees understand that outside of board meetings, all trustees speak on behalf of the board with one unified voice. This voice always represents the board's decisions and point of view as a single entity, not the conversations and debate that preceded the decision.

Let stakeholders have input. On major decisions, stakeholders on and off the board should be surveyed broadly and their input is considered. This should be a systematic process that is part of board strategy, not the work of a trustee going rogue and trying to collect various points of view at any given time. Every board should be charged with considering multiple points of view so that many perspectives are taken into account when making decisions. Board members will hear information outside of a formal inquiry if they have an "ear to the ground," which is often helpful information to the leadership of the school. Again, trustees should determine if passing on the information is warranted and if so, share the information directly with the board chair or head of school.

Be on the lookout for this behavior. It is easy to engage in and it is easy to miss "I have heard many people say..." when it happens. Tell your board that you are on a campaign both to notice and end this behavior.

Shut this behavior down firmly, immediately, consistently and with compassion. Old habits are hard to break; insert a gentle interruption of something like the following: "I'm sorry to call you out here because we all do this, so please know I am not picking on you. I am, however, using this moment to remind our board that we are trying to break the bad habit of saying 'I have heard many people say.' Let's be sure to talk about what you have heard offline after the meeting. In the meantime, let's direct our attention to the strategic concepts of what we are discussing and stay out of the weeds."

Having the boardroom as a platform comes with trustees having the responsibility to use their power and privilege judiciously and in the best interests of the school. Trustees must contribute responsibly and constructively. Each board member and board chair must be on guard to check, challenge and redirect this behavior through education, vigilance and partnership.



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JENNIFER GROEN

Balancing the Seesaw: Striving for Accessibility and Financial Sustainability Within Our Day Schools

When I was young, I loved playing outside on the seesaw. I'd scan the playground, searching for someone who might match my size so that we could get into a rhythm of play. As one of us went up, the other went down. My favorite thing was to try to balance the ends into a straight line. My partner and I would lock eyes, giggling as we tried to hold steady.

Today, in my role as the director of enrollment management and strategic initiatives at the Jack M. Barrack Hebrew Academy, a pluralistic, community secondary Jewish day school, I still spend much of my time trying to keep things in harmony, cradling extremes of a bell curve and balancing the general accessibility to the school with its financial health.

If we agree that Jewish day schools are in the business of educating Jewish children, how do we consider and accommodate various kinds of inequities, including families who have experienced trauma, are first-generation American or for whom Jewish education is a priority but is inaccessible? And if we want to exist a generation from now, how can we ensure that our schools will be financially viable?

For thousands of years, Jews have been dispersed throughout the globe. We still

speak different languages, cook with different spices and wear different clothing, yet we pray toward the same place and to the same God. Our beauty and strength as a people lie in our diversity, and our children become better people when they are exposed to different stories. Our obligation to teach our children is not relegated to zip code or bank account—and yet, without significant tuition dollars, our schools will cease to exist.

Our schools are diverse. There are those who don't understand how a group of Jews can reflect such rich diversity. They fail to see the depth, nuance and richness within our community. We have students with very high academic achievement and students who require more scaffolding. We have families who drive over an hour each way and families who walk to school; families who share one car and families who have cars for their nannies. We have students whose families are established



and well connected, and those who moved to this country with their children and are hopeful and vulnerable.

Jewish day schools today must face important issues honestly. Does every Jewish child deserve a Jewish day school education? is a very different question than, Can every Jewish family afford it? And if Jewish day schools reflect the people in the community, how can we be accessible to those people while maintaining the health of the school?

These are difficult times and questions, but we cannot evade them. They are not going away. By creating a model of greater financial sustainability through strategic and disciplined allocations of financial aid dollars, we can build schools that will have stronger infrastructure to support continued growth and diversity.

We want to provide our children with the best Jewish and general studies educational experience, including the finest teachers, programs and labs. We want them to be able to get involved in a variety of activities, including theater, music, debate, STEAM and athletics. We need security to keep them safe and facilities to inspire them. This is the product we want for our children. *Betzedek*, rightly so, but this package is as expensive as it is priceless.

From a macro level, we must clarify the community's commitment to the Jewish

future and assess if there are ways to leverage communal support. If we believe that Jewish day schools are educating future leaders and visionaries and instilling skills, passion and purpose to impact the greater Jewish community, the investment can't just be on the backs of parents. We have to hold the door open wide for our children.

The cost often prices out the most vulnerable among us, limiting the diversity of our population along social and economic lines, but there are actionable steps we can take to try to balance the seesaw.

1. GET CLARITY FROM SCHOOL LEADERSHIP.

The board of directors and head of school are responsible for the school's financial health. Understand your school's mission, vision and priorities. Identify what success looks like to your leadership and set goals accordingly. It's very difficult to meet conflicting goals. Is the end goal more students, regardless of the costs in tuition assistance dollars, or greater institutional stability and financial health? What are the objectives of your financial aid process? You can't have both as a primary goal.

This first step is often the most difficult, because we desperately want to achieve both simultaneously. Still, push for clarity. You

won't know if you are successful in the eyes of your school's leadership if you don't know the main objective.

Create and maintain a strategic model for tuition assistance that has clear guidelines and rationale so you can measure your achievement.

2. UNDERSTAND YOUR BUDGET.

Take the time to meet with your CFO to understand your school's budget. How much does tuition bring in? What are the fixed costs? What are the development goals? What percentage of your endowment is used in a fiscal year? Does your school carry debt, and is there a plan to reduce it? What percentage of students are on aid, and what is the average adjustment amount? What does financial health look like on paper?

Numbers tell a story and provide important insight. Tuition dollars typically make up the majority of the school's income budget, and the stories you represent must be connected to the spreadsheets. You are in a unique and important position to bring insights that can help to keep the school healthy, but only if you understand the budget well.

3. BE IN THE ROOM WHERE DECISIONS ARE MADE.

Do you attend board meetings? Finance committee meetings? Development committees? It's important to be part of these conversations. As enrollment management professionals, we have access to the admissions data and trends that are critical for decision making. Develop relationships with board committee members and establish trust so that your voice is valued. As enrollment management professionals, we know every parent in the school and can alert the institutional advancement team to prospective new donors and what they care about. Listen to what is being said by those in position of power, and contribute uniquely to the conversations so that your voice and the families you speak for are brought into the conversations.

4. DO YOUR RESEARCH. BE CREATIVE.

Look at the problem from the eyes of an anthropologist. Leading the Jewish future requires making difficult decisions that must be data-driven, constructivist and in line with our values. Look to identify the need and offer options that you've analyzed to people so that they can make informed decisions.

When our tuition assistance needs were growing higher than we could support, I was asked to look at the data for trends. Two major findings emerged. Many of our applicants came from families whose parents worked in the Jewish community and families whose parents immigrated and were raising first-generation Americans.

Our school already had a major donor who was earmarking his tzedakah toward Jewish communal professionals. With our data in hand, demonstrating the need, we met with him and were able to secure additional funding for this cohort.

We were committed to maintaining our diversity and wanted to be able to make tuition affordable for families raising first-generation Americans. We worried about people being able to complete an online form just as we recognized their challenges. Often they had little family support, struggled with English and had far less experience navigating American society. I took the data to our lay leadership, and we got to work. We connected with a group of philanthropists who could identify with their stories and struggles and held a parlor meeting. We asked two first-generation families to come to the meeting with their children who were about to graduate. These students rose to the greatest academic heights and had earned substantial scholarships to very prestigious universities. That night we raised more than \$400,000 of new money that would be earmarked for tuition assistance for these first-generation Americans, enhancing the worldviews and perspectives of all our students.

Enrollment management professionals hold an essential role in building the school culture and ensuring that the populations of our schools reflect the diversity of our Jewish community. The stakes are high. The students we enroll define the school we will become. And the future of Jewish day schools depends in large part on our work.

Balancing a seesaw indefinitely is an impossible task. Inevitably there will be ups and downs. However, tolerating the ebbs and flows of enrollment and finances, working toward a collective goal and keeping a long-term view will help maintain stability so that our schools will be secure for generations to come and we can continue to grow together.

TAKING DIFFERENT ROUTES

ALLISON CORVO

For many teachers, claims of fairness, particularly in middle grades, can be frustrating and challenging to manage. The phrase “That’s not fair!” haunted me when I first entered the classroom: How do I help students understand and navigate the emotions of their perceived injustices? For many teachers, claims of fairness, particularly in middle grades, can be frustrating and challenging to manage.

For the past few Septembers, I have started the school year with a map that shows the area around the school where I work as a seventh grade humanities teacher. In the center of the map is a heart that represents the location of the school. From their seats, students examine the map on the SmartBoard and think of which routes they take to school. I invite various students up to the board to draw onto the map their individual routes. Once a few students have done so, I ask students what they notice: Some people walk! Some people take the subway! Some people are dropped off!

“Where is everyone going?” I ask. “Everyone is going to school,” they reply.

“But why are we traveling different routes to get to school?”

“Because we’re all coming from different places!” someone inevitably answers.

“So everyone takes their own route to the same destination...” I let this idea settle into the classroom consciousness and then ask two additional questions: How can this map be a metaphor for learning about history, and how can this map be a metaphor for the learning in our classroom?

In the first weeks of school, when many seventh graders are struggling with negotiating a variety of learning issues, the idea that there are varied “routes” to our destinations becomes a metaphor for learning in the classroom, as well as a method of acknowledging diverging perspectives in history, literature and current events. The way we perceive our destination can depend on where we are traveling from. Similarly, the meaning of a civilization, leader or event can be influenced by who is telling the story and the point of view, or “route,” from which it is being told.

This metaphor has also helped facilitate conversations about fairness and equity in regard to learning style, preference and ability. Middle school students can have a strong sense of justice, so it is crucial to describe and acknowledge differentiation, scaffolding and alternative assessments in clear and caring ways. I have frequently explained that an assignment, grade, project or task might vary from student to student. In navigating these conversations, it has been helpful to remind students of this metaphor: “Fairness doesn’t always look exactly alike. You are traveling your own ‘route’ to this skill; another student is traveling their own path.” Equality and equity are not synonymous. We help our students develop empathy for themselves and one another when we give them tools to understand the dynamics and nuances of what is “fair” and “unfair.”

Student Feedback:

“I thought that the map metaphor was helpful. The map metaphor made me realize that we all learn differently, but it doesn’t mean that one way is good or bad. I felt like it helped me realize that I could learn in a lot of different ways.”

“The map metaphor was a helpful aid for me because it allowed me to realize that not everybody learns the same way, and I may be at a stage in the process where I am working on my own.”

“I think that it helps me feel that if I didn’t take the exact same route as another student did, it does not mean I am any smarter or not smarter than them and vice versa. I feel as though that it is very important to know that everyone has their own ways of learning.”

ALLISON COOK
ORIT KENT

Look Who's Talking: Teaching Power and Responsibility through Classroom Interactions

This school is not a democracy. How many of us have heard that line from a teacher or school administrator during our time as a student? Whether they use an authoritative, tongue-in-cheek or exasperated tone, adults in school find themselves driven to assert their authority from time to time by disabusing students of the notion that “majority rules” in school.

Schools are not democracies, but they are one of the most important *training grounds* for democracy. As powerful socialization mechanisms of society, schools fundamentally shape what students come to understand about power and responsibility. The hidden curriculum of school—the unwritten and unintended lessons students learn in school—often teaches kids that they have little power except through misbehavior, or, in some schools, that they have the power but little responsibility to others or their learning.

Lifelong lessons on the rules and skills of power have less to do with civics curricula and more to do with the lived relationships negotiated day in and day out among the elemental commonplaces of teaching and learning: the students, teachers, content and context. *How* students learn on a daily basis will shape the attitudes and skills students develop regarding their own power and responsibility vis-à-vis their peers, authority figures and their environment even more than *what* they learn in any particular content area.

If a school is serious about imparting messages and skills of power to build an engaged and responsible citizenry, it must look to its own patterns of pedagogy that deeply shape students’ interactions with others. How are students taught to interact with authority, one another and the content they are studying? Who has the

power—and the skill—in the classroom to shape an agenda, draw out or silence other people’s voices, ask questions, and support and challenge ideas? Do students learn to use their skills to make room for each other’s voices, to collaborate, compromise and build understanding together in their day-to-day learning, or are these activities left mainly to the authority of the teacher?

Pedagogy of Partnership, a Jewish method of teaching and learning, provides a framework through which we can uncover and reshape the hidden curriculum into intentional and life-giving lessons for responsibly engaging in a democratic society. Let’s take a look inside a couple of classrooms.

In a seventh grade classroom sits Jason, a pleasant but quiet young person who floats through his classes under the radar of his teacher and peers alike. Since he never speaks up without being called on, and since he is never a behavior problem, Jason draws no attention to himself. In full class lessons and discussions, no one knows what Jason may be thinking or if he has questions or ideas about the subject matter. Days can go by without Jason’s voice influencing the learning in the classroom.

In contrast to Jason, Liora yearns to express herself and enjoys the spotlight. Whenever possible, Liora will make a comment, ask a question, or fill fleeting classroom silences with a loud reference to an inside joke that will set her gang of friends into a fit of giggles while leaving others behind in confusion. Liora takes up a lot of time in the class, and the teacher often finds herself inadvertently negotiating with her to win back the classroom agenda.

While Jason and Liora embody very different classroom personalities, what they have in common is that they have not yet learned to take responsibility for their own power in their learning context. Jason has learned that his voice is not necessary for his own learning or that of his peers. Further, his peers have internalized this message; it would not occur to them to notice or care that Jason hasn’t participated, nor do they understand their own potential power to invite their friend’s ideas into the conversation. Liora, by contrast, has learned that her voice has the power to bring her attention from her teacher and her peers and that she likewise has the power to shape the class’ very content and flow. While her desire is not to sabotage the proceedings, she nevertheless wields her influence without much regard for the teacher, the subject matter, or the academic and social needs of her peers.

Jason and Liora’s teacher decides it is time to shift the dynamics of the classroom. She wants to do a better job of balancing the voices in the room and empowering all of her students to discover their voices and to take responsibility for their voices for the sake of everyone’s learning. The shift she wants to make will take real work and explicit teaching. It will require structuring the classroom discourse and teaching her students specific skills and language for fair and productive learning conversations.

Through the tools and frameworks of the Pedagogy of Partnership, the teacher begins to reduce the amount of time students vie for, or avoid, air-time on the big stage of the full group. She introduces the idea of havruta or paired learning as a training ground for students to practice talking and listening to one another with accountability and without an audience from peers or the constant presence of the authority of a teacher. Students are now in charge of making sure that their conversations are balanced, that each person shares their thinking and helps to draw out their partner’s.

Students take turns playing the role of “listener” and “articulator.” The teacher introduces specific phrases that she assigns all

students to use to draw out one another's voices and to deepen their understanding of the content. Students who may not be otherwise inclined learn to use phrases such as "Tell me more about what you mean." "I think X. What do you think?" "Can you say that in a different way, or give an example?" Students learn that "attentive silence" is not the absence of speech but an intentional move of listening and taking responsibility for evenly distributing power among learning partners. The teacher holds students accountable for understanding not only the content but also the ideas of their peers. As students practice in pairs, they begin to use these new ways of talking and interacting in their full group as well. The rules have changed, and Jason, Liora and their classmates have learned some new lessons.

Jason learns that he has much to contribute to the development of the ideas in the classroom. The new structures and rules of conversation give him a much easier way to plug in. He is surprised and pleased that his peers appreciate what he has to say, and in the new norms of the full-group discussion they often publicly credit him with an idea or question that caused them to understand the content differently. Now, even in the full class context, Jason is a frequent contributor; he feels more prepared to raise his hand, having had the opportunity to work through and try out his ideas in a more intimate context.

Liora learns that the currency for attracting attention has been converted. Whereas before she could dominate the classroom through performing for her peers, she now finds herself having fewer opportunities to draw on her old patterns because of the groupings and protocols the teacher has put in place. She is learning that she can get attention by listening well and not just by speaking, and while it felt annoying at first, she is surprised to discover that being paired with a classmate who does not share her inside jokes can be refreshing. The pressure to perform is off. Instead of taking every opportunity to use her voice to overpower the class, she recognizes that her participation is being moderated not only by the teacher but her peers, who call on one another to share ideas with consideration for who has and has not had a chance to speak. The seventh grade cohort is emerging with new skills and understanding about the power of individual voices and the responsibility they each have in building their learning environment.

Down the hall, fourth graders are also learning lessons about their own power. A student named Yoni sighs as he enters into his fourth grade Chumash class. He wishes he could just skip the class because he is so bad at it. He has been struggling academically and socially as long as he can remember and having to face these challenges with the added burden of a Hebrew language text feels too much to bear sometimes. His peers try to hide their eye-rolling when the teacher assigns him to their group, and he feels embarrassed about what little he has to contribute to "cracking the code" of the text or answering the questions on the worksheet. His classmates don't listen to him anyway, he thinks.

Over the next Chumash unit on the story of Yosef, Yoni notices that class begins to feel different. His teacher has taken some time out of the normal routines of working on the Hebrew text to introduce what she calls the partnership practice of "wondering" about the text. Now instead of just cracking the code and answering questions, his teacher enthusiastically prompts the students to share anything they notice about the text and invites the students to ask as many of their own questions as they want about it. They are practicing using prompts such as, "I notice..." and "I wonder..." Then, they start to think about the list of questions they have generated to

identify which questions are particularly "juicy" that the students—not the teacher—most want think about together.

Yoni notices a lot of things about the text, particularly because it takes him a long time to work through it. He also realizes he has a lot of questions about the story that his teacher and his classmates consider to be interesting. Together, with Yoni's help, the class picks a juicy question to pursue: Why didn't Yosef reveal his identity to his brothers right away?

Through havruta time and full-class discussions, the fourth graders work through their answers. Their teacher teaches them that any answer they suggest must be supported by evidence from the text, and students practice using the phrase "Where's the evidence?" to hold one another accountable to their textual partner. Yoni's high-performing classmates have ideas about why Yosef didn't immediately reveal himself to his brothers.

But Yoni sees something different in the text, something that the mefarshim (classical Jewish commentators) expound upon but that his classmates have not yet discovered. His classmates take notice of this idea and as a result, of Yoni too. Suddenly, the entire class begins rereading the text with Yoni's idea in mind, building textual support for this particular interpretation. Yoni's esteem rises in the eyes of his peers; it is clear to everyone that he has fundamentally influenced the class' learning. The teacher's decision to empower students to design a significant piece of the learning agenda with their own wondering and to give students the voice and tools to do this has shifted the power dynamics of the classroom—not only from teacher to students, but from high status students to lower status students. The students have learned new lessons about their own power and abilities and that of their peers.

School is not a democracy, but it is the place where students learn lessons of equal opportunity and the role they play in ensuring this opportunity for themselves and others. They learn lessons about the power of the individual voice to contribute or to detract from the common good and the need for listening as well as for speaking. It is the place where students practice having ideas and rehearse the give and take of negotiating with others to shape an agenda and execute it in collaboration. School is the place where *all* students—not just those with particular personalities or parents—can learn and practice an overt curriculum of skills and attitudes that equip them to engage with others not only in learning but also as responsible participants in our communities and our democracy.

What educators can do to distribute power and responsibility to all students:

- Give every student more time to talk, to talk with one another, and time without the authority figure of the teacher mediating and evaluating—but give them the tools to talk productively.
- Give students protocols and routines that give each individual student a time, role and opportunity to contribute and hold them accountable for their contributions.
- Make sure classroom discourse is not limited to the "big stage" of the full group. Students need time to practice without feeling like they are in front of a big audience.
- Teach students the words they can use with each other to explore, probe and refine ideas together productively.
- Make sure students get to ask and pursue some of their own questions and wonderings, not just the teacher's questions or the curriculum's, so that students understand that they too are responsible for the agenda and for using criteria for identifying and pursuing questions worthy of study.

“A DREAM CAN BE A DREAM COME TRUE, WITH JUST ONE SPARK, FROM ME AND YOU.”



DANIEL INFELD,
DIRECTOR OF CONFERENCE
AND CONVENINGS

Figment from *Journey Into Imagination* at Walt Disney World's EPCOT

Ever since I was a little kid, I wanted to work at Disney World. I was enamored by the Disney magic, and I wanted to learn how to create that magic for others (and, you know, I wanted to be able to get into the Magic Kingdom for free whenever I wanted). During my junior year of college, my dream came true when I was hired to be a Safari Guide at Disney's Animal Kingdom for a semester. Disney bills itself as “the place where dreams come true.” That motto was printed on the nametag I had waited 20 years to wear, and that responsibility was drilled into our heads as cast members.

Our theme for the 2019 Prizmah Conference is *Dare to Dream*. Throughout the conference experience, we want you to be inspired by your dreams. As educators and day school leaders, we often live our lives intensely focused on the day-to-day operational and curricular needs of our schools; we don't always remember the dreams that inspired us to pursue this career in the first place. By identifying and drawing inspiration from your dreams, we hope that your passion and vision will be replenished and strengthened.

However, we also want to give you the tools and the space to figure out how to make your dreams a reality. Reflecting on my Disney experience 10 years later, I am reminded that at Disney, dreams come true through relationships. As a cast member, I was taught to empathize with

my guests and to serve each person by connecting with them as an individual. By building these connections and encouraging guests to play in the story we were telling, we created an imaginary world together. As we've designed the Prizmah Conference over the last year, our team has continually come back to this idea that if we're going to make our dreams come true, we need to do it in relationship with each other. And so we've baked the idea of building connections into the core of the conference structure.

