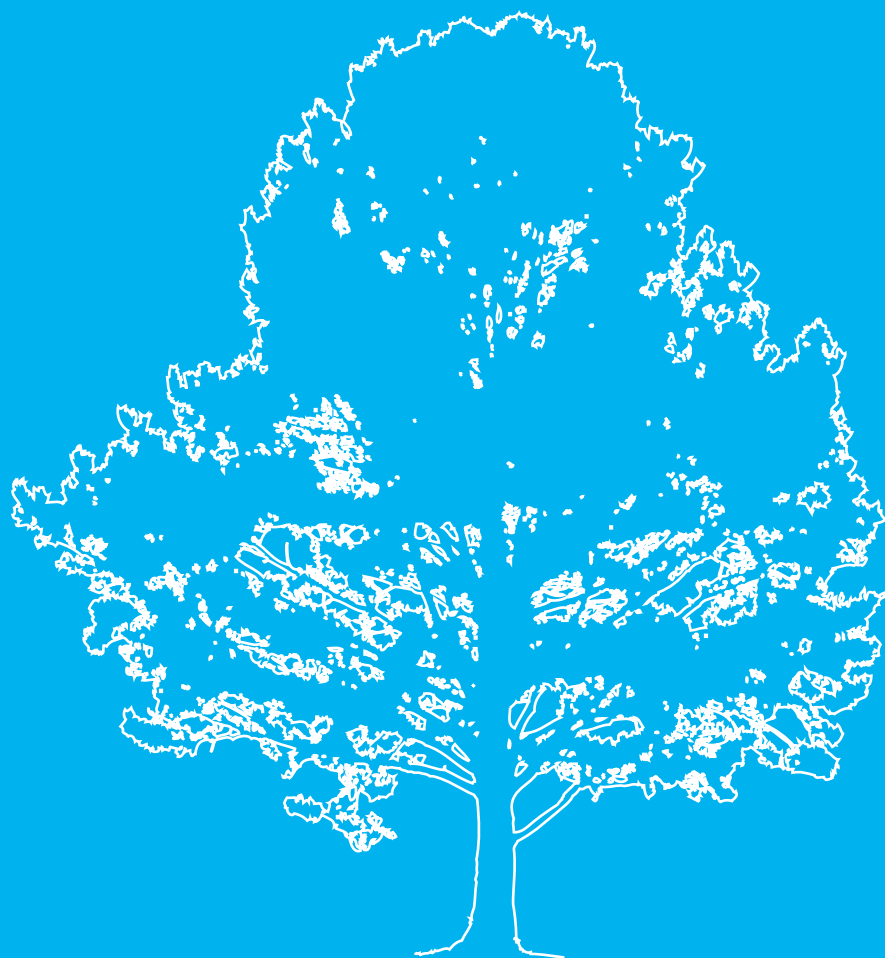


Redesigning Jewish Education for the 21st Century:

A Lippman Kanfer Institute Working Paper



LIPPMAN KANFER
INSTITUTE

THE LIPPMAN KANFER INSTITUTE:

An Action-Oriented Think Tank for Innovation in Jewish Learning and Engagement

Jewish education is the primary vehicle through which the Jewish community ensures its continuing vitality. Dramatic demographic, sociological, cultural, technological and organizational changes that have taken place in society and in Jewish life over the past quarter century call for equally dramatic changes in how Jewish education is organized, practiced, and delivered in 21st century North America.

In order to achieve such changes — changes that by and large have not yet been implemented widely and, in some cases, not even imagined — Jewish education must:

- Identify where innovation is required,
- Capitalize on creative ideas that exist within the field of Jewish education,
- Cultivate ideas from fields beyond Jewish education, and
- Systematize the development and dissemination of promising solutions.

The Lippman Kanfer Institute: An Action-Oriented Think Tank for Innovation in Jewish Learning and Engagement responds to this need. The Lippman Kanfer Institute focuses on infusing innovation into the Jewish educational system. The Institute identifies and disseminates new ideas, new thinking, new practices, and new organizational designs to keep Jewish education relevant and effective in a changing world.

The Lippman Kanfer Institute brings new thinking to important problems like the limited and episodic nature of educational participation among many Jews; the failure to build powerful synergies among multiple forms of education; and the untapped potential of technology, the arts, social action and other media for Jewish communication, self-expression and engagement. It maintains a vigorous connection with front-line practitioners and draws on and seeks to enhance innovative work already underway that promises to dramatically improve Jewish education's reach, impact, and effectiveness. The Lippman Kanfer Institute pays special attention to learnings from beyond the field of Jewish education. The Lippman Kanfer Institute's innovative ideas are brought to the field through vehicles such as conferences and colloquia; print and electronic publications; interactive media like wikis and blogs; and direct contact with educators and policy-makers working on the front lines.

