Spotlight on:
Media and Technology in Jewish Education

I. Media and Technology in Education — Past and Present

"Is technology computers? Is it multimedia? Is it calculators? Is it the result of rewiring school buildings to make them Internet accessible? The correct answer to each of these questions is — Yes — and much, much more." (Dugger, 2000)

The Jewish education landscape is changing with the use of technology and media. Many Jewish schools have invested in computers, labs, media studios, wireless infrastructure, and more. Jewish communities have invested in a variety of distance learning programs for Jewish education so that high quality online learning can reach Jews everywhere. New media and technology initiatives are constantly being developed to improve Jewish education. With each initiative comes great anticipation of forward thinking change that will make Jewish education better.

II. Who Uses It — The Jewish Educational Community

Statistics reveal that household income of Jewish homes is, on average, higher than that of non-Jewish homes. Households with higher income levels own more technology and media devices, including: television sets, DVD players, VCR players, computers, handhelds, video game consoles, and radios. Educational technology, described as the use of these technologies for an educational or learning purpose, has grown immensely in the schools and homes.

The Jewish educational community — and how it uses technology — is no different than the secular world. Educators, students, parents, teachers, administrators, and clergy all use technology for a variety of purposes, whether for teaching in the classroom, communicating through email, or developing websites for the community. If Jewish education is to be effective and engaging, it must harness these technologies to their fullest to bridge and foster community, improve communication, and enrich education.

III. What is Happening: Integration of Media and Technology in Jewish Education

JESNA, with other key partners in Jewish education, is advancing the integration of media and technology in a variety of ways. The following initiatives exemplify only a few of the ways that media and technology are being used in impactful and meaningful ways to meet the needs of communities — locally and nationally.

A. Professional Development for Jewish Educators

Technology is making training in Jewish education more accessible through distance learning. JESNA's recently published *Survey of Distance Learning* (2003) highlights key programs that offer accredited courses, M.A. degrees, and/or online certificate programs in Jewish education. These programs are delivered by means of web technologies and video-conferencing. Such courses allow Jewish educators to advance their learning even if they are in far flung communities or have limited time availability.

B. Creating a Community of Learners

Video and web conferencing allows learners to transcend time and distance to connect with Jewish students and teachers in communities throughout the world. For example, the Jewish Agency for Israel created an interactive Tu B'shevat Seder that connected schools in Atlanta, Los Angeles, Montreal, New York and Israel.

C. Strengthening a Resource Network

Some Jewish communities have a resource center dedicated to supporting their schools and educators, while other — mainly smaller — communities are limited in staff and space for resource centers. To facilitate the sharing of

resources across the field, JESNA publishes a quarterly newsletter, *Media Meida* (Meida = information in Hebrew). This newsletter reaches communities — small and large — with the latest developments and resources in media and technology in Jewish education. JESNA also convenes the Jewish Educator's Network at the National Education Computing Conference (NECC) each year, bringing together a cadre of educators at the nations' largest educational technology conference.

IV. Challenges of Integrating Educational Technology in Jewish Education

There are numerous obstacles to integrating technology and media in Jewish education. However, the growth of schools using media and technology has allowed educators, teachers, and communities to begin to discover ways to overcome these challenges.

A. Small Market Distribution

Although schools and teachers need and want high quality Jewish educational media and technology products, the limited demand of the marketplace for these products is rarely sufficient to warrant the financial investment needed to develop and produce high quality Judaic products, without outside support.

Connected to the small market for Jewish software is a supplier shortage of quality products that are specifically designed for Jewish educational settings that have the level of sophistication and support characteristics of products from the secular world. The lack of software presents a challenge — and opportunity — to use already existing, secular, software effectively within Jewish education. For instance, Jewish schools apply software such as Microsoft Office, PowerPoint, iMovie, and Inspiration Software to Jewish content, producing powerful and engaging learning projects and activities.

B. Technology Planning

Many Jewish schools have purchased computer hardware that is not being utilized optimally or, at worst, is gathering dust. All too often, this is because the schools lack a cohesive plan for how it will be used and how to integrate it with existing curricular goals and programs. Effective use of technology demands that schools develop clear visions and goals for the use of technology, and plan realistically for its implementation.