One of the key questions we've asked throughout the design process is how can participants learn *with each other* instead of being *learned at* by a presenter. This motivation has influenced the *shared experiences* (notice they're not called *keynotes* or *plenaries*) we'll participate in. Opening the conference is **George Couros**, who will help us to tap into the strengths of our learning community through participatory exercises and hands-on activities designed to get us into the innovator's mindset. We'll also learn about the dreams of storytellers, tradition makers and paradigm shifters during our **ELI Talks StorySlam**. We're especially thrilled to partner with the master design-thinking facilitators from **The Teachers Guild**, an initiative of IDEO and the Riverdale Country School, to engage with the questions that matter most to you and your schools.

Creating opportunities to learn together has also shaped the **175 sessions** you can choose from. Presenters are encouraged to use participatory learning modalities that allow you to connect not only with the content they're sharing but also with others in the session. And there will be abundant informal opportunities for learning and connection—whether in the **Prizmah DreamLab** (our participant playground and collaboration hub), over extended mealtimes or during a quick coffee break between sessions.

As we look toward the future of Jewish day schools, it's clear to me that each of our dreams will be amplified and strengthened by our empathic and trusting relationships. I hope that you will take advantage of our time together in March to rekindle an old connection, deepen a close relationship or reach out to someone you've never met before, because, as Figment reminds us, it just takes one little spark from me to you to make our dreams come true.

The 2019 Prizmah Conference is March 10-12 in Atlanta. Find out more information, plan your schedule, and register today at prizmah.org/prizmahconference.

Advice for Managing Challenging Classroom Conversations

Teachers and administrators at Jewish day schools want their students to be ethical and moral people who care about the world around them. They want them to be thoughtful, think deeply and take action. They want them to be motivated by their learning to make a difference. When cultivating these attributes, however, difficult conversations in the classroom are inevitable, and these difficult conversations can be challenging to manage and facilitate.

In speaking with teachers around the country, I've found that these challenges can largely be broken into three major categories: balancing conflicting values, giving students a safe space to share and the opportunity to explore the issues on their own, and determining the role of the teacher's opinion and view.

CHALLENGE #1: BALANCING CONFLICTING VALUES

Most often, what makes a conversation difficult is that at least two important values are in conflict, with no clear resolution. Abortion is a challenging topic, for example, because it pits the value of life against the value of choice. Gun control is controversial because it brings the value of the Second Amendment against communal safety. Tefilah in a non-denominational school is challenging because the value of community may go up against the value of Halachah. One teacher shared, "The problem is, everything is so important to these kids, and they don't see that most issues in life mean that a compromise has to be made somewhere or something has to be sacrificed in order to get to a resolution. They don't want to seem like bad people, and sometimes they can't see both sides, so it's really hard for them." None of these values is objectively more important than any other value, and yet we all prioritize these values when determining our stance on these and other issues. Following are some strategies for dealing with these conflicts.

Strategy 1: Identify and name the conflicting values.

Be transparent with your students and help them identify the competing values at play.

One teacher explained, "I always help students break down the issues before discussing them. It adds dimension to the conversation, and I find that it includes more of the students because even if they can't all speak to the specific topic, they can all relate to the values." By naming the conflicting values, it helps establish that there is no easy or correct answer to the conversation and helps students understand the complexities of the issue.

Strategy 2: Ensure the conversation stays about the values and topic and not the people in the class.

Difficult conversations can very easily turn into personal attacks. In order to avoid this, make clear that the conversation is about the values and the topics and not the specific people involved in the conversation. Do not allow David to be criticized in class for his personal views, for example. Instead, encourage students to analyze David's argument or to identify which values David is prioritizing. Then students can articulate a counterargument that does not insult David as a person.

Strategy 3: Accept lack of consensus (and work with your students to be okay with it too).

Concluding a conversation without determining the "right" answer is often challenging for students (and teachers), but with many conversations, a conclusion is just not possible. Establish in advance with students that exploring the topic, rather than finding one solution, is the purpose of engaging in the conversation. One teacher suggested, "My students and I have an understanding. At the end of a conversation like this, I'll say,

'We're done,' and then we all say, 'for today.' It helps them to understand that I know we didn't reach a conclusion, and we all know it will probably never happen, but it helps them to feel acknowledged. It also means I can set a time limit on the conversation without offending anyone."

CHALLENGE #2: GIVING STUDENTS A SAFE SPACE IN WHICH TO SHARE AND THE OPPORTUNITY TO EXPLORE ISSUES ON THEIR OWN

As student-centered learning becomes more prevalent in our classrooms, the role of the teacher is constantly shifting, from "sage on the stage" to "guide on the side." Still, the teacher plays an important role in setting up the environment of the classroom, facilitating the learning and being accountable for what happens. As one teacher said, "I want to give my students voice and ownership over the conversation, but, at the same time, if they walk out of my classroom thinking slavery is right, I haven't done my job." Strategies for this challenge include:

Strategy 1: Set communal norms.

At the beginning of the year when setting expectations with students, make sure to build in discussion about the kinds of conversations you will have in class and what the role of everyone in class is for those conversations. One teacher shared, "I set a 'Vegas rule,' so that what happens in our classroom stays in our classroom." Other teachers have set protocols for challenging conversations, including think/pair/share, or asking students to paraphrase what the last person said before

speaking, or asking students to spend half of the time advocating one stance and the other half of the time advocating the opposite. Taking time at the beginning of class to set communal norms and acquaint students with protocols will streamline difficult conversations in the future.

Strategy 2: Base the conversation on sources.

Rather than basing the conversation on what students have heard at home or in the hallways, consider sharing sources with the students to use as a springboard for challenging conversations. By providing sources to the students, teachers can control for misinformation and help involve students who are less familiar with the topics and/or less comfortable sharing their own opinions. Using sources as a basis also gives students the opportunity to hone their analysis skills. Alternatively, depending on the time allotted for the conversation, invite students to find their own sources to bring to the conversation.

Strategy 3: Determine your line.

No matter the conversation, it is still your classroom, so you should be the one setting

the boundaries and guidelines for the conversation, whether they are articulated to the students or just kept in mind. If organizing a protest is not an option for your school, steer the conversation away from that. If students start to express approval of slavery, ask probing questions to guide the conversation in a more appropriate direction. If the conversation isn't allowing for all voices to be heard in an authentic way, introduce a protocol to ensure that happens. As one teacher noted, "I am the one held accountable for what happens in my class, so, at the end of the day, I need to be okay with the conversation."

CHALLENGE #3: DETERMINING THE ROLE OF THE TEACHER'S OPINION AND VIEW

For many, this is the greatest challenge when managing a difficult conversation, and teachers have disparate opinions regarding this challenge. One teacher stated, "My opinions are irrelevant; I am merely a facilitator of student opinions." Another said, "I was hired to be a role model for the students, and the best way I can do that is to clearly articulate what I stand for and why."

Strategy 1: Be clear about the school's mission and values.

As a teacher, in most cases, your job is to promote the school's articulated mission and values. Ensure that you are familiar with any guiding documents the school uses (vision, motto, portrait of a graduate) and ask questions if their meaning is ambiguous. Ultimately, the role of the teacher is to promote and advance the school's mission, so this is an essential step.

Strategy 2: Consult with administration.

Different schools have different perceptions of the role of the teacher, so make sure you are clear about what the expectations are for you before engaging in any challenging conversation with your students. Is it okay with the administration if students know your perspective on authorship of the Torah or for whom you voted in the last election or your stance on the school's dress code? If your school prefers that you not share your views with students in this way, it impacts how you manage difficult conversations in the classroom, and you need to be aware of that.

Strategy 3: Consider your goals as a teacher.

Most teachers would say that their top goal in the classroom is to maximize student growth, but ideas vary as to how to accomplish that. Spend some time thinking about what you want for your students in the classroom and how these difficult conversations play a role. Do you aim to give your students a place to explore their questions? Do you want to help students find answers? Do you want to focus on the curriculum and minimize time spent on side conversations?

The way you manage difficult conversations in your classroom should be reflective of those goals. One teacher shared, "I have found that often when students ask me a question, they don't really want to know my opinion; they just want an opportunity to share their thinking, and my goal is to always give them that kind of opportunity, so whenever students ask me a question, I answer with, 'What do you think?' or 'Why are you asking?'"

Educator Todd Whitaker once said, "The best thing about being a teacher is that it matters. The hardest thing about being a teacher is that it matters every day." Ultimately, what is most important is for teachers to keep their students' best interests in mind and consider how to maximize their growth through these conversations.

Power and Ethics and the Textpeople of Jewish Education

Yuval Noah Harari and other futurists have predicted that, in the not too distant future, a majority of professions will disappear as their human workforce becomes superfluous, replaced by algorithms and Artificial Intelligence. Teachers are included in the list of those to disappear. I am here to tell you why I don't think he is right—at least not about the teachers.

THE POWER OF THE EDUCATOR AS ROLE MODEL

The educator conceptualized as an educational resource, similar to any other educational resource such as a textbook or artifact, is not a new idea. Plato and Aristotle recognized the power and impact of role models in forming moral consciousness and the influence of the teacher's person and personality to teach virtues (rather than skills or knowledge). The obscure and somewhat awkward story in the Talmud of Rabbi Akiva, who insists on learning the most intimate lessons from his teacher Rabbi Yehoshua in a firsthand way, by following him into the latrine and by hiding under his marital bed (Berachot 62a), illustrates that this is also something that Jewish educators have been cognizant of for millennia.

More recent educational thinkers have also considered and described the impact of teachers as persons on their students. Heschel coined the term *textpeople* to describe the role of a Jewish educator; textpeople are “teachers from whose very being students can learn no less than from the literary materials they bring into their classrooms.” Buber spoke of the teacher communicating directly with her “whole being” and in doing so affecting the “whole being” of the pupil, and Parker J. Palmer wrote about teaching with one's identity.

Sociologists see role modeling as critical to the process of socialization. Peter Berger frames this using the term “plausibility structures.” Belief systems are socially constructed

and socially maintained. The plausibility of a belief is dependent on the social support this belief receives. For children to become socialized into the values and beliefs of a parent community, they must be exposed to social networks (plausibility structures) of role models who share these beliefs. These are our schools and youth movements, our teachers and counselors.

Some argue that frameworks of informal Jewish education find it easier to play to the strengths of role modeling, with its more familiar and informal relationships between counselors and participants, where boundaries are often hazy and the life and real world of the educator is more accessible. Barry Chazan identifies the holistic educator as one of eight core characteristics of informal Jewish education, describing the counselor as a “total educational personality,” educating by words and deeds alike, embodying the values of the institution. Perhaps it is this informality and familiarity that is the foundation of the relationship between informal educator and the educated that makes some uneasy. But what is there to be uneasy about?

THE DANGERS OF THE EDUCATOR AS ROLE MODEL

To best provide for the potential impact inherent in role model education, the traditional boundaries that formal education place between teacher and student need to be blurred. The teacher needs to allow access to the real and private world they exist in outside of the classroom. This can

be through conversation in and outside the classroom during the school day, or arguably more effectively through extracurricular informal activities outside of the school day (although obviously always within the framework of the school as an institution). Examples of these include shabbatonim, field trips, educational travel, and afterschool clubs and sports programs. Informal settings such as these encourage the development of deeper relationships and expose students to the educator as a real person, where the values they may teach in the classroom are played out in real life.

But of course when boundaries are blurred, risks are heightened. What if teachers do not embody the values of the school in their private lives? What if they are in fact negative role models modeling behavior or values that contradict those of the school and its parent community? Perhaps more likely is flawed role modeling. While adults are more equipped to process the nuances and complexities of adult life, an adolescent exposed to a struggling or flawed role model could be negatively affected.

Role model education presents a series of challenges to educational institutions at an administrative level. Can a school justify basing its hiring policies on how closely a teacher's private lifestyle resembles the values and ethos of the school? Is it fair for the school to demand from its teachers that they carry the heavy burden of responsibility to model the values of the school in their private lives? Will this kind of pressure on the teacher lead to a feeling of suffocation, premature

burnout, and even scare away high-quality educators from their vocation?

There are also those who, in our postmodern age, are fundamentally uncomfortable with values-laden education. Can we really be certain of what truth and right is, they ask. Our education must allow room for all approaches and positions on the ethical and moral issues that face this generation. What right does a teacher have to present personal opinions as if they were absolute truth? Even if teachers allow room for other opinions and truths in their classroom, their own opinions will wield more weight and gravitas, because of the nature of the unbalanced teacher-student relationship. This is indoctrination, they would argue, and discourages students from engaging in independent thought. Those of this opinion would assert that educators must leave their own opinions, and especially their own politics, out of the classroom, and strive for pedagogic neutrality at all times.

The deepest concern with emphasizing and encouraging relationships based on role modeling is the potential for outright abuse of the power inherent in the teacher-student relationship. This could take the form of the abuse of sexual tensions in the relationship, or the influencing of the student to immoral ends. More common is the pedagogic danger

that the teacher rather than the student becomes the focus of the educational process.

LET OUR TEACHERS GO...

...and be themselves. And teach with themselves. Jewish education is not about skills and knowledge only. Jewish educators are in the business of socializing the next generation of Jews into Jewish society, Jewish culture and values, and into the Jewish people. They need to be allowed without fear to open their souls to their students to achieve these goals.

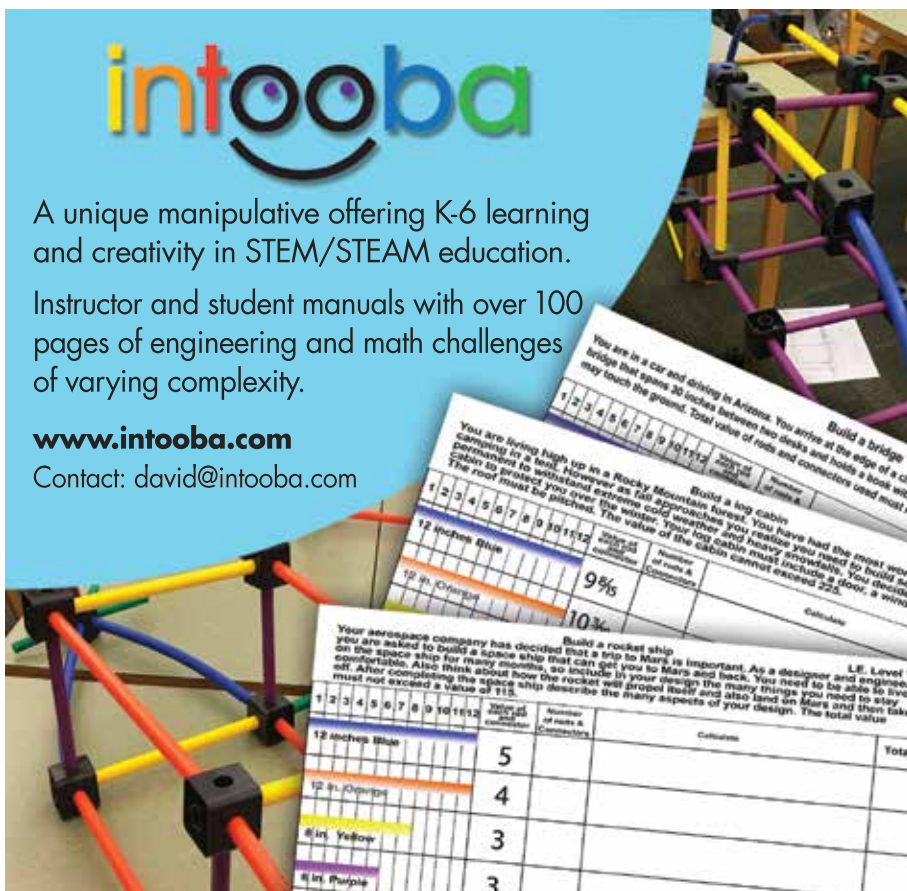
Informal relationships between teacher and student, within a transparent and clear framework of professionalism and ethically appropriate behavior, can and must be encouraged. This places an emphasis of responsibility on school administrations, who must supervise their staff carefully in this endeavor, offering advice and training, so that boundaries are clearly delineated. Yet even within these critical boundaries, there is tremendous room for the informal relationships necessary to encourage the process and desired outcomes of role modeling. The fears and risks explored above are no justification to take the heart and soul out of the teaching process.

School administrations not only have the right to orientate their hiring policies around the values and ethos of the school and parent community, but have a deep and vital responsibility to do so. This should help offset the risks of negative role modeling within the school framework. However, let's take a moment to consider the potentially positive impacts of struggling and flawed role models on our students. These role models are not to be avoided, because they are the human face of education. They can inspire in a way that a more perfect role model cannot, because they represent an attainable model for students to strive for and achieve, whereas a saintly role model may actually result in feelings of inadequacy and alienation. The whitewashing of spiritual leaders and models is an inherently un-Jewish approach. Just open the pages of our foundational texts to find the greatest leaders in Jewish history with all their flaws and mistakes front and center for us to consider.

Finally, and perhaps most contentiously, schools should encourage their teachers to share their perspectives, including their own personal philosophies of religion and Judaism, and even politics. There is no reason why skilled educators cannot create classroom environments in which there can be free and open exchange of ideas, providing multiple angles to any dilemma or topic, including their own opinions and approaches. If the core values of the teacher are at odds with the ethos of the school, then the larger issue of a flawed staff recruitment process is at fault.

Yuval Noah Harari thinks education is about knowledge and skills. In an age where we watch with astonishment as the children we teach access all the knowledge in the world via the browsers on their pocket-sized devices and master skills of an infinite array of activities via YouTube videos, it is understandable that he has concluded that the age of the human teacher is drawing to a close.

But we know that education is more than skills and knowledge. Education is about civilization and society, values and heart. Socialization cannot be achieved by Artificial Intelligence and algorithms. Educators, teaching the souls of their students, using their souls as models, touching the hearts and souls of young people, is what education is about. As long as there are societies that wish to transmit their heritage and values to the next generation, the educator-as-role model will be vital to the process of education.



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Build a bridge
You are in a car and driving in Arizona. You arrive at the edge of a cliff. The bridge spans 30 inches between two desks and has a load with a mass of 100g. The bridge must be 12 inches high. The total value of rods and connectors used must not exceed 225.

| 12 inch Blue | 12 inch Orange | 6 inch Yellow | 6 inch Purple |
|--------------|----------------|---------------|---------------|
| 5 | 4 | 3 | 3 |

Build a log cabin
You have had the most winter campers in a tent. However as fall approaches you realize you need to build a log cabin to protect you over the winter. Your log cabin must include a door, a window, and a chimney. The value of the cabin cannot exceed 225.

| 12 inch Blue | 12 inch Orange | 6 inch Yellow | 6 inch Purple |
|--------------|----------------|---------------|---------------|
| 5 | 4 | 3 | 3 |

Build a rocket ship
Your aerospace company has decided that a trip to Mars is important. As a designer and engineer you are asked to build a space ship that can get you to Mars and back. You need to be able to live comfortably for many months, so include in your design the many things you need to stay off. After completing the space ship describe the many aspects of your design. The total value must not exceed a value of 115.

| 12 inch Blue | 12 inch Orange | 6 inch Yellow | 6 inch Purple |
|--------------|----------------|---------------|---------------|
| 5 | 4 | 3 | 3 |

COMMENTARY

THE VIRTUES AND VICES OF MORALITY

Eliezer Sniderman

Dean of Jewish Studies, American Hebrew Academy, Greensboro, North Carolina:

Haidt's quote demonstrates why Jewish education is so important today. Western thought that grew out of the Enlightenment has socialized us to look for the "right answer." But the search for the "Holy Grail" is a foreign quest.

A talmudic lens finds questions to be much more interesting than answers. Jewish morality is not rooted in truth, it is rooted in action. Even something as holy as Shabbat is set aside in the case of mortal danger. The best way to remove binds and limitations is through the transcendence that comes about through focusing on the other.

Michelle Barton

Head of School, Shlenker School, Houston:

Social discourse is an important part of engaging in society, and a good *machloket* is central to Jewish culture. However, as this quote reminds us, "It is easy to forget that each team is composed of good people." Our job as educators is to serve as role models and emulate the behavior and Jewish values that we hope to see in our children. It is incumbent upon us to encourage our students to see the good in others and in themselves.

Unfortunately, sometimes during a passionate debate, we are quick to blindly judge the other person and question their morals if their viewpoint differs from our own. In Pirkei Avot 1:6 it is written, "Judge each person favorably." Jewish tradition teaches us to give one another the benefit of the doubt. When we judge another, we are taught to put their misdeeds on one side of the scale and their merits on the other side. If the scales end up balanced, then we should tip the scale toward the person's merits, allowing morality to neither "bind nor blind," but rather allowing our eyes to open toward a world of possibility.

Jason Feld

Head of School, Northwest Yeshiva High School, Mercer Island, Washington:

Anyone who has peeked on social media lately understands that there is a lot of truth to Haidt's point. The more pressing question is, Are we are fated to that truth as our reality? As Jewish educators, we are uniquely positioned to offer an alternative vision of morality.

How do we approach learning? Our Sages teach, "The Torah

has seventy faces." Like facets of a gem, each perspective is vital and an illuminating part of a whole. From the ideological teams (ahem) of Hillel and Shammai's academies, we internalize the value of "These and those are words of a living God," which require us to consider multiple truths and invite us to participate in timeless debates that foster dialogue and dissent.

In other words, Jewish education must counter the prevailing malaise of fracture and moral gamesmanship. Rather than "bind," our moral education must be designed to unify, and rather than "blind," our sacred work must continue to illuminate the way toward a better tomorrow.

Morality binds and blinds.

It binds us into ideological teams that fight each other as though the fate of the world depended on our side

winning each battle.

It blinds us to the fact that each team is composed of

good people who have something important to say.

Jonathan Haidt, *The Righteous Mind: Why Good People Are Divided by Politics and Religion*

Ruth Ashrafi

Judaic Studies Advisor, Gray Academy of Jewish Education, Winnipeg:

This is a very American statement. The winner takes all, and it often does not matter how s/he got there. There are different models though. In Holland, the government is always formed by a coalition of different political parties with a broad basis in society. In Canada, celebrating your ethnic and cultural heritage is encouraged. Good teachers have learned the most from their students, and everyone has learned something from a mistake. Morality should guard us against the danger of hubris.

THE 2018 DAY SCHOOL INVESTOR SUMMIT

*For Philanthropic
Change Agents*

*Our inaugural **Day School Investor Summit** was held in Miami on November 10-11, 2018. We are happy to share some photos of this event, where Jewish day school philanthropists from communities across North America gathered to connect with each other, share ideas, and explore possibilities for the future of our Jewish day schools.*



Brad and Robin Klatt, Alan Leifer



Lisa Popik Coll, Jeffrey K. Savit, Marcia Leifer, Paul Bernstein



Dr. Erica Brown



Ann Pava and Gail Norry



Alison Lebovits, Paula Gottesman, Joel Segal



Paul Bernstein, Yehuda Neuberger, Gail Norry, Jeremy Pava, Yossi Prager



Michael Bohnen, Lisa, Popik Coll, Rabbi Marc Baker, Harvey Freishtat



Manette and Louis Mayberg



Paul Bernstein



Marty Scheck, Ann Pava, Randi Zuckerberg, Gail Norry, Paul Bernstein



Mem Bernstein and Barry Finestone



Teaching Civics in the Age of Polarization

TAMARA MANN TWEEL
LINDSAY BRESSMAN

To teach civics today, educators must contend with forces outside the classroom, forces that threaten the viability of American democracy. We all know the troubling statistics: Only 20% of Americans trust the government, 40% of Americans believe that the other party is a threat to the nation's wellbeing, and a growing number of Americans believe that a "strong leader" who does not have to contend with elections might be better than our current democracy. We live in a country designed for self-governance, and yet less than half the population consistently votes. Only 23% of eighth graders demonstrated proficiency on a basic exam on the Constitution and branches of government. This is not the fault of students: social studies courses have been on decline since the 1990s.

These trends are compounded by the fact that students acquire the right to vote in the year they transition from high school to collegiate life. This period of transition, raises basic civic questions. Where should graduating seniors register to vote? What rituals or education help them understand the gifts and responsibilities of citizenship? What educational institution is responsible for ensuring that students have the knowledge and skills to inherit our country? The civics educational black hole has become so severe that students in Rhode Island are suing the state because, as *The New York Times* reported, their public school has failed to equip them with the skills to "function productively as civic participants" capable of voting, serving on a jury and understanding the nation's political and economic life." Our religious schools are hardly exempt from this challenge.

Over the last year, our program, Civic Spirit, has been working with schools rooted in faith traditions to learn how civic knowledge and sensibility can be amplified across their school community. Here is the good news. Most schools can contend with forces outside the confines of their classroom through the available infrastructure of their schools. To do so, schools must establish the responsibilities of citizenship as an articulated goal of secondary education.

Last summer, 26 lead educators and heads of schools from Jewish and Catholic schools came together at our Civic Spirit/Jack Miller Center Summer Institute to explore how to teach civic responsibility during a time when their students are either politically apathetic or passionately divided along partisan lines. The weeklong Institute did not shy away from the tensions of American history, the significant socioeconomic diversity of the different student populations, or the challenges and gifts of navigating civics in the context of religious obligation. Among moments of valuable tension, we had exceptional findings.

We came to understand the enormous value of the religious experience in civics education for ourselves as educators and for so many of our students. We connected over what we venerate and how we see divinity in each of our students. We learned that one of our master teachers venerates God, history and his US citizenship and that another reveres the divine sparks in her own students. Our religious connections were enhanced by our experience in America. Each of our families arrived in this country from somewhere else and claimed this land as our own. There was an understanding that we

shared both a rootedness in our traditions and a belief in the aspirations of a nation that had welcomed us and created the conditions for our flourishing.

We also learned from teachers what students need in order to assume the responsibilities of citizenship: a sense of belonging and emotional connection to their country. They need fluency in the history, logic and gifts of their political institution. And they need tangible experiences participating in local civic life. This led us to articulate three pillars of comprehensive civic education: Civic Belonging, Democratic Fluency and Civic Skills. These areas address three major challenges affecting civic life today: historically low levels of trust in American institutions and democratic norms; low levels of knowledge of the founding texts of American democracy; few if any opportunities for students to cultivate or practice the urgent civic skills needed to sustain American democracy in the 21st century.

These pillars are designed to help schools create opportunities that give students a yearning for political freedom, a sense of connection to their community and country, intellectual ownership over their inherited democratic tradition, and the civic skills and commitment needed to build a more perfect union. Importantly, there is no single template for every school. Rather, schools identify where they lie on the civic education spectrum, what unique elements build the school community, and how existing courses and programs can best support, integrate and amplify civic learning in their community.

Below are three brief stories from the past semester that illuminate how schools are developing these pillars.

CIVIC BELONGING: AN EMOTIONAL CONNECTION TO COMMUNITY IS A PREREQUISITE FOR CIVIC FAITH AND RESPONSIBILITY.

In a modern world where loneliness, isolation and institutional disaffection are rampant, an experience of belonging has grown rare. Teachers can no longer assume that students in their classrooms feel that they belong, in their neighborhoods or in their schools. It is in this arena that religious schools have a remarkable advantage. The majority of religious schools in America are high-trust environments where students experience communal belonging at home, in places of worship, in afterschool programs and even in camps. Religious



schools should not take this sentiment for granted, but rather should understand the unique gift a faith-based environment offers for students. To move from an experience of communal or religious belonging to civic belonging, religious schools need to deliberately extend their high-trust environment and make the case for moments of broader affiliation.

Audi Hecht, chair of the history department at Yeshiva University High School for Girls, has been working with a select group of students to create assemblies geared to giving the entire school community an opportunity to emotionally connect with the country. In preparation for a schoolwide Civic Arts Performance, the members of the Civic Spirit class participated in a series of workshops, sharing ideas, crafting original pieces, synthesizing musical elements, selecting iconic historical photographs, and collaboratively working under the guidance of a professional actor toward a collective artistic expression that they were proud to share with the school community. During the show, a student named Leah recalled the legacy of Seneca Falls:

**You fought long and hard
For a piece of paper that delegated your equality;
So let this, this ballot be a ballad to our strength.**

This captivating soliloquy gave these young women an opportunity to feel grateful for their citizenship while recognizing the political process that ensured it. Leah's words served to connect the young women in the audience to their country, their history and the urgent value of their participation.

In just three months, we have witnessed how civic belonging can be enhanced through school assemblies, public art projects and campaigns that reach across the student body. There are also wonderful opportunities for teachers in religious schools to bring concepts of civic belonging and obligation into Tanakh and theology classes.

DEMOCRATIC FLUENCY: KNOWLEDGE OF AMERICA'S INTELLECTUAL AND POLITICAL TRADITIONS PREPARES STUDENTS FOR A SELF-GOVERNING SOCIETY.

It is not enough for students to learn American history; they must also be able to understand the reasoning and thoughtful formation of the type of government they have inherited. Just as mathematical proficiency and Judaic literacy are goals of a day school curriculum, democratic fluency represents deep and accurate knowledge of how American democracy developed and how federal and local

government works today. We argue that such fluency can develop when educators weave primary sources, historical milestones, the legacy of the three branches and basic political theory into humanities courses. This content is particularly helpful when political topics and heated conversations emerge in the classroom. Democratic fluency is also enhanced through an analysis of comparative politics and case studies that examine various forms of social governance.

This pillar was expertly highlighted in Murray Sragow's U.S. history class at Yeshiva University High School for Boys. While teaching the "The Mayflower Compact," the original governing document of Plymouth Colony written in 1620, Murray called attention to one particular phrase that speaks to a guiding principle of American democracy: the consent of the governed. He then asked his students a series of reflective questions: Is this how our federal and local governments still operate today? What other factors, such as campaign financing and the changing field of advertising, challenge this notion and impact the electoral and political system? As the governed, what should you want or expect the government to do? The teacher thoughtfully linked the words of a 300-year-old primary source to the serious questions of contemporary democracy that his students will face as they prepare to take on the responsibilities of citizenship.

Democratic Fluency can be taught inside history, social studies, and English or literature classes. We have also found that in-school government and afterschool clubs offer students an opportunity to apply and deepen their knowledge of governmental and electoral systems.

CIVIC SKILLS: COMPETENCY IN CIVIL DISCOURSE, MEDIA LITERACY, AND COLLABORATIVE PROBLEM-SOLVING TEACHES COLLABORATION AND ENGAGEMENT.

"Democracy," wrote the American philosopher John Dewey, "has to be born anew every generation, and education is its midwife." Civic skills for democratic life will never remain stagnant. Each generation must discover and decide what skills are urgent and how they will be taught. Three skills are particularly vital today: civil discourse, media literacy and civic problem-solving. The classroom provides an opportunity to teach, practice and strengthen these skills. At De La Salle Academy, an independent middle school started by Lasallian Christian Brothers in Manhattan, where 90% of students are first generation, social studies teacher Wilson Martinez has intentionally integrated civil discourse into his sixth grade core class.

During a unit on discourse techniques, Wilson asked his class, "What are strategies you can use when stating your perspective on a controversial issue to try to persuade the other side?" "Humor," one student suggested. "Pausing," said another. "Tell a story," a young woman proclaimed. "Exactamente." "Now," Wilson looked at the students quietly, "What is the difference between dialogue and debate? What do you do differently with your voice when you're in dialogue?" The students thought. One boy with thick black glasses concluded the class, "You lower the tone of your voice. You want the other person to feel you are here to listen."

To effectively ensure that our students possess these key civic skills, all of which will help them thrive in college and beyond, middle and high school teachers should receive quality professional development training and have access to engaging resources and lesson plans. Fortunately, there are excellent organizations throughout the United States with core expertise in each of the competency areas. Well-trained teachers can integrate these skills in a wide variety of existing courses and clubs, from an elective psychology class to a debate club and even a school newspaper.

Religious day schools, which prioritize values, communal obligation and the gifts of inheriting a tradition, are well situated to incorporate the pillars of civic education into the current structure of the school. However, one critical component of comprehensive civic education necessitates that school communities move outside their four walls: the chance to meaningfully interact with other students who come from distinctly different backgrounds.

The American public square requires that people of different faiths, socioeconomic status and backgrounds come together to solve significant issues, be it public transit, housing concerns or access to health care. Students need to practice listening and communicating with different types of individuals as equal partners in civic life. It is for this reason that we created Civic Spirit Day, a daylong event dedicated to collaborative problem solving. More than 150 students from our partner schools, representing immense diversity across religious, economic, racial, ethnic, political and geographic differences, will convene on May 1, 2019, to design solutions to a selected civic issue. This year's topic will focus on National Service. Outside of Civic Spirit Day, this program will provide a model for schools to give students ways to work on local civic challenges with diverse cohorts.

In 1853, Herman Melville penned the tale of a staunchly apathetic scrivener named Bartleby. We read Melville's short story at our Summer Institute as a way to anchor conversation in an emotional connection to text. Written in a decade consumed by the question of slavery's expansion, "Bartleby the Scrivener" offers us a way to discuss the challenge of responsibility. What are the limits of our responsibility? How do we reach out to students consumed by loneliness, inaction or even anger? How do we give our students all that they need, emotionally and intellectually, to take up the full challenges of civic life that await them?

The famous phrase of Bartleby, "I would prefer not to," has stayed with our team as we encounter educators, principals, heads of schools and students who always give us the opposite refrain: We must. It is time to ensure that all of our students are prepared to inherit and invest in a democracy that has always and will always require their full participation.

To Read More

Research on Youth and Civic Engagement
tischcollege.tufts.edu/research/circle or civicyouth.org
Political Partisanship and Faith in Democracy
people-press.org
Civic Education Opportunities in Religious Day Schools
civicspirit.org



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CULTIVATING A SERVICE LEADERSHIP MINDSET

HOW DO YOU CREATE A SENSE THAT THE BOARD SERVES THE SCHOOL INSTEAD OF ACTING FROM A SENSE THAT IT HAS POWER OVER THE SCHOOL?

Rich Levin

Chairperson, Committee on Trustees, Torah Day School, Atlanta

In many organizations, a cultural change is required in the board leadership to achieve a more effective cultivation of leadership. The following process gives boards a chance to create leadership that can meet and exceed goals.

Cultivation of a leader begins by discovering that a person has an interest. But that interest is not yet important enough for the person to step forward and risk time, energy and self-esteem for it. (Other reasons the potential leaders don't step forward: They don't have confidence they will be heard. They don't believe the organization is capable of change.)

After identifying potential leaders, start by asking them questions, watching if there is some topic or facet of the organization, some perceived need by the potential leader that sparks passion. Then feed their interest with more communication and interactions related to the interest, asking for thoughts, opinions and advice.

If the person is engaged, follow up with an invitation to talk to others who share an interest in the issue. Ideally, those conversations begin to include more people who are in leadership positions in the organization. In these conversations, you show respect and listen for the specific interests that would make the person valuable on a committee.

Then, discuss the person's interest with a committee chairperson. If there is an opening, make the formal connection. Those that actively participate and contribute value are offered a position on a committee, giving them the opportunity to grow into higher positions.

When an entire organization is of the mindset to identify, groom, nurture and promote talented leaders; when there is a conversation of developing future leadership in this way, an organization has unlimited potential.

Jeff Bicher

Chair, Board of Trustees, Hebrew Foundation School, Montreal

We start by ensuring that board members are accountable to the organization and are aware of their responsibilities. The board education highlights the individual duties that board members have—care, loyalty and obedience, among others. At the first meeting of the year, our head and I present our calendar of meetings, including a schedule of committee reports, discussions and items that will require resolutions. Discussions on items may require votes at subsequent meetings to give members time to reflect.

Sometimes board members get frustrated because as temporary owners we expect specific follow-through from professionals, and in some cases believe we can do it better. In such cases, the board needs to be reoriented to focus on adding value to the implementation strategy as opposed to directing our professionals to carry out specific tasks.

My role as board chair is often about balance and moderation. With respect to management, I help our lead professionals appreciate the value in and benefit of volunteer leadership while supporting them as they navigate the relationships with a board filled by their students' parents. From a trustee or governing body perspective, I seek to temper our board members' desire to micromanage the goings-on of the school, reminding them to make decisions for the benefit of the organization, not one individual or family.

When things do not go well, complaints come to board members. We impress upon our board members to reach out to management and share the criticism but also to suggest to the complaining parents that they engage with management as well. We often qualify our statements by invoking the hat with which one is speaking (parent or board). Lastly, members of the board have ample time to share their thoughts about how items are being addressed with and without management present.

Kelli Brogan

President, Board of Trustees, Shalom School, Sacramento

It is important that lay leaders are empowered in some way while they are on the board. At our school, we help cultivate a service leadership mindset by making sure our committees do much of the hard work. They do the research, then present their information to the board to be voted on. We usually have a current board member chair the committee; it is his or her responsibility to find committee members, with some direction from the governance and trustees committee. Ideally, this is our interview process for new trustees.

There was a time when our board was very much involved with the daily operations of the school. Thankfully, we realized that we needed help. We looked to Prizmah (then RAVSAK) to get us headed in the right direction. We assigned a board mentor, who helped our board move in the right direction. Now we always have an outside facilitator run our board retreats. This last year we used Board Source to figure out where the board needed the most work. We try and work on our weaknesses, because if we can identify them, we become a stronger board and we can work harder to strategically advocate for our school.

During my tenure as president, I have tried to make sure that our meetings are meaningful and substantive. I have looked to outside sources to find information on running better board meetings and read about what other Jewish day schools are doing to increase their enrollment. I have re-worked our agenda, so that we are not just giving reports, but have "New Business," "Old Business" and some reporting. We also try to have some board education once or twice a year led by a board member.



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Professional Development towards Becoming an Anti-Racist Jewish Day School

BENJAMIN MANN

ASKING RACE QUESTIONS

“Where are the Jews of color?” I asked myself as I sat in an auditorium full of Jewish educators. The daylong conference was focused on civics education in Jewish educational settings and drew hundreds of Jewish educators from throughout the New York area. And as I looked around, I noticed we were mostly, almost entirely, white.

I thought about how there was probably more cultural diversity in the group than I could see, perhaps Jews from Sephardic or Mizrahi backgrounds, Jews by choice, or people with a variety of Jewish journeys that brought them to the conference. We know that the Jewish

community is racially diverse. According to the American Jewish Population Project of the Steinhardt Social Research at Brandeis University, at least 11 percent of Jews in the United States are people of color. But if there was racial diversity in the room, I could not see it.

The first conference speaker introduced the topic by describing America as a place where diversity and pluralism are elevated as intrinsic values and aspirations. As I listened, I asked myself, “What would Native Americans think of that characterization? Or African Americans?” And then, in a moment of introspection, I realized that I was asking questions I never asked before and seeing things in new ways. Just a couple of years ago,

I would not have thought about the racial makeup of a conference or the place of racism in American society.

These questions, new to me though not really new, reflect the work we have been doing at Schechter Manhattan to become an inclusive, racially aware school. I aspire for Schechter Manhattan to be an anti-racist Jewish day school, one in which students and faculty have opportunities to consider their racial identity, where the racial diversity of the Jewish community is reflected and valued, and where graduates have the knowledge, skills and dispositions to be successful in a racially diverse world and to be positive agents of change toward a more just society. I believe that this work starts with our Jewish values: that all human beings are created in God's image and deserve to be treated with caring and respect.

Teachers with racial awareness can provide students with learning opportunities to address issues of race that arise in society and in their classrooms, thereby helping the students see things that otherwise remain hidden to them: racial diversity in the Jewish people, holiness in each and every human being, and systems of racial discrimination that devalue some people's innate worth. With this in mind, at Schechter Manhattan we have tried to raise race questions through professional development for teachers.

PLANNING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Doing this work in a predominantly white, Ashkenazi Jewish day school is hard, since many of us are not practiced at talking openly about race. So in the 2017-2018 school year we partnered with Be'chol Lashon, an organization that provides opportunities for Jewish professionals to actively engage in conversations about race, ethnicity and identity in the context of Jews as a multicultural people in America. We invited them to help us plan and implement professional development workshops for all Schechter Manhattan teachers.

The Schechter Manhattan faculty participated in half-day workshops in November 2017 and January 2018 with the goals of expanding our awareness of Jews as a diverse multicultural people, practicing active listening and speaking with awareness, and growing in comfort with talking about race and identity. These seem like modest goals, as they don't yet approach curricular change or teaching practice. Before we could discuss how we will talk with our students about racial diversity and inclusion, we had to give our teachers the

opportunity to explore their own perspectives and perceptions of their racial identities. Talking about race required each participant to draw upon his or her life experiences, beliefs and feelings. As such, this professional development can feel high risk, asking teachers to step out of comfort zones.

The activities we engaged with during the workshops with Be'chol Lashon started with the personal. An initial activity asked participants to consider how they identify themselves and how others perceive them. In a session about bias, participants shared the messages about race and identity they got from their family of origin and how this impacted them. In order to build tools for engaging in conversations across difference, participants told their personal story (about their name, or family, or Jewish journey) and listened to others.

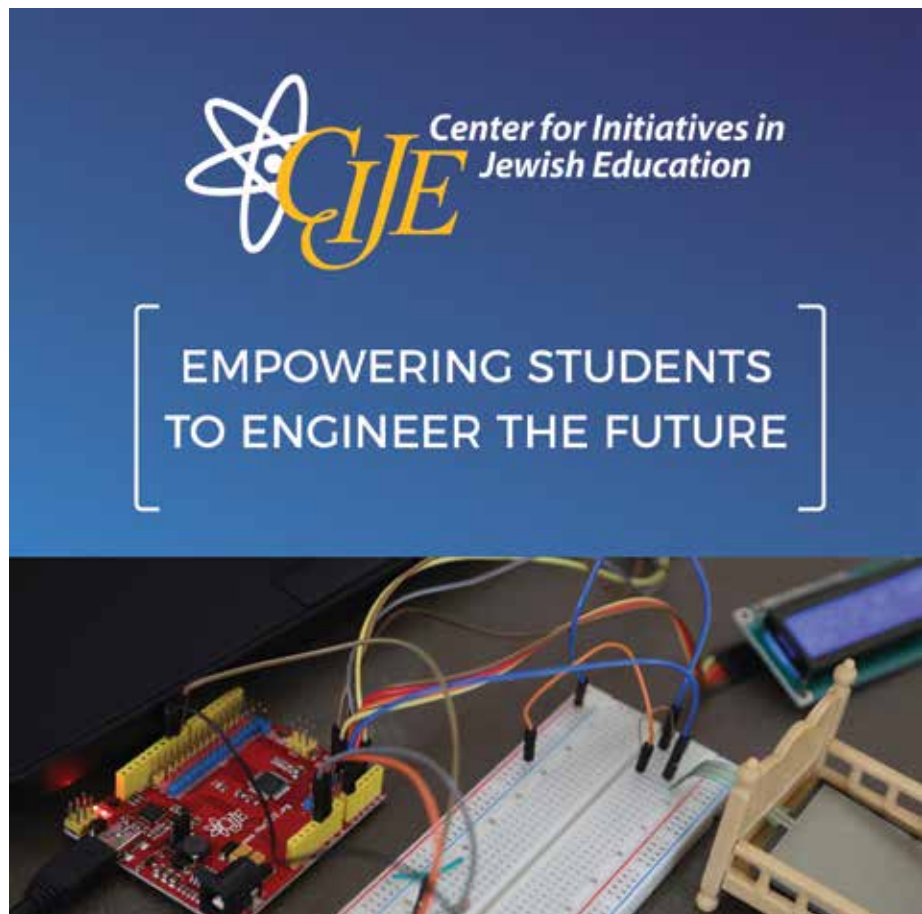
As a Jewish day school, we also approached racial diversity as a Jewish issue, and participants discussed excerpts from an article by Diane Tobin and Aryeh Weinberg, entitled "Racial Diversity & the American Jewish Community: Best Practices to Build Cultural

Competence in Jewish Communal Organizations." We considered both the authors' contention that Jews have historically been one of the most diverse peoples in the world and whether we still are diverse. We also explored concepts of whiteness and privilege by viewing a video from the Whiteness Project (vimeo.com/161215716), responding to whether the portrayal of racial and Jewish awareness presented by the speaker connects with our students.