JESNA's publication "Technology Planning 101," a

resource for schools and technology coordinators and/or planners at schools, outlines the major steps to building an effective technology plan from which the school and community will benefit. These steps include:

➔ *Technology Committee:* forming a planning committee of key stakeholders and knowledgeable experts.

➔ *Learning Objectives:* Setting educational objectives — and how they could be accomplished with technology. Consider building into these objectives an assessment program to review whether these objectives were met.

➔ *Technologies for Learning:* Differentiate computer literacy (acquiring computer skills) and the use of technology as a tool to access and engage with content.

➔ *Computer Skills:* Skill sets should be developed for students, faculty, and staff. These should be shared with the community at large so that parents can understand the skill set needed.

➔ *Environmental Scan:* Review existing technology and how they are being used to accomplish goals.

➔ *Models of Technology:* Review models of technology. Examples include computer labs, cluster of computers in classrooms, handheld programs, laptop programs, etc.

➔ *Professional Development:* Address issues of staff training. Provide a means for ongoing development. If possible, consider providing equipment for them to use technology for their personal productivity.

➔ *Maintenance and Upgrades:* Address issues of maintenance and future developments in order to provide accurate budget projects for technology investments.

This resource can be found on JESNA's website at: http://www.jesna.org/pdfs/mt_techplan.pdf

C. Information Literacy and Training

Jewish educators (like their counterparts in other settings) are challenged to incorporate new technologies in their practice. Teachers — who did not grow up using these technologies themselves — have a steep learning curve. Teachers were not trained in ways to integrate technology in the classroom; this makes them unsure or intimidated about how to use general applications (such as word processing), online learning such as Web quests,

presentation-building software like PowerPoint, or web design programs such as HyperStudio or FrontPage. Studies show that teachers with fewer years of teaching experience (especially younger teachers) and those with more hours of professional development are better prepared to use computers and the Internet for classroom instruction. Teachers without recent professional development are more likely to report that they do not feel at all prepared to use computers and the Internet in classrooms compared to teachers who received one or more hours of professional development. Technology innovation, the way teachers use technology to be more innovative and creative with their lessons, is an attainable goal with adequate support and professional development. Often the question is not whether computers improve student learning, but whether *the way in which the computers are used* improve student learning. Technology cannot be successfully integrated in Jewish education programs without appropriate professional development to help teachers and administrators develop comfort and competency. Teachers need the time and opportunity to develop these competencies, as well as ongoing mentoring and support.

V. JESNA — Addressing the Challenges

Interest in the use of technology to enhance and support Jewish learning is steadily increasing among innovators and visionaries in Jewish education. JESNA is dedicated to working to provide the necessary best practices, events, and resources to ensure the consistent use of technology in education to achieve Jewish education excellence. What is needed? There is a need for:

➔ a series of high quality, innovative products that respond to the complex realities of Jewish learning and teaching.

➔ a group of leaders to pave the path towards making the use of technology in Jewish education and everyday occurrence.

➔ standards of technological literacy to be applied consistently among all Jewish schools.

➔ a leading organization to help communities develop technology as a tool for all aspects of Jewish education, whether through online courses, educator recruitment, or community technology programs.

➔ a national Center for Jewish Educational Technology to provide the dynamic, self-renewing infrastructure that is essential for developing and coordinating new initiatives to transform the landscape of Jewish learning in the digital age.

JESNA's involvement in partnering to bring high quality online professional development courses and programs are steps towards creating the needed network and leaders who will continue to pave the path of improvement in Jewish education with media and technology. JESNA's newsletters and online resources are a strong foundation for being the online resource center for information on many aspects of Jewish education, including educational technology. And JESNA's role as a convener stands ready to be the foundation from which to build a Center for Jewish Educational Technology.

High quality Jewish education can be achieved through innovative use of media and technology. The possibilities of what can be accomplished have only begun to be realized.

For additional information on how JESNA can help you make a difference in Jewish education, technologies, and media, please contact JESNA's Information Solutions Hotline at 212-284-6897 or email questions@jesna.org.

These Spotlight papers have been prepared by JESNA to provide funders and other community leaders with a brief overview of important areas in Jewish education.

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