WHAT WE LEARNED

The workshops went very well, and teachers largely responded positively. Teacher responses to an anonymous survey about professional development at Schechter Manhattan included these comments: "Be'chol Lashon was a very meaningful PD opportunity." "I really enjoyed the PD on race. It really got me thinking about race conversation in our classroom." "I found the work with Be'chol Lashon to be eye-opening, both personally and professionally."

That said, it was clear during the sessions that some teachers were more comfortable



TEACHING ABOUT RACE IN A JEWISH SCHOOL

EYTAN APTER

In today's world, teachers have to teach about race and racism in our country, delving into the complexities of race relations throughout American history, the progress that has been made, and the areas in which growth and change need to occur. As a classroom teacher in a Jewish day school, I have embraced the challenges that come with teaching about race in a predominantly homogeneous class. Prior to teaching any unit centered on race, I consider several key questions.

What unique challenges do teachers face teaching a class of middle- to upper-class white students living in a suburban environment?

For a majority of my students, racial tensions and challenges are something they read about rather than experience firsthand. For many, the realities of the inequities in this country are unknown. At the beginning of a unit on civil rights, I prepare my students with numbers and statistics that clearly demonstrate the inequities. By exposing students to these realities, they can move beyond what Boston College research psychologist Janet Helms has called the "contact phase" of her White Racial Identity framework, in which people do not understand the issues because they are not exposed to them nor do they have contact with people of color who have endured these inequities and hardships.

How do Jewish values prepare students for this unit? As a Jewish educator in a Jewish setting, I am able to draw upon Jewish values before teaching about race. Values such as "Love thy neighbor/ Ve'ahavta le'rei'acha kamocha" connect to our learning, as the concerns and issues impacting those living in our greater neighborhood deserve our attention. I remind them of the value "Don't stand idly by / Lo ta'amod al dam rei'acha" to show them that we cannot ignore the inequities either. I strive to create lessons that allow students to express opinions with respect / derekh erez, and I push students to think about the issues of race in the context of repairing the world / tikkun olam. Sometimes we may find it easier to just demand that our students embrace an outlook because we feel that it is right or just, but we better serve our students if we can make explicit connections to the values that they have been taught throughout their years in Jewish day school.

How do we foster dialogue in a safe environment without condoning ignorance? Gloria Ladson-Billings, researcher and teacher educator at the University of Wisconsin-Madison School of Education, warned against silence in the classroom, arguing that silence is not a measure of acceptance. Students need to feel comfortable sharing ideas, questioning one another and learning from their language choices. It is crucial for teachers to set up class norms or standards before opening topics for discussions. In my classroom, these include: Be mindful of the way you present your ideas. Educate rather than criticize others. Assume the best intentions. Use "I" statements.

While there is so much more that may go into planning lessons or units on race, teachers should not shy away from addressing these issues. Rather, through education and preparation, teachers can begin the conversation to help their students be change makers in the years to come.

with the topic than others, and we heard some participants' voices more than others in whole group discussion. During small group and pair conversations, I observed that all participants were actively engaged.

Speaking about racial diversity with a group of predominantly white teachers presented its own challenge. It can feel strange to talk about race in that setting, and potentially fall into dichotomies of "us" and "them." One of the presenters from Be'chol Lashon is a Jew of color, and her presence and guidance was very important to help us feel safe and brave to talk openly. This also raised a challenging question about which members of the school community were included in the dialogue. There are people of color who work in the office and maintenance; teachers asked why they were not included. The workshops were implemented within the structure of the teaching faculty's annual professional development calendar, a part of their professional responsibilities, but not a regular part of the non-teaching staff's work. This is a challenge we are still grappling with.

A few months after the workshops, we asked teachers about any times race or racism had come up with students and reflections on whether or how the Be'chol Lashon workshops impacted their teaching. Teachers reported that the Be'chol Lashon workshops helped them to reflect on their own identities, and that many of them would like to do more to bring conversations about race to their classrooms, but aren't sure how to implement this in practice.

NEXT STEPS

This year we are working with a cohort of teachers to figure that out. Nine teachers self-selected racial diversity and inclusion as a core professional development area. They have identified a variety of possible ways to extend their learning and build their skills. Some teachers may review curriculum to identify opportunities to raise questions and conduct conversations about race with students. Others may practice how to engage these issues in authentic ways as they emerge in classroom discourse. Some teachers may develop lessons for students to explore their own identities, racial and otherwise. And others may choose to learn more themselves about race, racial diversity and inclusion in education. We are working with the group to help them find common areas of interest to explore and to plan their professional development process.

We hope that this continuing process will lead to positive outcomes in our pedagogy and curriculum, so as to support our students' growth in their understanding of race and their capacities for engaging with a racially diverse Jewish community and world.

Creating Support Structures for Jewish Diversity

Jewish schools, as identity-based schools, and their leadership, can fall into the trap of assuming students share experiences based on a shared Jewish identity. This blind spot can compromise a climate of inclusion and interfere with student learning. Too much focus on unity can come at the expense of recognizing difference and acknowledging diversity within the community.

Because of the unique population it serves, The Jewish Community High School of the Bay has confronted this challenge head on. All of our students self-identify as Jewish; however, the diversity of our student body today goes far beyond denominational difference, and reflects the diverse Bay Area community from which our students come. Ten to fifteen percent of our students self-identify as a Jew of color. Many of our students come from multiracial, multicultural families. Many speak a language other than English at home, and many are children of first generation immigrants. Many have felt pressure to “prove” they are Jewish or choose between identities.

From hiring practices to ongoing professional development, schools must be proactive in creating structures to build a professional community that has the self-awareness, knowledge and skills to teach for cultural competency and respond to the complex dynamics and interactions between students of dominant and marginalized groups. Without creating systemic and structural supports from the leadership down, growth in the areas of equity and inclusion will not be sustainable, and we risk compromising the learning of our diverse student body.

Students perform better in schools where their teachers’ identities reflect the identities of the students. While the language of

diversity and inclusion can be interpreted as political, our approach is rooted in the value that every student who comes to our school should be fully seen and contributes to a fuller expression of Jewishness. When students see themselves in teachers, the texts they’re reading and their classmates, they feel more confident in who they are as people, more represented, and can achieve the deepest and most authentic learning.

Four years ago, JCHS established the Diversity and Anti-Bias Steering Committee and a directorship of social justice and inclusion for the purpose of creating systems and curricula that facilitate school growth in the following areas:

- Actively embracing diversity and enacting an anti-bias framework
- Training professional community members who are skilled at teaching cultural competency as well as recognizing bias and intervening to facilitate critical growth conversations
- Establishing learning goals and curriculum around identity, diversity, justice and action, for learning an anti-bias framework based on an integrated Jewish lens
- Creating a space where students and professional community members in socially marginalized groups are heard and responded to, and feel empowered and affirmed in their identity and experiences.

RONI BEN-DAVID
LAUREN COOK
Yael KRIEGER

This steering committee has been an important catalyst for change.

Humility plays a vital part in implementing and enacting change. The summer after we established the steering committee, the entire professional community was tasked with reading sociologist Beverly Daniel Tatum’s *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?: And Other Conversations About Race*. The head of school set the agenda: “We know a great deal about the values of embracing diversity and honoring differences, but there is a great deal we do not know about how these values are celebrated at times and trampled at other times by our professional community. We will learn from Tatum’s book and return in August better prepared to support student learning and growth in this area.” Every summer since then, the professional community is given an “equity challenge,” in which they take their own deep dive into areas of learning around equity and inclusion. The work of increasing knowledge does not happen quickly. It requires openness to change and a willingness to acknowledge our blind spots.

By acknowledging the breadth and depth of what we do not know, the school puts forth a growth mindset and creates a climate that allows for mistakes. For over a decade, we have used a weekly full school community meeting to bring in underrepresented voices,

or those not represented at all in our population. However, these islands of learning are less effective than the systemic changes.

With the structural establishment of a committee and a director tasked with regularly thinking about these issues, we have been more successful in creating sustainable systems for change. Our hiring process now includes an interview with a team of people specifically tuned into candidates' cultural competency and experiences with inclusion work. Diversity and cultural competence are values and attributes we seek out and reward in the hiring process. We have also brought student voices and experiences into the conversation by creating a Student Advisory Board. This has empowered students to share their perspectives and urge us to make changes. We are preparing to engage in curriculum audits, encouraging teachers to look deeply at the implicit messaging of their curriculum and seeking spaces for deeper, connected engagement with more inclusive imaging.

We have seen students become advocates for change. For the past three years, we have sent a contingent of students to the Student Diversity Leadership Conference, part of the National Alliance for Independent School's People of Color Conference, where more

than 6,000 educators and students explore the themes of equitable schools and inclusive communities. Students who attend then share their experience with our school community through a panel presentation.

Students often return from the conference expressing how meaningful it was to have deep conversations with other students in affinity group meetings based on race, ethnicity or sexual orientation and/or gender identity. Thus far, most of the work at the school around affinity groups has been for faculty. For our professional community, we have held lunch-time affinity groups for women, people of color, non-Jews in a Jewish school, and LGBTQ+. Furthermore, we hosted a series this year called "Unpacking Male Privilege" for men. As sociologist Tatum states, affirming identity "is not contradictory to, but rather a prerequisite for building community" and "students who feel that their own needs for affirmation have been met are more willing and able to engage with others along lines of difference." While our small size (180 students) can create challenges to creating affinity spaces for students, we are constantly looking for ways to support students finding or creating those spaces and help our faculty have those spaces as well.

We continue to audit our Jewish studies curriculum, looking for how to more fully present the variety of expressions of Jewish peoplehood, which includes representations of Jewish men and women from a variety of heritages. How can we amplify the voices of different types of Jews? It is vital that we provide our students with "mirrors" to see themselves and other stories/histories of Jews of color. When done well, students are given many opportunities to process difficult experiences; feel affirmed in having felt pressure to prove their Jewishness or choose between different parts of themselves; see that they are not alone, that they have the power to lift up others and be lifted up; feel equal claim to their Jewish identity even if it isn't rooted in lineage; and confront the assumption that Jews of color are part of one uniform group, that they only exist within binary of "Jews of color" or Jew. Moreover, they can see themselves as potential leaders in the Jewish community with the insights and self-awareness that our community must value and learn from.

We continue to strive to create a relational community where students of all sorts of identities feel seen, understood and reflected. Creating systems and structures that support these strong interpersonal connections will move the needle toward making our community more self-aware, inclusive and adept at centering the voices and experiences of Jewish teens of color and other minority groups. Moreover, what we see is that in creating spaces for and empowering those who have historically been disempowered, we create a learning environment where everyone feels more connected, seen and engaged.

Articles on the Impact of Teachers Reflecting Students' Identity

Julie Pennell, "Girls Do Better in School When Taught by Women"

Jill Rosen, "With Just One Black Teacher, Black Students More Likely to Graduate"

Alejandro Fernandez Sanabria, Antonieta Cadiz, and Ronny Rojas, "Hispanic Students Perform Better When Their Teachers and Administrators Are Latino, Too"

Ty Tagami, "Study Reports How Race Matters in the Classroom"

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The World Outside the Classroom



As we study buildings, our minds turn to the wider subject of “homes.” In 1993, the year I graduated from Barnard, Rudy Giuliani was elected mayor of New York City on the platform of improving the quality of life for New Yorkers. He redescribed drunks, panhandlers, squeegee men and peddlers as the “taxes” paid by law-abiding citizens of the city in the post-recession years. They were nothing but a blot on our vision and experience—an impediment to our pursuit of happiness. As he took office, the numbers of homeless one saw daily diminished notably, forcing the question of where they had all gone.

Still, in mid-1993, the Upper West Side numbered many homeless. On 86th Street and Columbus Avenue, sometimes Amsterdam, there was regularly a gray-haired man in jeans on the street corner by the diner. I passed him nearly every day, as did most of the Beit Rabban students. We passed him the day we went out observing the architecture of the neighborhood, and we passed him at times on the way to or from Central Park. Many of the kids knew him by name and waved or said hello. He was homeless.

Early in the year, the students had constructed a container to collect the coins of tzedakah they brought each Friday. We tried to allocate it monthly but in this case, a few months had gone by. Now, near the end of the year, we piled it up in pennies, nickels, dimes and quarters, and worked together to count it. It amounted to about forty dollars. When we raised the question of allocation, the majority of the kids thought immediately of taking it to Andy on the corner.

Collecting money was only one part of the school’s community service program. Each week, we sat together on the rug, and children and teachers would raise concerns about things they saw in the world or things we saw in the world that needed our attention. Together we cultivated the habit of noticing where help was needed—our help.

Community service with kids is a sensitive thing. It unfolds in live time, right here where we are; there is less of a protective buffer than in other forms of study. And what community service concerns most often is suffering and trouble. It focuses on things that should really be otherwise, that aren’t fair or aren’t just, or are simply very sad.

If you are a kid who comes from a community that stresses our responsibilities to others, you are likely to spot such trouble in the world fairly quickly. This is doubly true if you are a city kid, especially one who has been allowed and encouraged to notice rather than ignore or sidestep what surrounds him or her. And once you see what is before you, whether you are a child or an adult, it is at times natural to be drawn into despair, listlessness, fear, even terror.

Sitting together on the rug, and in discussion with Devora Steinmetz, Beit Rabban’s founder and head of school, I learned that the job was twofold: to help children see and feel the palpable claims upon us, which meant sometimes feeling sad and confused, and at the same time, to see and to feel that we could do something meaningful to help, which meant cultivating a sense of purpose and energy, and putting our minds to work creatively.



To cultivate such energy was much easier in company. We had each other. But we were not alone either. We joined forces with other organizations that were already working in the city and helped them a few times a year: We made cards, packed packages, and worked with seniors at Project Dorot for the elderly (where I also volunteered weekly throughout my college education); we visited the Jewish Home and Hospital and sang with its residents; we learned about Project ORE for poor, homeless and mentally ill Jews, and met with kids from a school for the blind.

We had visitors come to talk with us about the work they were doing in the community. One man had founded an organization called New York Cares, and he came and sat in our classroom on a chair much too small for his long legs, and asked the kids, with all the kindness in the world, to think about what homeless people need. What would it be like to live between places, not to have a place to call home? He described a coat drive he ran yearly before the winter set in and the work of collecting coats: deciding where in the city to place containers, how to gather and sort the donations, and how to distribute the coats. I remember one child asking about how homeless people would take care of their teeth because where would they keep their toothbrushes? I remember discussing the problem of food because it is much more expensive to buy food already prepared, like a sandwich or a hot meal. Homeless people don't have a kitchen where they can store containers or a loaf of bread and utensils to prepare their own food, so how can they afford to keep eating? And where do they wash their hands if they get messy while eating?

Meeting that tall, gentle man from New York Cares prompted many practical ideas among the kids, including a book drive they organized the next year for a homeless shelter. Didn't homeless people need books too?

But I remember thinking, beyond the immediate outcome of our meeting, that now the possibilities for what one could be when one grew up had just expanded to include "founder of a volunteer association." Fireman, ballerina, teacher, lawyer, doctor . . . community service organizer.

And I remember thinking as I considered this circle of children that perhaps you find yourself wanting to take on such

work later in life because you have tried to imagine how hard it is to be homeless and then, finding that imagination takes you only so far, you have actually investigated it, and then you have an idea of both its trials and of what it might take to limit or obviate them. Maybe you take on such work because in your experiment of wondering what it feels like to be homeless or through your investigation, you realize that the person who is homeless is not only homeless, but is also a person. Maybe you feel the energy to take on such work because you know that people are not only the condition in which they find themselves but possess reserves untapped and often undetected. They are more than homeless or hungry. Maybe you enter such work or maybe you find time for volunteering even if you have other work because when you were a child, the adults around you suggested that they would help you. Maybe you take on such work, part-time or full-time, because your education has reflected to you a respect for all human beings that is acted out in the everyday life of your classroom.

The ways you are taught to listen and speak to others no matter who they are, what they look like, where they come from, how they speak. The ways you are taught to ask about what you don't know, to recognize *that* you don't know, to look to others and to books or other sources to learn more. You feel a need to investigate. Your teachers help you cultivate the tendency to see both evident and unexpected connections, and to respond to what you have found or made with the desire to deepen or improve it.

Every day in school, you see and accept as natural that kids learn at different paces and in different ways. Competition, self-defeat or self-congratulations ideally beside the point, a distraction from the real tasks at hand.

What you need, and what your teachers want to help you find, is the poise to go about your own work independently, with purpose, interest and hope. Your own work goes on with or alongside others and you help them when they need it or seek their help when you need it. And always, always, there is the reality that the learning one does in school exceeds school; it concerns the world beyond the classroom. The learning one does outside of school can be brought back in, tested, affirmed and refined in the company of teachers and friends.

These assumptions and the practices they give rise to are the infrastructure of learning, that is, the "building" and "home" of the kind of learning that might improve our world. This is the kind of learning that might help shape a human being who, we have reason to hope, will look beyond him- or herself.

Here, in a small classroom in New York City, we have tried to convey these beliefs to a group of young children. But I know, and later I see it proven true, that these beliefs and practices can inform a much larger classroom and can speak to older students, too. To be respected, to respect: so much comes from this.

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PRIZMAH RESHETS

Each Reshet — Hebrew for network — centers on a particular topic of interest. The members of each Reshet, with the support of the Prizmah team, design dynamic and creative networked learning opportunities. Organized by school professionals and lay leaders, every Reshet utilizes a variety of digital communication and in-person opportunities to forge meaningful connections with geographically diverse communities.

Join a Reshet, and have a plethora of knowledge at your fingertips. By connecting to our forums, you will gain access to the wisdom, expertise, and support of thousands of Jewish day school colleagues. Discuss opportunities for growth, celebrate successes, and brainstorm solutions to challenging scenarios common among day schools.

- *245 schools/organizations participated in Reshet events (2017-18)*
- *1088 participants in Reshet events*
- *180 participants in HoS Reshet*
- *Monthly thought leadership newsletter in Board Reshet*
- *Bi-weekly Reshet Digest in HoS Reshet*



PRIZMAH

Center for Jewish Day Schools

BUILDING ENDOWMENT THROUGH GENERATIONS

DANIEL SPIEGEL, ADVANCEMENT DIRECTOR, SINAI AKIBA ACADEMY, LOS ANGELES



The launch of the Generations Endowment Campaign seven years ago, in partnership with BJE (Builders of Jewish Education) and PEJE (Partnership for Excellence in Jewish Education), was a visionary advancement in securing a sustainable and vibrant future for our school.

The numbers speak for themselves. During the three years our school participated in the Generations Campaign, from 2012-2015, our existing endowment increased by almost 40%. Even more remarkable is the fact that donations increased each of the three years we participated in the program, despite the challenging economic environment.

These successes were made possible because of the extraordinary learning opportunity Generations provided us. With expertise provided by BJE and PEJE coaches, our administrators and lay leadership team initiated a fundraising infrastructure that would make successful endowment giving possible. For the first time, our school crafted a major-gifts plan, developed a gift-acceptance policy, and implemented a moves-management strategy to effectively cultivate and

steward prospective donors. Later in the campaign, our school also created a case statement and implemented a planned-giving program.

Generations changed philanthropic conversations in our community. Our lay leaders and professionals took advantage of every opportunity to educate our families about the significant impact a healthy endowment will have on our school's viability. Our team also engaged all members of our community in the endowment discussion, planning large and intimate events to engage alumni, alumni parents and grandparents.

These efforts led to success. As reflected by the diverse ages and ethnicities of our Generations donors, the Generations Campaign was a true community effort. Of the 37 donors who participated, approximately a third were current parents, a third are alumni parents, and a third are grandparents.

Although the Generations Endowment Campaign concluded three years ago, the initiative's impact will be felt far into the future. The culture of endowment

giving established during Generations is even more relevant among our donor community today.

Since the conclusion of the Campaign in 2015, seven Generations donors pledged additional endowment gifts at the same or increased levels. In addition, several families not previously involved in the Generations Campaign pledged major gifts in the past three years. Our school's endowment has grown to its current level of \$15 million.

Affordability and accessibility continue to challenge enrollment, as tuitions rise and incomes remain flat. Our school's endowment, much of which was raised through the Generations Campaign, has supplied the necessary funds for tuition assistance. More than 30% of our families receive financial assistance, enabling them to benefit from our educational experience. I am confident in saying that our students today directly benefit from the opportunities provided by PEJE, BJE, our lay leaderships, administrators and donors in our Generations Endowment Campaign.

AMY AMENT
JOSHUA LOOKSTEIN

Preserving Community and Upholding Values: A School's Response to Parkland

Like many other Jewish schools, ours sometimes finds itself challenged by the conflict between the competing imperatives. On the one hand, we never want a family to have to consider our school's perceived political positions when deciding whether or not to enroll their children. Nor would we want students to feel uncomfortable by the school imposing a particular view or activity on them that goes against their own values and beliefs. Those are considered red lines, *yehareg ve'al ya'avur* (let oneself be killed rather than violate) at our school. On the other hand, it is important for us to be able to take a stand on certain significant issues for our community and country. Because politics is in the eye of the beholder, it becomes even more challenging to address critical, current, national issues in ways that are inclusive, social-emotionally safe, developmentally appropriate and apolitical.

We have found we have to tread lightly in our approach to politically sensitive topics, and whatever decision we make will likely not satisfy everyone. Recently, we received criticism from both parents and staff for sending a busload of students to Albany to lobby for security and STEM funding for day schools, and for not thanking our current president by name for moving the US embassy to Jerusalem (we just did it again).

So when much of the country mobilized around the Parkland shootings, we had to decide if we would participate in the national response and, if so, how. We felt strongly that this was a historic event that our middle school students should be aware of and reflect upon. We also thought it was an important and potentially transformative learning

experience. We want our students to be actively engaged in the world around them, and to feel empowered to impact the world. After all, our goal is for them to learn “*al menat la’asot*,” in order to act.

In deference to the diverse political views of our parent and student population, we wondered about how to commemorate this event without forcing students to participate in something they felt uncomfortable with. In one of our ears were parents and staff who felt that the 17-minute walkout was anti-Trump and anti-Second Amendment. In the other ear were parents and staff who felt that since the only rational and moral response was the 17-minute walkout, not walking out was pro-Trump and pro-Second Amendment.

We chose to look at the issue through the following overarching lens. When God decides to destroy the cities of Sodom and Gemorrah, God first engages in a discussion with Avraham, prefaced by the question, *Hamechaseh ani mi’Avraham asher ani oseh*, Will I conceal from Avraham that which I am doing? God knew what God wanted to do. But God also knew that if Avraham was to become *av hamon goyim*, the patriarch of multiple faith communities, God needed to

expose him to difficult leadership decisions, to show him that the world was not black and white but rather multiple shades of gray, and that he and his descendants would constantly be faced with ethical dilemmas and questions with no clear answers.

Likewise, our administration struggled with the question of how to respond to Parkland. We could either avoid the question and let others grapple, make the decision for our students without giving them a chance to grapple, or we could invite our students into the grapple. We chose to invite them in.

We framed the day as a yom iyyun, a day of intense learning. The middle school gathered together as a community to learn from their teachers and from each other. In small groups, students were sent to classrooms for four mini-lessons on various topics. One teacher offered a brief history of student-led protests and the impact they have on the national conversation. Another teacher taught about the Second Amendment. A rabbi spoke about the laws of putting your life in danger to save another person. Another teacher spoke about the laws of visiting a mourner. Our school psychologist led a session on resilience. Another teacher discussed her own

personal experiences with student activism on behalf of Soviet Jewry. A rabbi addressed to what extent our pop culture desensitizes us to violence.

At precisely 10am, at the moment of the designated walkout, students had two options: they could walk out or stay in. The same three 17-minute activities would be available outside and inside. Students could say *tehillim*, they could express their feelings artistically, or they could write letters to first responders or victims’ families. One key element was that students were asked to indicate their choice in advance. We wanted to prevent the possibility that students would simply go with their friends and account for critiques that students were influenced by teachers during their sessions. Most students chose to go outside. Some stayed inside. The administrators involved split up.

We take pride in the fact that we designed a program that helped students mourn the loss of life, learn lessons related to both the shootings and the student-led national response, experience the national debate about that response, and did it in as apolitical a way as possible. We received criticism. We knew we would. We explained our motivation. Some accepted our explanation and others didn’t. We felt we made the right decision. We didn’t imagine our program would satisfy all parties, but it satisfied many and still enabled us to be educationally responsible in our own eyes.

This model of coming together as a community to learn and share during difficult times helped us accomplish our goals in this situation. The formula—mini-sessions on topics related to the issue at hand, 2-3 response options, and similar ways of self-expression for each response—is replicable and adaptable to many situations. In hindsight, we could have done something similar to address the embassy’s move to Jerusalem. With enough practice, students may be able to design these programs on their own, rather than passively experiencing their teachers’ plans. We believe this structure will help students approach the inevitable future issues they will face proactively, thoughtfully and respectfully.

Our students are future Avrahams and Sarahs. God understood that even if we have a pretty good idea of what the right answer is and we are pretty sure our students will push back on it, it is important to invite them in to our thinking and contribute their own thoughts. That is how they will learn to live lives of impact.

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Connection and Shock: Expanding Students' Jewish Horizons through International School Partnerships



**MORDECHAI
SOSKIL**

All teachers desire to stretch their students' thinking so they can imagine a world bigger than the one they occupy each day—so they can see the next horizon. The golden ring of teaching is the realization of those moments when you know you've changed your students, when you've created ripples in the ponds of their minds. Through the partnership Beth Tfiloh Dahan Community High School has with the Scheiber Szandor Gymnazium (SSG) in Budapest, Hungary, through SOS International, we have been blessed with just those types of experiences.

SOS International is a nonprofit organization dedicated to enriching next-generation Jewish identity and values through international exchanges. They build ongoing partnerships between American and European Jewish day school educators, students and community members, helping them embrace their Jewish identities and rejuvenate Jewish communities around the world.

Our partnership with SSG has included four exchanges. In the first two rounds, teachers spent a week in the partner school learning, observing and teaching. The week included touring the host city and a tikkum olam project. In the last two rounds, the teachers returned to their partner schools but with a group of carefully selected students. These students became genuine friends as they went about learning, touring and teaching younger students in the partner school.

But what does it look like *in real life* when Jewish teens who live on two continents find their Judaism as a primary point of intersection?

ON THE OUTSIDE LOOKING IN

Learning about the context of their Hungarian peers' lives has had a profound impact on our Beth Tfiloh students. One of the ways it has shaped their view of the world is by seeing themselves, if only just a bit, as outsiders. In the cocoon of our robust Jewish community in Baltimore, our students often feel that the whole world is just like they are: socially comfortable in their Jewishness, and politically secure as members of their national community. What a shock to meet teens who dress as they do, and enjoy music and video games and sports as they do, but feel uncomfortable identifying as Jews.

A couple of anecdotes drove home this point. One of the first evenings that we were in Budapest with the teens, we all went to an escape room. It was a great opportunity for the teens to spend time together and work together. One of the goals of the trip was to help foster Jewish pride and strong Jewish identities among the Hungarian teens. Of course, the best way to influence a teenager is with more teenagers, so we brought a dozen American teens who, while all diverse in their observance of Judaism, share a strong Jewish identity and great pride in who we are.

Those goals are most keenly worked on in the space between programming when the kids spend time with each other; thus the escape room was an ideal setting. After the activity, the teens clustered in the courtyard outside and noticed a military surplus type store. A few went in to explore the shop while waiting for their peers to gather. They exited in just a moment as they realized that it was a store dedicated to Nazi paraphernalia and regalia. It was quite unsettling. The shopkeeper's reaction to boys in kippot entering his shop shook them up. His glare of mixed disgust and anger was a new phenomenon. The conversation with their peers that followed gave them a much better sense of what the facts on the ground are for Jews in Hungary.

We spent much of the afternoon the next day walking through the beautiful city of Budapest, learning about its history and the Jewish community that was there and what is there now. In the evening, we were walking towards the Balint Haz, the JCC of Budapest building, where we would all eat dinner together. The teens were doing what teens do as we walked the mile or so, clustered in groups talking and walking and laughing as we shepherded them along. It was all very age-appropriate and what experienced teachers have seen dozens of times.



We passed a government building with a few soldiers stationed outside—a scene not so uncommon to my American students, most of whom had been to Israel before. And so naturally our students said something to the effect of, “Thank you for your service.” They received only dirty glares in response (and not because they were talking English). Their Hungarian counterparts were astounded—first that our boys were walking so comfortably with kippot, and then that they would talk to a soldier. Jews can’t do that in Hungary. The visceral and immediate response of the Hungarian teens provided a much more tangible understanding of their world than any article or lecture could have done.

LEARNING THE DIFFERENCES

In debriefing our teens, we learned a lot about how they experienced the week in Hungary. It was no surprise to learn that the things that impacted them most were the conversations they had with their peers, not the formal programming. Daryn shared that one of the most important moments for her came during a conversation late on Friday night of our Shabbaton, in the quiet solemnity of *leil Shabbat* and the privacy of her shared hostel room. “It was quite a shock to learn that these kids, so much like us, who go to a Jewish school even, can’t be proud of being who they are. It’s hard to grow Jewishly and think about keeping Shabbos and be proud of who you are when the whole society is trying to make you be uncomfortable and lose that pride,” Daryn said.

For Rikki, the point was driven home on her very first day in Budapest. We were on a bus going from the school to a lookout over the Danube on a beautiful spring day. But the moment was colored by the running commentary of her new friend Abel, who kept pointing

out places he had personally experienced anti-Semitic remarks. Even more distressing for Rikki was when our Hungarian friends came to visit us in Baltimore. Emese, an SSG senior, was amazed to learn that Rikki’s dad could just wear his kippah all the time and nothing happened. Rikki said, “For my friends in Hungary, being Jewish is something they have to think about all the time because it scares them. But here in Baltimore people are like, ‘You’re Jewish. Ok, I’m Christian. Next.’ I never really thought about what that means to me here until I saw it through Emese’s eyes.”

Undoubtedly, this experience will continue to impact our students in many ways. For them, the world is smaller, and yet somehow, their sense of the Jewish community is larger. Their thinking about who is part of Klal Yisrael has expanded.

But the lessons go beyond that. Joseph perhaps said it best: “Realizing what it is to be a Jew in Hungary makes me much more grateful to be a Jew in America. It makes me realize how comfortable things are here, and that makes me think about who else can be part of our community. How do we make sure that we are making Judaism seem like something anyone can be a part of? My friends in Hungary used to think that Judaism was ‘either you have to be a black hat-wearing rabbi or do nothing.’ But now they see there are lots of ways to practice Judaism, and everyone has to find a way for themselves. How do we make sure that Jewish communities in America are reaching out to find people that feel like outsiders and bring them in?”

In the end, learning about another Jewish community through the eyes of their peers has helped our teens learn more about themselves and their community.



JDS Students in These Times

DANIELLA PRESSNER

Head of School, Akiva School, Nashville

Our Children as Leaders

On September 20, 2017, Hurricane Maria hit the island of Puerto Rico, causing mass destruction and devastation to the island and its people. Almost all communication was cut off; electricity, running water and other amenities were not recovered for months. We know that there are areas of Puerto Rico even today that have not recovered, and some that may never be rebuilt. People did not have access to working hospitals, to clean water, to dialysis and oxygen machines. Federal aid was lagging,

1,748 miles away, our children were safe, warm and dry. They had heard about or seen pictures of the impact of the recent hurricanes, but few realized the enormity of the situation. Our children, like many other children in our world, are, in some ways, privileged. This is not something they should be embarrassed about, but it is something they have to own and treat with caution and great intention.

Part of our educational vision at Akiva is that our children work not only to impact the Jewish community but to engage and care about our entire world. As we know, this is something that has to come from deep within each and every soul. While we provide each child with opportunities to create meaningful change in their world and in the worlds of those around them, we must also provide them with the structures that enhance the likelihood that they will initiate these changes. Once they leave our school, our children need to have the knowledge, persistence and confidence to be changemakers.

Every morning, our kindergarten to sixth grade classes gather together in our chapel for morning assembly. This is a 10- to 15-minute experience where we learn something together as a community. About a week after Hurricane Maria hit, we used morning assembly to learn about the situation in Puerto Rico, and the students were offered a charge: "Over the course of this day, let us know if you think you want to do something." That day, eight students from four grades decided they wanted to use their power productively.

They founded Kids4Kids, a student-led group with the goal to help children around the world. They developed a plan to raise money, and we connected them to a young activist, Erin Schrode, who had been working in Puerto Rico serving meals to those in need after Hurricane Maria. Erin came to speak and reminded our children that they should and *could* make a difference. Kids4Kids challenged Erin to find them a way in which they could impact Puerto Rico's children, and she connected

them to an orphanage in Bayamon whose children had lost their roof. This was the start of a successful \$1,000 campaign to raise a roof for a children's orphanage in Puerto Rico. Our children raised the money and a roof was built soon after. They saw the work of their hands be used productively for positive change for children in Puerto Rico. The money was mailed directly to the orphanage, and the children exchanged pictures of themselves at their places of learning.

This year, Kids4Kids has 22 members and has teamed up with Crayola's Color Cycle campaign to keep plastic out of landfills by converting markers into fuel. Kids4Kids has worked with the local preschools and the greater Nashville community to collect more than 600 markers thus far, and the group is now considering its next project. Teaching our children to engage their privilege is crucial for their sense of self, but watching them courageously take the lead was a reminder that children can be the best models of effective action.



JENNIFER COXE

International Baccalaureate Coordinator and Interim Assistant Middle School Principal, The Solomon Schechter Day School of Bergen County, New Milford, New Jersey

Community Projects: Teaching Students to Use their Power for Good

Commemorating the 20th anniversary of the genocide in Rwanda set off a chain reaction in our school that systemically changed the way we inspire and empower our students to use their Jewish values and text study to become changemakers in the world.

In the summer of 2014, a small group of Schechter administrators and educators traveling to the East African country listened to the unimaginable pain a divided, destroyed nation had undergone. They also witnessed the miracle of those whose side had once murdered the other learning how to live together again through a process of reconciliation.

The experience compelled us to reexamine our fundamental responsibility as educators and to find a more authentic, meaningful way to connect students to the world beyond them. Through that, we sought to foster students' respect and appreciation for "the other," empowering them with the moral imperative to stand up and act for the purpose of creating a better world.

In 2018, Schechter became an authorized International Baccalaureate (IB) World School for the Middle Years Programme, having tailored this framework to our Judaic studies curriculum to help students connect their Jewish text learning and actions through mitzvot in a global way. Since then, we have designed and implemented a program that focuses on developing true empathy, a sense that although much of the world does not live the way that we do, we share a common humanity.

We've discovered that solely encouraging students to run "bake sales" or other one-off charitable endeavors often makes it difficult to ascertain what actually happens and whether our efforts result in helping others. The Community Project, however, brings together the spirit of chesed and tikkun olam, community service and action, and engages students in inquiry-based exploration that turns their learning into action.



Among this year's Community Projects:

- Becoming mental-health advocates by raising awareness inside the school and greater community of early-adolescent depression through the creation of a public relations campaign.
- Exploring and identifying alternative spirituality/prayer opportunities beyond the standard prayer service in order to make tefillah more meaningful and allow teens to connect with their spirituality and God.
- Saving the lives of area homeless, neglected, abandoned, and abused animals through weekly work at a local animal-rescue shelter.
- Regularly playing soccer with disabled children through an area organization that expressly focuses on inclusion through athletics.
- Developing and launching a media campaign to raise awareness about LGBTQ issues among early adolescents.

Students use a detailed structure that includes templates, criteria and forms. Throughout the year, middle school faculty and staff supervise projects that align with their own expertise and interests, and every student or student team is assigned an advisor specific to the project. Advisors meet with students throughout the year to help ensure that the project topic satisfies legal and ethical standards of health and safety, confidentiality, human rights, animal welfare and environmental issues, as well as to confirm the authenticity of the work in which they engage.

One of the many compelling aspects of the Community Project is that it encourages students to reflect on their learning and the outcomes of their work. It also challenges them to collaborate and pursue service learning—key skills that help prepare them for success in further study, the workplace and the community. They learn not only the skills, attitudes and knowledge needed to complete a project over an extended period of time, but how to be effective communicators in a variety of situations.

Because these projects are student-centered, students learn to participate in a sustained, self-directed inquiry that inspires new ways of looking at problems and developing deeper understanding of their own power to make change in the world.

JDS Students in These Times

Listening for the Grace Note: Finding Harmony Amid Cacophony

2018 marks the 25th anniversary of the NAIS Student Diversity Leadership Conference, a multiracial, multicultural gathering of upper school student leaders (grades 9-12) from across the US and abroad. SDLC focuses on self-reflecting, forming allies and building community. Led by a diverse team of trained adult and peer facilitators, participating students develop cross-cultural communication skills, design effective strategies for social justice practice through dialogue and the arts, and learn the foundations of allyship and networking principles. In addition to large group sessions, SDLC “family groups” and “home groups” allow for dialogue and sharing in smaller units.

NAOMI RAVEL

Class of 2020,
Gann Academy, Waltham, Massachusetts



How do I identify before and after SDLC?

Attending a predominantly white school is especially difficult for a person of color. The added stress to me is that I'm also Jewish on top of my many cultural identifiers. Being at Gann has let me explore my Judaism in ways that I'm not always able to do with the color of my skin.

Attending SDLC for the first time last year was eye-opening for me because I could connect with my Nepali heritage. This year, I wanted to explore the Israeli and Puerto Rican sides of my family since they are also important parts of my identity. I struggled to find a balance between all three cultural identities.

At SDLC this year, I learned that having the same amount of knowledge for each culture connects me deeper to my own personal and unique identity. Also, this year at SDLC I had a better appreciation for the South Asian affinity group. Within the affinity group, I met many boys and girls who wanted to educate me on my Nepali culture. I was unaware of the day-to-day culture that Nepali kids experience. I was excited for them to teach me about the music, history and politics within the country.

I'm thankful to be able to attend SDLC for a second time and learn even more about myself and others.

ABIGAIL BALA

Class of 2020,
Gann Academy, Waltham, Massachusetts

What does it feel like to be surrounded by people who have similar experiences to you?

At SDLC, the most powerful experience I had was in the affinity groups. I went to the multiracial group, and I really valued the time I spent there. We talked about our lives and identities, and I ended up meeting many multiracial Jews. It was a really moving experience for me to talk with them.

At school, I often feel like I'm alone in my experiences. I can talk and explain things to my white peers as much as I am able, but no matter how empathetic they are, they can't really understand what I'm going through. That's okay, but it can be hard for me.

A lot of people have trouble understanding or accepting my identity as a multiracial Jew. At school, people will only acknowledge my brownness when it is convenient for them—because I'm white-passing, teachers can get away with that. A lot of times in my Jewish community, my multiracial identity gets looked over. In affinity group, we talked about how it is important for us to not accept that and make people acknowledge all of our identities.

In all, what I'm taking away from my time at SDLC is that my many identities are not separate pieces of who I am. I am a multiracial Jew, not a Jewish person and multiracial person. I don't know if I could have come to these understandings if I wasn't surrounded by multiracial Jews.





LAURA BOGORAD

Class of 2019,
Gann Academy, Waltham, Massachusetts

What does it mean to be a person who looks white/is white but is also part of a minority group?

When I began preparations to leave Gann and go to the SDLC, I felt apprehension along with my excitement. While I was incredibly excited to travel to Nashville with 1,600 other high school students to tackle the issue of diversity, I also felt that I might not belong. I am Hispanic, but I am also white. If this was a conference on racial diversity, what right did I have to go as a white person? Would I fit in?

When I first arrived, I was surprised by how many white passing people were at the conference. But more surprising than that was how easily I felt comfortable. The people I met and talked to were supportive and kind. One theme of the conference was love, and when the other students listened so attentively to my stories, I felt validated.

I learned how diversity means more than race. It encompasses socio-economic class, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, ability, age, family structure and religion. In my opinion, having a diverse conference means more than racial diversity; it means bringing together people that speak to radically different experiences that still support each other.

Being a Jewish person also added to my experience of the conference. At many times looking around a room with many Jews in it made me feel a sense of belonging. At other times I felt my identity challenged. When the conference brought a speaker challenging the legitimacy of the state of Israel or when people screamed “free Palestine” from the back of the conference hall, I felt uncomfortable. I think there is still work to do in providing a space that is entirely inclusive.

SDLC taught me to entirely accept my complicated identity and see there will always be people that will support me and challenge me.

ZOEY ZILBER

Class of 2020,
Gann Academy, Waltham, Massachusetts

How does diversity affect the learning and practice of Judaism?

Over the years, Jews have become more diverse. Through assimilation, Jews have slowly adopted the traditions of their neighbors. They may marry outside the religion and celebrate Jewish holidays in their homes alongside non-Jewish holidays. They may even take on the custom of decorating their house in lights with the colors of the tallit and Magen David instead of Christmas colors.

They are also less cohesive as a group, which affects how Jews learn and how they practice their Judaism. In the US, there are many different denominations of Judaism and degrees to which people practice them. Travel also causes diversity within Jewish culture. American Jews who go to France or Israel or Russia meet Jews who might eat different foods on Shabbat or sing different songs. All of this creates a more diverse Jewish population when they bring what they have eaten or sung back to the US.

From another angle, while there is more diversity among Jewish people, most Jews are predominantly white. For those of us who are non-white, practicing Judaism can be more difficult. For example, when I—someone who identifies racially as Chinese—correct someone on a Talmudic law during Jewish Studies class, my point has often been rejected or treated more skeptically than a white peer’s. Additionally, when I once put on a kippah jokingly, a friend of mine said, “That looks so wrong.”

At SDLC, I learned that interactions like this, though started with good intent, both feel wrong and are wrong. These are moments where I need to express my discomfort because saying that in any context isn’t acceptable. Therefore, as a non-white Jew, the lack of diversity makes it harder to learn and practice Judaism.



JDS Students in These Times



Student Walkout for Action

EVAN HORWITZ
NIOMI MARKEL
ELIZABETH MEHR
JONAH FLAMM

Students, Portland Jewish Academy, Oregon

Like many students around the country, we felt moved to action after the shooting at Stoneman Douglas High School. Students just like us had been killed. A school just like ours had been turned into a battleground. As seventh graders at Portland Jewish Academy, we had been raised with the belief that we were being listened to, that our voices mattered. It was because of that sense of empowerment that we began to plan a school walkout to protest the lack of gun laws in this country that allowed for the shooting to happen.

Our seventh grade class planned the walkout for our middle school, but this event was eventually expanded to include fifth graders, teachers and community members. In addition to protesting the lack of gun laws, we also wanted to focus on memorializing the 17

students killed in the shooting at Stoneman Douglas. We led our group out of the building and to a field nearby. There, our class shared stories of the victims, their lives and their pasts, and imagined what their futures should have been. After we finished this memorial, two of us spoke about establishing gun laws in order to prevent gun violence and in hopes of fully preventing future massacres.

On March 18, 2018, we joined millions of students across the country in walking out of school to promote common sense gun laws. Our reflection and planning continues today. We know that we need to be the change we want to see in the world. For thousands of years, others have done all they could to stop Jews from succeeding. This time, the matter we were protesting affected our lives directly.

For people who had already lost loved ones to school shootings, it was too late to change anything. But we hoped that by protesting, we would be able to change things for future students in America.

At our school, we are taught from a young age to be activists. In our humanities classes, we engage in active discussions in which we challenge society's shortcomings and talk about how to make the world a better place. By protesting the lack of gun laws in our country, we hoped to pursue peace and make the world a better place.

We memorialized, we marched, we protested.

However, not much has changed yet. This is a call to action. Throughout school, we have learned about the concepts of *ohav shalom* and



rodef shalom. An ohev shalom is someone who loves peace. Loving peace is not a bad thing; however, an ohev shalom does not actively pursue peace in the world. A rodef shalom, on the other hand, is someone who not only loves but pursues peace. At PJA, we are taught to be a rodef shalom.

We are taught to lead.

Change is a challenging and slow process, and it may take awhile, if ever, for someone to see the change they had long worked for. We, as Jews know this all too well. However, if one does not actively pursue what they believe in, change will never come. So however inconsequential you believe your activism may be, know deep down that one day it could change the world.

DR. SUSAN LONDON

Middle and High School Psychologist,
Hebrew Academy, Miami Beach

Shining Light in Response to Gun Violence

It is difficult to imagine that the school shooting that took place in 1999 at Columbine High School, an event that seemed completely foreign and like something written out of a horror movie, has become almost commonplace today. We've seen shootings in schools, workplaces, malls, concerts, movie theaters and now in our most sacred of spaces: churches and synagogues. I was a junior in college when Columbine took place, and I remember clearly how my classmates and I sat in our seminar class grappling with the news—numb and dumbfounded that such an event could happen in the United States of America.

Yet almost 20 years later, we still see reports of school shootings. For educators, this creates a conflict: How can we honor and memorialize the victims, educate our students about the world in which we live, while also allowing them to feel that their world is a safe place? It's a delicate tightrope to walk.

At our school, we handle these tragedies by confronting them. We do not treat them just as news stories that we can choose to gloss over. We teach our students that where there is darkness, we must try to shine light. When the shooting took place at Marjory Stoneman Douglas last year, just miles from our own school, our high school students responded. They organized a student-run assembly to memorialize the 17 victims of the shooting. Probably most powerful, the father of Meadow Pollack, who was killed in the Douglas shooting, spoke to our students over speakerphone about the importance of voting and gun control. Our students also initiated a fundraiser by designing a T-shirt that read "Douglas Strong." All of the proceeds from the fundraiser were donated to the Chabad of Parkland, hand delivered by our students.

When another shooting occurred in the Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh, we set up a memorial service and assembly in the middle and high schools to remember the lives of the 11 adults who were murdered. We lit candles, paid tribute to each victim and recited the Kaddish. We also showed the ADL's video titled "Imagine a World without Hate" and used it as a springboard for a deeper conversation about the consequences of hate. Our middle school students demonstrated their caring by sending cards to congregants of the Tree of Life Synagogue. In our elementary school, students created a "Tree of Life" filled with mitzvot performed by students in honor of the victims of this tragedy.

And sadly, it still does not feel like enough: a vigil, a memorial service, an assembly, a T-shirt sale. It feels nothing short of troubling to know that our students are living in a time where a schoolwide memorial service feels familiar. We hope that we have lit our last candle for all of these victims of gun violence, and that is the message our students walk away with as well.

MERYL FELDBLUM

Enhancing Female Leadership in Modern Orthodox Day Schools

The issue of female leadership, or lack of female leadership, in Jewish day schools is complex. Often the hurdles placed before women, or the doors closed to them, aren't clearly visible. But empowering the women in our institutions is not only about fairness and equality; it's about modeling for both male and female students, during their most formative years, that women are valued, have a place at the table, and can and should be leaders. Modeling this lesson through purposeful actions speaks volumes.

Like other independent schools, Jewish day school administration is unbalanced in terms of gender. The head of school position is clearly male-dominated. For 2017-2018, the National Association of Independent Schools reported that only some 36% of NAIS heads are female, despite the disproportionately high number of women who are teachers, still the most likely background for heads. The situation in Jewish day schools is arguably worse, according to past studies, and it needs to be addressed.

Removing hurdles and opening doors to female leadership must always be intentional. Change is not easy to implement. Schools, like all organizations, are rooted in traditions and systems that are complicated, and change will have many and varied consequences, some anticipated and some unexpected.

Addressing this gap is also complicated. I am completing a study examining the experiences of female Judaic studies faculty at Modern Orthodox day schools across the US. They are very aware of existing discrepancies in gender balance in administration and have provided me with the following thoughts and suggestions to help to change the status quo.

SYSTEMS

The lack of women in leadership positions is a systemic problem, which requires systemic changes. Jewish day

schools must institute practices that support women's advancement in the workforce. This process begins with recruitment and hiring.

Word-of-Mouth Hiring

Many day schools do not publicize administrative openings, relying mostly on word-of-mouth hiring practices. Instead of placing ads in local papers or turning to head hunters, school leaders often ask colleagues in the day school world for recommendations when there are openings in the administration. These word-of-mouth practices may not be purposefully discriminatory, but they lead to unintentionally unfair—and potentially illegal—hiring practices all the same.

A *New York Times* article describing the recent trend among major businesses to rely on employee referrals for non-entry level positions pointed out the dangers of this practice: First, people tend to recommend people much like themselves, a phenomenon known as assortative matching. Secondly, 64% percent of employees recommended candidates of the same sex, while 72% favored the same race or ethnicity. Furthermore, according to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, word-of-mouth hiring “in a non-diverse workforce is a barrier to equal employment opportunity if it does not create applicant pools that reflect the diversity in the qualified labor market.” “Word-of-mouth” hiring that results in mostly male applicants is not representative of the

population, and therefore discriminatory. Our Jewish day school leaders and stakeholders must commit to recruitment and hiring practices that don't rely on word of mouth and open the doors to female candidates.

Fair Pay

An AVI CHAI report noted a large discrepancy between male and female administrators:

Gender is a powerful factor in salary determinizations, with women principals being paid significantly below what men earn. ... In their first year of service at their current school, no men earned below \$60,000, while 10% of the women did. At the other end of the pay scale, there were men who earned above \$180,000 in their first year, but no women. Ten percent of first-year women are in the three highest salary categories of \$120,000 or above. The comparable statistic for men is nearly 40%. For principals who have served between five and ten years at their present school, one-quarter of the women were paid above \$120,000, while for men the figure is close to 60%.

These numbers will likely not come as a surprise to those working in the Jewish day school world. When I spoke to women currently working in the day school world, they expressed feelings of frustration, resentment and discouragement because they saw their work and commitment to Jewish education being unappreciated and undervalued. Creating pay scales that ensure fair, transparent and structured salaries would help alleviate this problem.

It is important to remember when creating payment structures that in those communities in which rabbinic ordination is closed to women, they are systematically excluded from moving up the payment ladder. Schools must create avenues that allow for women to earn salary status equivalent to their male rabbinic counterparts and in my opinion, equating a doctorate with semichah is not an equitable solution. Many schools consider semichah equivalent to a doctorate for the purposes of a pay scale, but even according to Yeshiva University, semichah is a master's program.

HR Departments

Jewish schools tend not to have HR departments. While HR departments increase costs, the ancillary benefits of having them could be well worth the investment. Both of the issues mentioned earlier—hiring practices and payment structures—should live within an HR department and not solely with the head of school. Furthermore, HR departments allow for a safe space for the discussion of workplace gender issues. For schools where budgetary restrictions simply won't allow for a true HR department, school leaders must create policies and procedures that are well-communicated, transparent and adhered to strictly.

CULTURE

School culture is difficult to define and thus even more difficult to change. School culture is often a mixture of policies, procedures, rituals, behavior and beliefs. Many of these practices are ingrained and, at the same time, unintentional. It is this mixture that can create an environment that is not conducive for women's advancement.

The Old Boys' Club

Many of the women I spoke to, across many schools in many different areas of the US, felt that their schools' culture excluded them from leadership roles and opportunities. They described a "rebbe culture," which in turn created an "old boys' club." One of the participants in the study explained that many of the rabbis in her school are friends with the all-male administration; they socialize in and out of school, creating a "circle of safety" for the male faculty, and by definition excluding the women. "Old boys' clubs" may seem harmless, but in actuality these groups allow men to network and form relationships that lead to more opportunities. Men in the group naturally get their voices heard more and take part in more important conversations.

What makes "old boys' clubs" complicated is the informal nature of these groups. There is no rule that women cannot join these informal clubs, but the nature of the group excludes women, especially in Orthodox circles where there is a certain expectation of gender separation. School leaders are often unaware of these clubs and the impact they have on women and their careers. In some cases, they are aware but don't know how to address the issue.

There isn't an easy solution, but we can start by defining clear boundaries that separate professional relationships from personal relationships. Because this process lives in the details, the changes may need to be granular. Administrators should avoid office hangout sessions, leave group chats, and even withdraw from fantasy football leagues and other informal groups. Small steps like these will help break down informal groups that have historically excluded women.

The Public Face

Culture lives in the details. A number of interviewees described the all-male face of their school. The faculty who run programs, the guest speakers and the student leaders are all male. While none of these phenomena are instituted policies, they do create an environment that marginalizes both female faculty and students.

When it comes to culture changes, actions speak louder than words. Administrators must go beyond lip service; stating that a school values and appreciates their female faculty is not enough. School leaders need to take steps that build a culture that promotes female leadership. One participant suggested having an "institutional framework in place to counteract the tone, to make this stuff normal." She envisioned a structure in which for every male speaker, there would be a female speaker. If the male principal runs one program, the female associate principal would run the next. Administrators should institute policies that reinforce this behavior among the students, like having male and female student body presidents every year. In essence, schools must "force" a female public face to counteract the historic lack of a female public presence. This change does not have to come at the expense of a male presence—it should be in addition to the male presence.

The avenue to a better future begins with listening. All of the ideas above were compiled from listening to what women had to say about their own experiences. The women in every school will have the best insight into the most practical and impactful changes that can be made in their specific settings. Giving women a voice is the best and easiest first step.

YARON SCHWARTZ
JOSHUA LADON

Teaching Masculinity in an Age of #MeToo

If we were to take masculinity to a doctor, she would likely diagnose it in need of significant social-emotional support. When we look at how men act publicly, be it politicians, soldiers, actors or athletes, we consistently see an aggressive masculinity, indifferent towards emotion, unempathetic, concerned with expressing their dominance over women and other men. This masculinity needs healing. It exhibits symptoms of great distress and pain.

Over the last several years, the Shalom Hartman Institute High School for Boys in Jerusalem has developed a systematic whole-school approach to teaching positive masculinity that strives to enhance the social-emotional growth of the young men in attendance. As an Israeli Orthodox boys middle and high school, it has unique contextual characteristics. While American middle and high schools generally organize along individual student schedules, in which students switch classes every period, in Israeli schools, students spend the majority of time in a single class cohort with a *mechanekeh*—home room educator—who teaches a significant number of their classes. This allows for a more sustained conversation of communal values and group cohesion. Additionally, dealing with masculinity in an Israeli religious setting is informed by the intertwined questions of Zionism, Judaism and machismo. That being said, the extensive nature of the program, rooted in a deep philosophy and pedagogy of teaching a diverse masculinity, is informative. We hope to share these ideas in service of broadening the possibility of teaching healthy masculinity within the Jewish community.

This project emerges from the notion that men and boys, not just women and those who identify as non-cisgendered, are affected negatively by the way masculinity plays out in our society. That is to say, male sexism affects men as well as women or trans individuals. We argue for the teaching of masculinity in service of enabling boys to develop a healthier sense of self, allowing for a fuller sense of one's emotions. While this approach offers a way to teach a masculinity that challenges the dominant expectations for how men should act, it is first and foremost focused on the social-emotional growth of boys.

To teach a healthy masculinity, it is important to understand the contradictory societal expectations for boys. In his article "Real Boys: The Truths Behind the Myths," psychologist William Pollack identifies three myths about boys: 1) Boys will be boys, 2) Boys should be boys, and 3) Boys are toxic. The first myth, boys will be boys, tends to focus on the ways boys' behavior, especially their physicality, is outside of

their control and the control of the adults in their lives. Rather, when boys wrestle, break a window or engage in risky behavior, it is excused with this aphorism. Pollack notes that this adage is not said when a boy runs crying to his parent or brings a present to his teacher. (Quotations below are from Pollack's article.)

The notion of boys will be boys has its roots in ideas about the way testosterone contributes to a natural inclination towards physicality, something that is not supported by scientific evidence. For example, testosterone has been tied to boys' capacity to concentrate during a chess match. In contrast, Pollack argues, that while boys may enjoy certain types of play (large group, hierarchy of rules), the problem with boys will be boys is that it "allows us to shrug off a boy's behavior when it crosses the line from active to aggressive."

The second myth, boys should be boys, assumes that boys should act in a way that is macho and dominant, that boys should not act like girls. "As soon as a boy behaves in a way that is not considered manly, that falls outside the 'Boy Code,' he is likely to meet resistance from society—he may merely be stared at or whispered about... humiliated... get a punch in the gut, or... just feel terribly ashamed." Learning about this begins at a very young age. It begins when we tell little boys to be a big boy or not cry. Telling boys to be boys hardens boys, teaching them to disconnect their emotions from themselves.

Finally, the myth that boys are toxic emerges from the first two but amplifies inseverity. Boys will be boys sees "boys as prisoners of their biological makeup," and boys should be boys confines them to "a gender straightjacket." Given these first two, we also tend to see "something inherently dangerous and toxic about boys—that they are psychologically unaware, emotionally unsocialized creatures." With the increase of mass shootings perpetrated by lonely white men, this idea has become even more ubiquitous. As a result, we forget that boys need to play and experiment. While there are times we say boys will be boys, letting them get away with problematic behavior, at other times, we see boys as toxic, reacting to "boys' childish exploratory

play” as though it was “adult predatory behavior... as though he is a full-fledged aggressor.”

A full response to these myths recognizes that boys can be empathetic, especially when they are nurtured lovingly: “The power of love can dispel the myth that, in boys, nature and nurture are at odds.” For parents and teachers, this is an especially important point. Boys can learn through their parents and mentors how to express empathy, love and care. In addition to strong mentorship, we can support boys’ development by cultivating the notion that there is a diversity to masculinity, there are many ways to be a boy. This allows boys to transcend the fear they have of breaking the boy code and express a vulnerability. Through a fuller sense of masculinity, boys will have a greater capacity to be empathetic with their peers and themselves. Finally, these myths can only be combated if there is recognition that growth takes time, requires making mistakes and figuring things out.

In developing a curriculum to respond to these notions of masculinity within a Jewish school, we propose several steps rooted in a Gender Responsive Pedagogy (GRP), which is a paradigm that encourages educational institutions to strive for justice and full social equality as a holistic reality. Male sexism plays out in the smallest unit of interaction between two men and grows from there, between men and women, between a teacher and his students, and on institutional, structural levels. GRP assumes a need for the entire faculty and staff to be engaged in this educational project. It requires a pedagogy that transcends the distinction between informal and formal learning, and it proposes a new way of reading traditional texts. This type of process, when done in partnership with as many of the staff in school as possible, will enable an end to all types of discrimination and oppression that still exist, and will make all students feel truly loved and safe.

There are three key steps to building a curriculum in this mold. First, faculty and staff need to learn and think about their own notions of masculinity. At the Hartman Boys High School, the first step was to learn and discuss the material with the faculty in advance of any learning with students. Faculty learned most of the material for over a year before it was brought to students. Teachers needed to confront their own conceptions about gender and masculinity before they could teach these values. This project emphasized the role male mentors play in the lives of adolescent students, in shaping their notions about masculinity and helping them work out a healthier sense of masculinity among themselves.

Second, the curriculum should be built to engage both students’ cognitive and social-emotional faculties. Many social-emotional programs ignore the intellectual experiences of students. Students want a serious discussion of the issues that affect their lives and want complex encounters with Jewish sources with media sources, experiential learning and social-emotional activities. In the Hartman curriculum, for example, the seventh grade focuses on the bar mitzvah and its connection to gender. It investigates what it means to be a man according to media, with friends, religiously, as well as expectations of femininity. Throughout the six-year curriculum, there is no taboo that is not explored. To construct a healthy masculinity, we take seriously students’ questions and concerns about sex, body image, violence, friendship with girls, homosexuality, masturbation and pornography.

The third step cultivates students’ capacities to read texts (Jewish, secular, television, film) with an eye to the ways gender is taught in explicit and implicit ways. When one conceptualizes male relationships through the three myths of boys, it becomes difficult not to read the Jewish tradition through this lens. How much of the Talmud tells

of the relationships between men and their students? Consider, as an example, a short story from Brachot 5b about Rabbi Yochanan visiting his student Rabbi Elazar who was ill:

[R. Yochanan] noticed that R. Eleazar was weeping, and he said to him: Why do you weep?

Is it because you did not study enough Torah? Surely we learned: The one who sacrifices much and the one who sacrifices little have the same merit, provided that the heart is directed to heaven.

Is it perhaps lack of sustenance? Not everybody has the privilege to enjoy two tables (lots of food and great riches).

Is it perhaps because of [the lack of] children? This is the bone of my tenth son!

[R. Elazar] replied to him: I am weeping on account of this beauty that is going to rot in the earth.

[R. Yochanan] said to him: On that account you surely have a reason to weep. And they both wept.

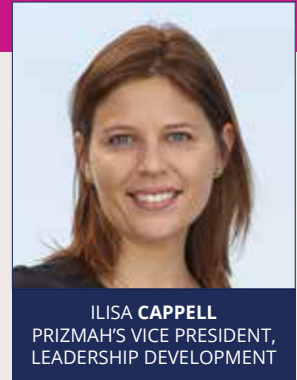
In light of the notion that boys should be boys, what does it mean that R. Yochanan questions his crying? R. Eleazar is ill, lying down; one could imagine R. Yochanan simply entering and joins with Eleazar. This is a sad moment. But his discomfort is made evident through the series of questions he poses and the explanations he gives. Don’t be sad about not learning enough Torah, don’t be sad that you didn’t have enough food, don’t be sad that you didn’t have children (I buried my children!). R. Yochanan gives a litany of reasons not to be sad. Where does his discomfort with tears come from?

This is a text that highlights a view of masculinity that is suspect of male emotion. Only when R. Eleazar responds that he weeps that he will return to dust is there a transformation and the two can cry together. But even this response is telling. He weeps over the loss of his physicality, a loss that is universal to all human beings. He does not express emotion over his fate, only the fate of creation. He cannot express his own regrets and desires.

This text is a short, simple tale of a teacher and his grown student. It is similar to many in the Talmud. It is also a text about how two men act and the capacity for educators to teach masculinity. While the traditional reading of the text focuses on how the Talmud shapes notions of Judaism, this lens shifts the focus of learning toward the way the texts continue to shape our notions of masculinity and how that plays out in the everyday lives of Jewish men.

The challenge in bringing this approach to a broader audience is that teaching about masculinity in an Orthodox Israeli boys school will be different than teaching about the topic in coeducational settings. This context offers a window into thinking about what it means to support boys as they become men and for raising a generation of Jews committed to cultivating safety and justice for all. First, it requires a deep commitment by the faculty and staff to engage their own thinking about gender. Second, it requires a pedagogical approach that transcends the cognitive-experiential divide. Third, it asks all of those involved to take seriously the way they read Jewish texts, using them not as explicit prooftexts but as pathways for larger questions about individual behavior and one’s role in society.

CONDITIONS FOR SUCCESSFUL HEADSHIP



ILISA CAPPELL
PRIZMAH'S VICE PRESIDENT,
LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

Training programs and high-end degrees alone cannot guarantee a head of school's effectiveness and endurance. A study commissioned by Prizmah, conducted by Rosov Consulting with the generous support of The AVI CHAI Foundation, entitled "The Learning Leadership Landscape: Experiences and Opportunities for Jewish Day School Personnel" (prizmah.org/prizmah-leadership-study), found four persistent conditions that make the context of leadership within our day schools so challenging:

Financial and enrollment pressures are typically attributed to the efficacy of the head of school, even when the circumstances are beyond the head's control. For example, a drop-in enrollment may be due to families moving out of town. Rationally, we know the head isn't responsible, and yet the head may well be blamed.

Toxic board cultures. Boards that lack clarity regarding its roles and responsibilities are generally unable to give the head the support he or she needs, and this often leads to toxic board cultures due to unfounded assumptions and unrealistic expectations.

Concentrated rather than distributed leadership. Research and experience demonstrate that successful school leadership teams have various skills, dispositions, and capacities distributed across leadership teams.

It's the Wild West out there. There are few shared standards and expectations across day schools. Our leaders, both lay and professional, need support in giving effective feedback so that they can measure success and identify opportunities for growth.

As a follow-up to the study, Prizmah conducted focus groups with nearly 100 heads of school across the country. This is what we heard:

- Our heads of school are driven by a deep sense that this work is holy and that they can contribute meaningfully to the Jewish present and future.
- There are no dull moments in the life cycle of a school. The headship is in itself an opportunity for creation and creativity, and the complexity of the position is exhilarating.
- Heads experience profound joy in the children and families they serve, in developing leadership teams, and in working with the community. As one head noted, with the same breath, "Some days it is hard to get out of bed" and "I can't think of anything else I would rather do."
- Heads often feel they are required to be an expert in everything (instructional leader, business manager, community builder, and inspirational orator) and simultaneously serve as a role model in the community. The resulting disconnect between expectations and reality often deters heads from voicing their needs. Creating conditions and the space for heads to be vulnerable and speak up when they need guidance is crucial.

- Heads do not work alone and cannot lead alone. They rely heavily on mentors, board members, colleagues, spouses and trusted advisors for support.
- We need to strengthen our leadership and talent pipeline.

The one thing we heard consistently from all heads, across all denominations and school sizes, was how critical the lay-head partnership is to their success. Heads who reported high levels of trust in their boards felt more satisfaction with the work. Successful heads understand their responsibility to work together with the board as a fundamental part of their role and agree that board training is critical.

So yes, continue to invest in the head of school's professional growth and development, but don't stop there. Consider the following:

Invest in board training. Clarity around lay and professional roles and responsibilities goes a long way in ensuring effective boundaries.

Invest in the board-head partnership. Work on building trust. How will you support one another and effectively lead the school community together? What might shift in your practice if lay and professional leaders operated from the premise that one of a lay leader's top priorities was to support the head of school?

Develop intentional practices for board-head communication. Think about how and how often you will communicate with each other. What gets in the way, and what support do you need to be able give and receive feedback? What norms will you establish for communication? For example, many lay/head teams have a rule of "no surprises" to ensure that they keep one another informed so that no one is caught off-guard when issues arise.

Shift our mindset on leadership. Instead of "finding" strong leadership for the school, look to cultivate leaders from within. What would our school cultures need to look like to support our professionals' growth and development? How might our schools be better prepared for leadership succession when they have invested in a culture of growth and development for professional and lay leadership?

Invest in developing your talent pipeline. Prepare ahead, involve the community, and be explicit about roles/responsibilities for succession planning.

These practices are an investment that will pay dividends as you continue to lead your school from strength to strength.

We are excited to report a study in progress to explore what our lay leaders feel they need to be successful in their roles. We look forward to sharing the findings with you.

ORLY NADLER

Engineering STEM Education for Girls

As the director of technology at a premier Modern Orthodox high school for girls, I regularly interfaced with high school girls whose confidence in their use of technology was low. For a few years, we offered Visual Basic, Java, then Python, but no matter which computer programming language we offered, the interest was minimal. One day, a student shoved her laptop towards me in resignation, lamenting that she was simply “not good at this technology stuff.” Her frustration was palpable. At that moment, I determined to find a way to tackle this debilitating mindset towards technology. A thought percolated in my mind: What type of experience would we need to facilitate so that our students would view technology as a valuable tool enabling them to further their reach and realize their unique perspectives?





I discovered a website highlighting the work of creative technologists who used electronics and code to create elaborate works of art. The High Low Tech group's self-proclaimed goal is to "engage diverse audiences in designing and building their own technologies by situating computation in new cultural and material contexts, and by developing tools that democratize engineering." They do so by exploring "the intersection of computation, physical materials, manufacturing processes, traditional crafts and design." Everyday objects intermingling with, and enlivened by, electronics was mind-bending and spectacular.

For example, the Living Wall is a "smart," dynamic wallpaper that can be programmed to monitor its environment and control lighting and sound. It affords a subtle but beautiful way to add computation to an everyday object. Simply touch the wallpaper to turn on a lamp, play music or send a message to a friend. The seemingly ordinary and flat wallpaper becomes "smart" through a paper computing kit whose pieces serve as sensors, lamps, network interfaces and interactive decorations.

Could the fusion of art and computation be the winning combination that would transform girls from passive, reluctant users of technology to active, proud producers? To test, I started a "Tinkering Club" in which we made whimsical electronic projects that were difficult to categorize: musical stairs; paper circuitry menorahs; "about me" animations. I soon realized that the context of creation was more important than the scaffolding of skills. Once students reached a pivotal level of wonder and curiosity, they would push through the inherent complexity with much

more grit and stamina than when presented with a rigorous but dry challenge.

On a quest, I began traveling the country to attend multiple Makerfairs, which are large gatherings of electronic enthusiasts who share their often-peculiar creations. While some of the displays had real-world relevance, the majority were pure fun: a helmet that will direct the wearer through vibrations on each side based on the input of a remote control; slithering robots; fire-shooting contraptions; counterculture DIY retro games. In the broadest sense, Makerfairs are celebrations of the creative spirit of humanity harnessing the power of technology.

As I explored the creative world of computation, I was simultaneously surveying the educational landscape of STEM education. I visited elite private schools, yeshivot with advanced STEM programs and magnet schools. Each time, I was struck by the underrepresentation of girls in the classroom. Teachers were apologetic and explained that they were working on balancing the gender ratio.

In one class where I was introduced as an expert in STEM education for girls, the boys asked me point blank: "Why are girls not into STEM like we are?" When asked how they would answer, they responded, "It's genetic." We know that this common assumption is incorrect. The data is clear: female students' achievement in mathematics and science is on par with their male peers. According to the National Science Foundation, female students participate in high-level mathematics and science courses at rates similar to their male peers, *with the notable exception*

of computer science and engineering. This exception is most likely due to the contextualization of STEM in gender-specific and flat representations. The boys were right; the girls are not into STEM "like they are" because STEM has typically been taught in a very specific, male-gendered way.

This discrepancy permeates even the most progressive publications such as *MAKE* magazine, the publication for the flagship MakerFaire company. Leah Beuchley, a former MIT professor who spearheaded the High Low Tech group there, analyzed the first 36 covers of the magazine and found that the photos portrayed a "very narrow definition" of Making and STEM activities. Of all covers, 53% focused on pure electronics, 31% on vehicles, 22% on robots, 8% on rockets and 5% on music. In a conference address, she pleaded for a wider application of technology that is more than just robots or more male-oriented applications, and could include algorithmically designed pottery or data-visualization through ornate craft. What's more, of the 40 people featured in *MAKE*, 85% have been white men and boys. If more artistic and culturally diverse applications were displayed and if more female role models were portrayed, then women would be able to relate more to STEM professionals and might be more attracted to this innovative work.

Teenage years are often fraught with the need for individuation. I began to entertain the notion that the playful elements found in the Maker movement could be a model that would offer teens a healthy and expressive way to redirect their angst into creative technological contraptions. One way to achieve this is to provide instructions that give just enough direction but do not dictate all the necessary components or steps for the project. For example, when students need to create a moving vehicle, we should provide them with enough room for personalization while simultaneously providing enough scaffolding to minimize frustration.

There must be room for challenge and personalization. I witnessed one student using a small shoebox to build a moving car, which was designed as a Dalmatian dog. In addition to controlling two motors and an ultrasonic sensor, the student wanted to add a wagging tail using a servomotor. Her effort to personalize her vehicle took her to the next level of complexity in her code. She also became so engaged by her creation that she labored over it during class and lunch hours in order to hone her craft to perfection.

One of the most impactful ways of achieving this level of absorption and technological

dexterity is through the focus on student-driven capstone projects, which is the cornerstone of the engineering curriculum provided by CIJE, the Center for Initiatives in Jewish Education. The project lets students create an innovation propelled by student interests. In a recent project, a student who had a blind uncle created a device that would sit on a seeing-eye-dog's collar and alert paramedics if the dog's charge was in physical danger. Students in the CIJE network are supported by an engineering mentor and given funds to purchase an array of components needed to bring their idea to fruition. The project culminates in a celebration that takes place in a large conference center with over a thousand projects displayed. The young engineers must explain and answer questions posed by seasoned professionals in the field.

If the general contextualization of STEM is taught through male-oriented projects and end goals, then it should be no surprise that girls don't buy in. I would also bet that there are many boys who also aren't fully engaged by this approach. Perhaps if STEM conjured up a wider array of possibilities, such as the idea of living wallpaper or decorative wearable technology with easy wins and personalization embedded throughout the learning process, more students will see it as a powerful expressive means. Initially, they might not care enough to sort numbers (a beginner's programming exercise), but they will care enough to add a wagging tail to their contraption. Both exercises will push students to hone their coding skills, but the personalization approach might even give way to a passion.

Research supports the contention that men and woman seem to favor different learning styles, and the didactic approach usually associated with STEM subjects works best for men than for women. Women might opt out of a discipline based on the learning style that is most prevalent in that discipline. It's not due to inability but rather a lack of interest based on how they perceive the learning will take place in the classroom (D'Allegro, Dickinson and Kulturel-Konak, "Review Of Gender Differences In Learning Styles: Suggestions For STEM Education").

Seymour Papert was a mathematician, computer scientist and educator, pioneer of artificial intelligence and, most notably, the creator of the constructionist learning theory. He coined the term "low floors, high ceilings" as a guiding principle in developing educational technologies: allow novices quick and easy wins through low-barrier projects that include the ability to increase the sophistication over time. Mitch Resnick, head of the

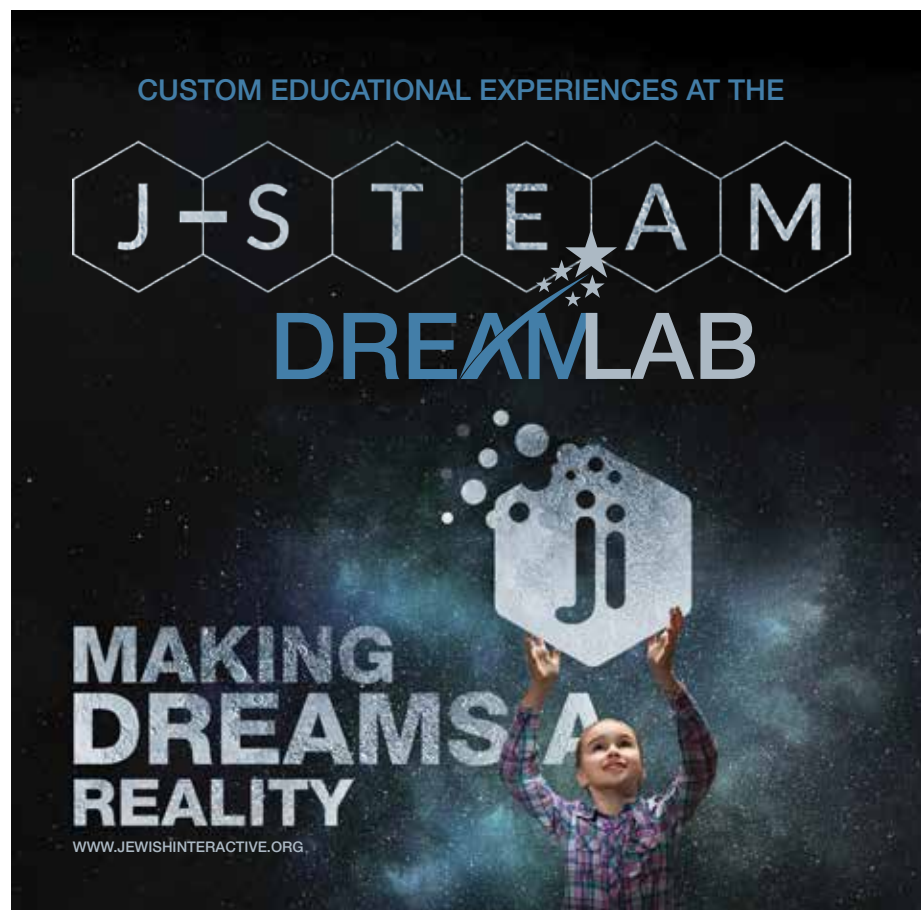
MIT Lifelong Kindergarten group at the Media Lab, adds another important dimension: *wide walls*—a diversity of pathways to engage personal interests with the freedom to explore and tinker in the process.

Learners come with a unique blend of backgrounds and interests, which makes it difficult to craft an equally engaging project for all students. When structuring classroom experiences, we need to allow a diversity of pathways to the project. Wide walls became a guiding design principle for Mitch Resnick and his team. For example, consider the Scratch programming language, which Resnick's team developed. Scratch is explicitly designed so that kids can create a wide range of projects, "not just games, but also interactive stories, art, music, animations, and simulations." This three-pronged approach—low floors, high ceilings and wide walls—greatly enhances student engagement, especially for students who chafe in robot-centric STEM approaches, which is most dominant today.

Paulo Blikstein of Stanford, a researcher of Maker spaces, suggests that educators should think outside of the "STEM Box" and recommends pairing up with teachers

of other disciplines to create powerful units that combine diverse disciplines: biology and engineering, or history and math, for example. This interdisciplinary approach greatly enhances the range of projects that can be created in a Makerspace, and, in the process, allows for the diverse interests of students.

No one truly knows what the future job market will look like, particularly given the anticipated advancements in artificial intelligence. But one thing is for sure: the future is being created by engineers, and the process of engineering the future should be shaped by both males and females. According to Blikstein ("Children Are Not Hackers"), "We have the once-in-a-generation opportunity to establish something truly new in schools, make it sustainable and deeply integrate it into the school day. We have the opportunity to give millions of children a new entry point into the world of knowledge and science, and give them a much richer palette of expressive media for their ideas to come true." With the proliferation of inexpensive electronics, outfitted Makerspaces and wide-walled curricula, we can give girls as well as boys this new entry point.



JASON ABLIN

On Kept Princes, the Bell Curve and Our Boys

Adam is a peacock. He struts through the halls showing his feathers whenever he can. When I walk into a classroom where Adam is, his back is noticeably straight; he sits with seeming attentiveness and some designation of self-worth. He is not tall, but his solid frame gives him the appearance of height. He is capable of having different kinds of conversations than you might from boys his age. He has a biting sense of humor, sees irony all around him and is willing to share his insights.

But with all of Adam's outward appearances of competence and confidence, he is actually quite weak in school. He struggles to complete assignments, and is often unclear about what to do and how to do it. He really needs much support inside and outside the classroom but is unwilling to ask for it. He has a particularly tough time in math.

Adam does not typically get in trouble, but he has one bad habit that lands him in my office on a regular basis: he talks back to teachers and can be confrontational. This year, his math teacher is getting the brunt of Adam's mouth.

Struggling in math places young boys and adolescents in a double bind. Their struggles are not just academic but a particular kind of gender dilemma as well. Boys are *supposed* to be good at math. Math and science *define* them as men. In struggling with these subjects, they have to contend with both the insecurities and failures of the academics and the perceived failure of masculinity. Adam is asking himself, "Is there something wrong with me because I can't do this? My friends all seem really confident in math. Am I like one of those girls who is constantly crying in the hallway because she just failed her math test?"

Adam's teacher is not helping Adam's cause. He rushes through problem sets; he does not check for understanding. Adam is left too embarrassed to ask for support or help. The teacher assumes Adam is getting it because he is not raising his hand. Moreover, the other boys frown on students who slow down the class with "stupid" questions. The teacher does not do enough to silence this form of male-on-male humiliation. Adam, therefore, does not see him as an ally. He takes his feelings, his anxiety and his need to male posture, out on his male math teacher.

"You are the worst teacher in this school," Adam says calmly but with a knowing laugh. What Adam does not know is that I happen to be positioned just outside the door to his classroom and am listening intently to the conversation. The teacher's classroom management skills lack assertiveness and purpose, so I am regularly observing the crucial first 10 minutes of class to give him feedback.

"Everyone knows you can't teach, and I'm failing because of it."

"Adam, can you please take a seat," the teacher says with a rising tone of agitation. Things are going downhill quickly this morning. "Everyone please take out your homework so we can go over the problems from last night."

"I didn't do the f-ing..."

End of conversation.

I enter quickly. Some boys sit petrified; others stare at Adam to see his reaction, while a third group pulls out materials without making eye contact. Adam does not even wait for me to say it. He just picks up his backpack and heads down to my office.

It is now me, Adam and his mother sitting around a conference table. She has had to leave work in the middle of the day. She is not angry or even irritated, just expressing, without words, feelings of exhaustion and helplessness. The first three times Adam was sent to my office for speaking back to adults, she was firmer and more convincing. Adam's parents also do not fit the socioeconomic make up of many

of the school's families. Both work, they barely make enough to pay their bills, and their children are given huge scholarship dollars to attend the school. She looks like she wants to hide beneath the table.

"Adam, the teacher is not the reason you are doing so poorly in math," I start. "You need help and support, which he has offered to you a number of times. You don't show up to his help sessions, and you refuse to put real effort."

"I can do the math," Adam says as if it is biblical truth.

"Then show me." I take out paper and write the problem I saw written on the white board that morning. Adam picks up the pen, adjusts his glasses. He starts the first step of the problem, scratches over a number, picks his head up and looks into the sky as if he is either thinking or praying. Unfortunately, right now, I know that neither will do him much good. I know he cannot do this problem. His mother quickly interjects.

"Mr. Ablin, you know he is quite capable. He can do this work, I'm sure." Adam is now turning red. She tries to touch his face to comfort him. Bad move. He jerks back his head and has an expression on his face of wanting to die at that moment. "Everything is going to be great, sweetie. Don't worry. I know. Your dad and I think you're going to be something special."

Adam's mom is merely articulating what young boys and adolescents face as the fundamental gender dilemma: that they are somehow going on to greater things, to conquer the world. Boys are destined. Hard work and determination are an afterthought. I believe that boys, as young as infants, spend a good part of their childhood being admired and praised as much or more than loved and engaged emotionally. They are inheritors of the kingdom, and because of it, they are told that there is something almost automatically linked to success in their DNA. They are kept princes.

They are *kept* princes because most of these boys will eventually discover that this is not the way the real world works. Outside of the bubble lies failure, falling down, struggle and finding yourself around people who are as good or much more talented and hardworking. In other words, the ground begins to move very quickly underneath them. And boys do many, many things over the course of a day at school to try to keep this ego construct intact. They act out in class, they are less likely to follow rules, they draw everyone's attention and energies to them in all sorts of positive and negative ways. When measured, they receive more than triple the amount of attention from teachers in classrooms than girls, simultaneously creating another gender problem.

So, Adam, under the gazing eyes of the perpetrators of this mythology, his mother and his father in absentia, is struggling under two burdens. One, he cannot do the math problem; two, if he admits it, if he makes himself vulnerable and open to addressing his difficulty with math, so that the entire male mythology needs to be rewritten. What he fears is that what he has been told about his very nature, even his very biology, is false, which it is.

Do I think Adam can, ultimately do the math? Absolutely. But he has to *do* the math. Boys' sense of their self-worth depends largely on what they accomplish. There is nothing written in some big book somewhere that boys need to be accomplished in math in order to lead a meaningful life.

And the data no longer supports claims of male superiority—in fact, much more startling realities exist. American males occupy the top 10% of the bell curve in terms of math achievers; however, through awareness and increased access, women have thankfully closed this gap, showing over the past 40 years that the arguments over DNA versus effort, interest and self-perception is essentially over. Girls and women have shown a clear ability in math and math-related fields. Our lack of focus on the entire biological ecosystem of school has left boys at the bottom half of the bell curve of not only literacy skills but math as well, by percentages as high as 26% to 29% in both disciplines (Halpern, Wai, Saw, “A Psychobiosocial Model,” in *Gender Differences in Mathematics*).

In fact, by maintaining and supporting the myth of the kept prince, we perpetuate all sorts of other kinds of potential harm and havoc in our societies because of the deferential and overly admiring/posturing toward boys. Where does male anger, resentment, rage and aggression come from? What are the origins of male superiority? If you are told you are superior from environmental and cultural cues all the time for no reason, then the results are clear and fairly self-fulfilling. Males are much more likely than not to hear black-and-white assessments such as “school is just not for him” or “he just doesn’t ‘do’ school.” The lashing out over failed promises and crumbling male self-perception are real, dangerous and damaging to all of us. With almost 90% of violent crime in this country perpetrated by men (according to the CDC), we are looking at a culturally generated human health crisis. Upwards of half of the American male prison population has undiagnosed learning disabilities. By not teaching boys to be accepting of help, vulnerable and open to support, we limit their access to potential economic aspirations and put them at risk and vulnerable as adults.

What are the results of all this predestination for our boys? Largely, it is confusion and isolation and frustration. As it was for Adam, exposure of this myth is frightening and scary. A boy’s sense of reality is so conflicted that frustration mounts. And, for many young men, it means veering away from all sorts of endeavors because they may meet obstacles and challenges which are not overcome with ease and a sense of preordained certainty. For boys, the danger is that the entire narrative of male identity, built up so carefully but falsely over the years, is a fraud—and then, who am I? How do I define myself? How can I be so exposed and called out for not being what I was meant to be? Whoever told Adam that he was first going to have to work his tail off to do well or even just adequately in math? Quite the opposite. Our kept prince has no clothes.

Boys need to be guided and nurtured by the evidence they provide, their accomplishments or failures based on what they produce, not what we think they should produce. I witness this all the time in schools. Teachers are much more likely to say to boys than girls, “You are more capable than what you are showing me.” Who says? Why are boys presumed to be able or capable of doing anything in school or in life for that matter without demonstrating it? Instead, teachers need to say, “You rushed through this and it shows. Try it again.”

This is also why, I believe, boys love being on sports teams. Sports and being on a team become, in a positive way, narrative and myth busters. Coaches measure their players in small successes and failures, and what you see is what you get. There are few presumptions, at the outset, about whether boys will be successful or not. Sure, some kids are bigger or faster or have more refined motor skills, but for coaches, attitude, hard work, determination and, yes, grit are much more accurate indicators of success.

Boys are held accountable for what they do. There are few, if any, free passes. You miss a practice, you are in the doghouse and do not get to play. You work hard and show teamwork and improvement, there are clear accolades for your efforts and you get to play more. And the boys love it. When I ask them about their experiences and we get past the clichés, boys talk about being able to prove themselves, they like how hard work leads to success that they can see, and they can feel it is something real, not a made-up fantasy.

And parents? The supportive ones let their boys fall down, demand that they show up at practices on time and consistently, and if they are going to sit on the bench all season, it is a good lesson in character and realistic expectations. The challenging parents are constantly looking to reinforce the myth of inherited greatness. They want their child to be the exception, because their boy certainly must be somehow exceptional. The rules do not apply because, look at him, isn’t he already wonderful and worthy and talented? Why aren’t they getting playing time or starting? So what if he missed a practice? And the toughest: What do you mean he didn’t make the team?

In these circumstances, boys find themselves torn in a thousand directions, not wanting to be disrespectful to their parents, wanting to fit in on a team and be accepted, and not wanting to challenge the myth that they are special, chosen, always worthy. The results are a false sense of personhood, of self. By defining the male identity by the myth of the kept prince, we steal his dignity and replace it with a facade, ready to crumble at the first real test or obstacle. When we put him in a gendered box in school, at home and throughout his environment, we do not allow him to build a set of tools to bring his real aspirations to life, no matter what they may be.

Parents and teachers need to ban the dead-end language of *smart* and *gifted* and *capable* from their vernacular, particularly when it comes to boys. It creates what Carol Dweck at Stanford calls a static mindset and reinforces a type of gender bias that stays with them for a lifetime. It is an unfair burden that limits young boys from seeking help when they need it and, instead, gives them a sense of grandiosity, which is false and ultimately debilitating.

Teachers can also do more to take control of their classrooms, exert more confidence and not let outside influences interfere with their work with our Adams. We can certainly begin by not holding our boys in such high regard where they cannot even see the ground underneath their feet. We should take some of the wisdom of coaches. Let them scrape their knees, get upset, work hard enough where we can see them sweat and then bear witness to their true growth as a cause of celebration.

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PRIZMAH

Center for Jewish Day Schools

JORDAN HERSKOWITZ

Creating a More Welcoming and Inclusive Space for LGBTQ Youth

At Golda Och Academy, we have made strides over the last 10 years to make our school community a more welcoming, safe and inclusive environment. Yet while students and faculty felt that they were open to all, regardless of sexual orientation, we had no students or faculty who were comfortable being out at school.

In 2012, a student whose sibling was gay started a Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA), a student-led club that provides a supportive environment for LGBTQ youth. The GSA began by running campaigns around the school focusing on speaking kindly to one another and not making derogatory, anti-gay remarks. This soft approach of talking about LGBTQ issues in school met with acceptance, but the club members had higher ambitions: to get all students talking about ways they could help create a more inclusive learning environment.

The next year, I directed *The Laramie Project*, a play by the Tectonic Theater Project about the brutal attack and murder of college student Matthew Shepard because he was gay. Aside from being a powerful piece of dramatic literature, the production allowed our school to send a bigger message to our community and confront these issues in a creative way. GOA was the first Conservative

Jewish day school to put on this production. We made sure our impact was seen and heard widely. We included messages from the Association for Jewish Theatre, the Tyler Clementi Foundation, Straight but not Narrow and the mayor of Jersey City, all of whom offered their congratulations and appreciation to GOA for putting on this production.

The performances were paired with talkbacks to discuss the play's themes and how they relate to the LGBTQ inclusion work we had started working on at GOA. These panels included gay GOA alumni, Jewish community leaders and rabbis, and representatives from local LGBTQ organizations. Making the performance an educational experience for the audience helped support our school's inclusion efforts.

In order to make bigger strides and lasting change, we realized we needed outside support beyond that of our administration and board. Although we had a few LGBTQ

parents and faculty, we had no out students. Our administration was troubled by this juxtaposition. Why were our inclusion efforts not correlating to students feeling safe to come out in school?

Through connections made after *The Laramie Project*, our school was accepted into the Keshet-RAVSAK School Leadership Project, which gave us a year of support to make concrete changes for LGBTQ inclusion. By partnering with Keshet, an organization that promotes LGBTQ equality in Jewish life across a variety of organizations, we were carefully guided as to how to make this goal possible.

Our work with Keshet began with an institutional self-assessment, which asked us questions about our educational programming and organizational policies and culture. This inventory was helpful for our school to see that our programming was starting to be inclusive and celebratory of LGBTQ, but our policies and culture were lacking. Over the next year, we began looking at these pieces both individually and within a larger school context. We set up an LGBTQ Faculty Inclusion Committee, which included LGBTQ faculty and allies—teachers, counselors and administrators—from both our lower and upper school campuses. Through the faculty lens, we learned that a lot of what the administration thought was apparent in our inclusion efforts was not clear. A new focus became bringing the faculty into the work so that they became strategic partners in making classroom spaces safer and more welcoming.

Our yearlong work with Keshet included a summit, where we met with other Jewish day schools to discuss these issues and learn how schools are approaching them. Keshet paired us with a coach who checked in with us monthly and offered advice. Keshet’s manager of education and training made a few site visits throughout the year, which included a parent education night entitled “Raising Children in a Community Committed to Inclusion and Respect.”

Through the School Leadership Project, we changed our mindset from a reactive one (“What do we do when...?”) to a proactive one (“What can we change now to make students/faculty/parents more comfortable in the future?”). We started with updates to our policies, like making our dress code gender neutral, and then expanded to physical changes, by adding all-gender bathrooms and “Safe Space” signs outside the door of every classroom. The work was accompanied by educational sessions with our community. Keshet helped us manage all of these moving

parts to make sure our changes would be sustainable and long lasting.

For the most part, these changes met with little opposition. A few students and parents voiced concern when we participated in the Day of Silence, the Gay Lesbian School Educational Network’s national program, in which students opt to take a vow of silence to represent the silencing of LGBTQ students. These moments were difficult and tested us, but our school remained grounded to the goal we originally set: to make GOA a more welcoming and inclusive community to all, no matter one’s sexual orientation or gender expression.

A culminating piece of our inclusion work came at the start of last school year, when a high school student came out as transgender. In an email to her grade, she wrote: “As I come out to you with this information, I want you to know that I am not changed. I am still the same person I was before, but I am attempting to achieve a more comfortable environment for myself.”

The student navigated her new identity within our school on a day-to-day basis. Together

with her parents, our administration worked on finding ways to make her comfortable while continuing our efforts to make the school inclusive for all. We found a big hurdle to be using proper language and terms in relation to the student’s gender expression, so we had a faculty learning session to debunk and educate each other about these terms and discuss ways to make both this student and other students questioning their identities feel comfortable inside and outside of the classroom. In preparation for our school’s senior spring semester in Israel, we met with students and parents to go over what accommodations, like rooming, would be made.

We are blessed that our Jewish teachings and school values allowed a student to come out in high school and become more comfortable in her own skin. All children have journeys of self-discovery, and it’s through the support of our entire community—students, parents, faculty and staff—that they find their true selves. The student’s decision to come out provided a powerful moment for our school, and we are hopeful that our inclusion efforts continue so more students feel safe to express their true, authentic selves.

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BRITAIN'S CHIEF RABBI
EPHRAIM **MIRVIS**

Statement on Homosexuality in Jewish Schools

In this important declaration, Rabbi Mirvis lends his stature within the Jewish world to support the inclusion of LGBTQ+ students in Jewish schools and outline the religious foundations for such an approach. His statement offers guidance to school leaders in both the ways that they approach this population of students and how they choose to frame their approach in policies and communications, within and beyond the school walls.

A priority for every school is the wellbeing of its students. Numerous professional and lay leaders of our schools and many rabbis have shared with me their view that there is an urgent need for authoritative guidance that recognizes the reality that there are young lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT+) students in our schools to whom we have a duty of care.

While many such students are thriving in Jewish schools, there are many others who endure deep unhappiness and distress due to the mistreatment and hurt they experience. Young LGBT+ people are particularly vulnerable to bullying and harm, as are children of LGBT+ parents.

It is of great importance that all members of staff should have the knowledge, skills and confidence to address the needs of these pupils and their families, providing support and guidance in a Torah framework.

To our great regret, without appropriate measures in place, harm has too often been caused in our schools and this is a problem that persists today. Orthodox schools have understandably found it difficult to engage with LGBT+ issues.

Headteachers, teachers, lay leaders and rabbis feel an urgent responsibility to put in place effective measures to prevent the harmful effects of bullying, name-calling and insensitivity.

There is also a need to provide appropriate pastoral support to those who seek it, all within the parameters of Halakhah (Jewish law), our Jewish values and ethos and current regulatory requirements.

With this in mind, I consider it a *chiyyuv* (obligation) to provide appropriate direction to our schools and to ensure that rabbis and other suitable members of staff are on hand to provide support and guidance to our students.

As challenging as the task might be, and it is exceptionally challenging, I believe that failure to address it at all amounts to an abrogation of our responsibility to the Almighty and to our children.

We are, of course, aware of the Torah's prohibitions here, including Leviticus 18:22, but when homophobic, biphobic and transphobic bullying is carried out with "justifications" from Jewish texts, a major *chillul Hashem* (desecration of God's name) is caused.

"Do not stand idly by your fellow's blood." Leviticus 19:16

The Talmud (Sanhedrin 73a), explains that this verse teaches us that if one sees a person in a life-threatening situation, one has a *chiyyuv*, an obligation, to do something in order to save them. Note that the Torah does not merely consider acting in such a case to be commendable or ideal—it is an absolute obligation.

Any person who doubts there are young LGBT+ people in our schools who have been left feeling so isolated that their very lives are in danger, has simply failed to grasp the reality confronting some of our students. Research by Stonewall indicates that 45% of transgender young people have attempted to take their own life and 22% of lesbian, gay and bisexual pupils have done the same.

Of course, not all LGBT+ students will feel so maligned or suffer intolerably at the hands of bullies, but it is clear that many do. The evidence is that distress and harm would be reduced if communities and schools were more understanding of the needs and life experiences of LGBT+ young people.

There are many Jewish values, expressed through good *middot* (character traits), which apply equally to our conduct regarding each and every one of us, such as *ahavat Yisrael* (love of a fellow-Jew), the *pintele yid* (the spark of holiness in all of us) and the *tzelem Elokim*: the image of God in which we are all created. No one should be hurt by breaches in *shmirat halashon* (careless speech) or excluded through lack of *kevod habriyot* (respect for other people).

These are all concepts that can be promoted as part of a wider culture of care for every individual in our schools. We can foster a joined-up approach where *kodesh* teachers, rabbis and *rebbeztins* work together with other departments to deliver a sensitive, balanced approach to those who are discovering their identity.

All young people, regardless of sexuality or gender, should know that if they approach their *rabbi*, *rebbeztin* or Jewish studies teacher, they will find a listening ear, understanding and pastoral support within a Torah framework.

"You shall not wrong [tonu] one another and you shall fear your God, for I am the Lord your God." Leviticus 25:17

The Mishnah explains that just as there is a concept of *ona'ah*, wronging another, in our business practices, so too there is a concept of *ona'ah* with our words.

Emerging from this, if one knows that a particular subject or

form of words is likely to cause pain to another but chooses to go ahead and use those words nonetheless, one is guilty of *ona'at devarim*.

The *Sefer Hachinuch* (the 13th century Book of Education) characterizes the prohibition as follows: "Do not say hurtful or painful words to another, against which they cannot stand." None of our pupils should have to face such unbearable treatment. Today, we refer to this behavior as bullying and it is completely forbidden.

It is also forbidden to inadvertently cause people pain, even where the intention was to be constructive. The Talmud gives an example from a different context: when speaking to someone who is experiencing personal grief, one may not say to them, "If you had only been a better person spiritually, perhaps this suffering may not have befallen you."

This example makes it clear that even with the best of intentions, one can inadvertently cause great pain. Whether as a result of insensitivity or ignorance, this is still *ona'at devarim*.

This lesson is particularly instructive in the context of the way that teachers regard LGBT+ students. A teacher might believe that they are addressing students with all due sensitivity, but without recognizing LGBT+ issues and the life experiences of a young LGBT+ person growing up in the Jewish community, it is possible—and indeed likely—that they will cause physical and spiritual harm, potentially driving young people away from Judaism.

Thus, it is crucially important for students and staff alike to be fully aware of the impact of their words and actions on others. This can be suitably addressed with proper leadership, with clear policies in place and with appropriate training and support for staff.

"Love your fellow as yourself." Leviticus 19:18

The famous teaching of Hillel, based on this commandment, "Do not do to others that which you would not wish them to do to you," highlights the critical importance of empathy in Jewish tradition and that sensitivity to the feelings of everyone, including LGBT+ people, is a core element of our Torah way of life.

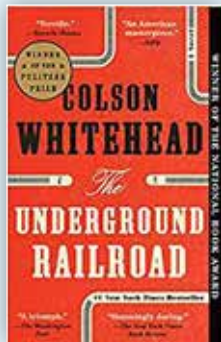
Young LGBT+ people in the Jewish community often express feelings of deep isolation, loneliness and a sense that they can never be themselves. Many are living with the fear that if they share their struggles with anyone, they will be expelled, ridiculed and even rejected by family and friends. They may even be struggling with a loss of *emunah* (faith, trust in God) and the fear of losing their place of acceptance and belonging in the Jewish community.

I hope that this document will set a precedent for genuine respect, borne out of love for all people across the Jewish world and mindful of the fact that every person is created *betzelem Elokim*, in the image of God.

This has been adapted from The Wellbeing of LGBT+ Pupils: A Guide for Orthodox Jewish Schools. The full guide is available from <http://www.chief Rabbi.org/lgbtwelfare>.

ON MY NIGHTSTAND

BRIEF REVIEWS OF BOOKS THAT PRIZMAH STAFF ARE READING

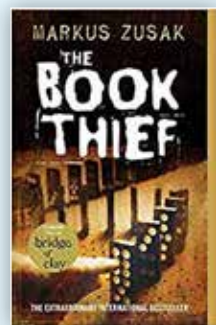


Underground Railroad Colson Whitehead

Colson Whitehead's courageous novel takes us on a harrowing journey, in search for freedom, through the antebellum South. Our protagonist, Cora, begins her life as a slave in Georgia, and with the help of a new friend and fellow slave, Caesar, they bravely set out in search of the Underground Railroad—and the hope of a free life.

This book is terrifying, engrossing, optimistic, disturbing, enlightening and chilling—all at the same time. An important portrayal of American history, this is a must-read book.

Erin Tasmin



The Book Thief By Markus Zusak

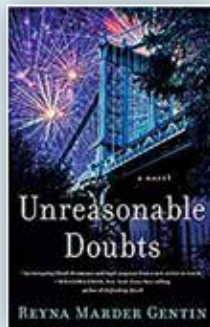
This book has spent 10 years on *The New York Times* Bestseller List and is the winner of the National Jewish Book Award, and after reading it, I understand why. The story takes place in Germany, starting in 1939, and is told from the perspective of an unexpected being, Death. Death encounters a young girl, Liesel Meminger, when she is on her way to live with a foster family, since her mother can no longer

take care of her due to life circumstances and the poor conditions for the average citizen in Germany at that time.

Liesel's foster father, Hans Hubermann, is a WWI veteran who befriended a Jewish man, Erik Vandenburg, during the war. Erik's son, Max Vandenburg, unexpectedly shows up on their doorstep one night, and the family ends up taking this young Jewish man into their home to hide and care for while the country sinks further into the Holocaust.

The characters are so well developed that you feel like you know them and become invested in their lives. It is hard not to emotionally feel for them as the events of WWII evolve. I have never read a book with such an interesting narrator.

Lauren Stanley



Unreasonable Doubts By Reyna Marda Gentin

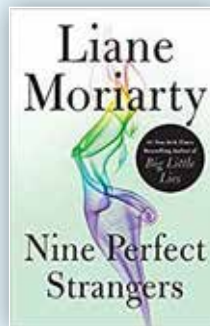
Liana Cohen is at a crossroads in her life. Once a young and idealistic public defender in New York City, she's now experiencing a professional crisis of faith, questioning the innocence of most of her former clients and the purpose of her work. She's been dating corporate lawyer Jakob since law school and has recently become interested in Jewish life on the Upper West Side of Manhattan. Jakob is convinced that Liana

will make a perfect life partner; Liana isn't quite sure and has told her friends that she's giving herself until her thirtieth birthday to decide whether or not to marry him.

Gentin really did spend several years as a NYC public defender, and her ability to convey the nuances and ambiguities of the job is evident throughout the book. Liana's friend and workmate, Deb, understands that Liana needs to work on a case that will reinspire her passion for the work. Deb hands her an appeal case involving a convicted rapist named Danny Shea, who is young, handsome and unusually articulate. He insists that he is innocent, and Liana starts to believe him. She becomes obsessed with Shea, on both a professional and personal level.

For a first-time author, Gentin has a unique ability to tell two concurrent stories—one of suspense, the other of one woman's attempt to balance career, tradition and family. It is an engaging story about coming of age and of maturity.

Dan Perla



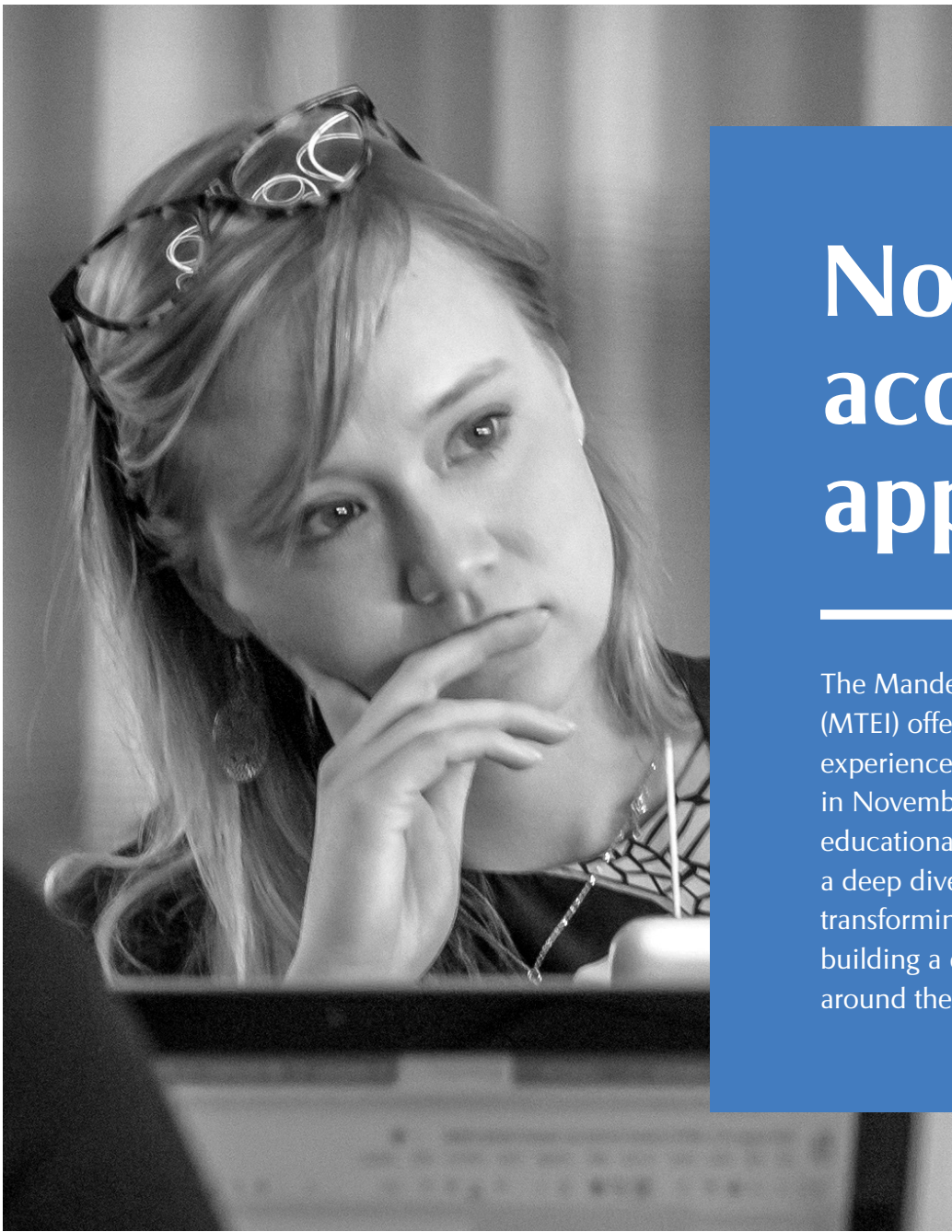
Nine Perfect Strangers by Liane Moriarty

If you enjoy books with multiple storylines and points of view, a plot where a bunch of random characters are stuck somewhere and you get to watch them interact, and plenty of good old drama, then definitely read this.

The book features a colorful cast of nine characters: a middle-aged romance writer, a gay family lawyer, a divorced single mother, and a couple and their daughter dealing with

a tragedy, to name some—who come to Tranquillum House, a health resort that promises to “transform their lives.” They are indeed transformed, but in a very different way than they imagined. Characters are very well developed, and even the antagonist is fun to read about. The book is funny, thought-provoking and so scandalous, I couldn't keep from making my shocked face while reading.

Esther Muslimova



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