The Lippman Kanfer Institute is part of JESNA and contributes to its mission to improve Jewish education by identifying and disseminating empirically-based learnings and innovative solutions to communities, institutions, policy-makers and practitioners. The work of the Lippman Kanfer Institute is supported by the Lippman Kanfer Family Foundation, based in Akron, Ohio.

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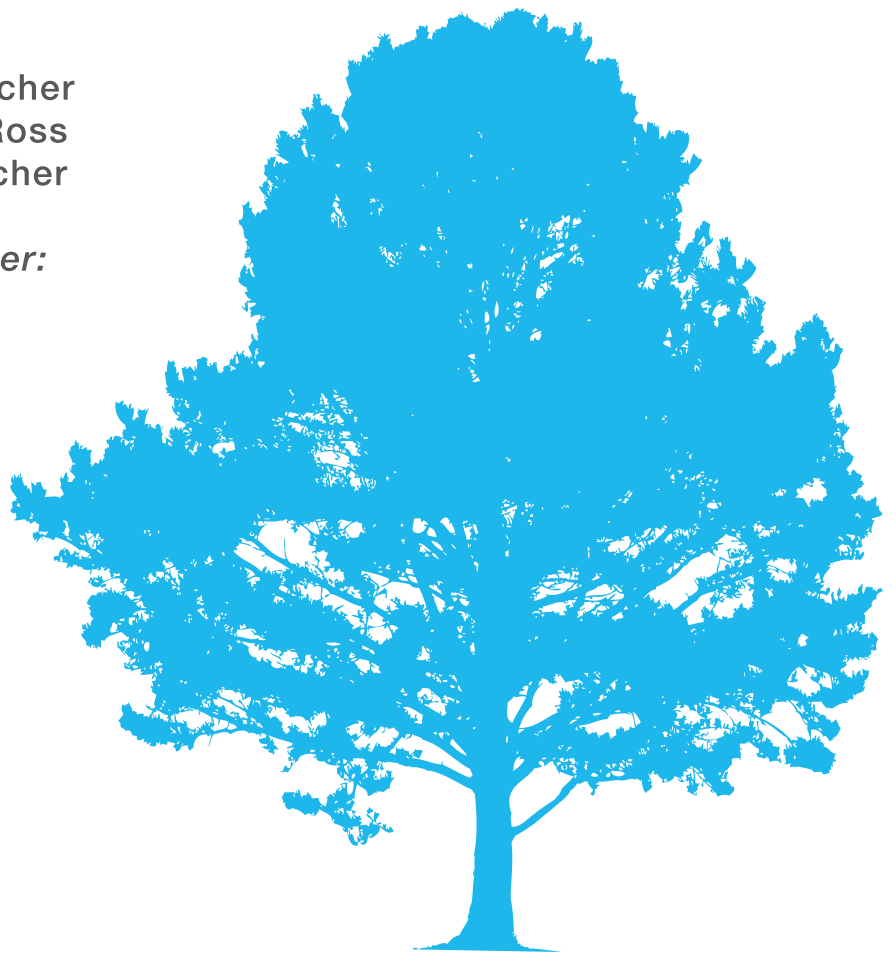





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“Our greatest hope is that [this Working Paper] will serve as the catalyst for many ... conversations as we work together to create a dynamic, engaging, and inspiring Jewish educational system for the 21st century.”

Introduction

This Working Paper is the first publication of JESNA's Lippman Kanfer Institute: An Action-Oriented Think Tank for Innovation in Jewish Learning and Engagement.

The Lippman Kanfer Institute was established at JESNA, with the support of the Lippman Kanfer Family Foundation, to identify, develop, and disseminate new ideas, practices, and policies that will ensure Jewish education's relevance and effectiveness in the 21st century. This Working Paper lays out the Institute's initial set of findings, conclusions, and recommendations. These center around a set of "design principles" that we believe hold the key to maximizing Jewish education's reach and impact. These design principles simultaneously build upon and challenge the current reality in Jewish education. They define an approach to Jewish education that is learner-focused, relationship-infused, and life-centered — one that, happily, is already being implemented successfully in a range of settings, but which, unhappily, is far from the norm in educational practice today.

The Working Paper also proposes a strategy to change this situation. The strategy is grounded in change principles validated via experience in a number of fields. The implementation of these principles to transform Jewish education will require a number of concrete steps, several of which are specifically outlined in the Paper.

The process of preparing this Working Paper was itself innovative. For many months, the paper lived on a wiki — a web-based tool for collaborative writing and editing. The material that has found its way into the paper comes from a variety of sources: a web survey conducted early in the process, several "mini-research studies" carried out by the Institute, and — above all — the contributions of a distinguished Advisory Council of educators, academics, religious leaders, communal activists, and experts in a number of different fields. The Advisory

Council met twice as a group during the course of the paper's preparation and strongly shaped both its direction and specific content. In addition, individual Advisory Council members made numerous contributions to the paper's content and language, both via the wiki and through direct contacts with the Institute's staff.

Although the members of the Advisory Council, listed in Appendix 3, are not and should not be held individually responsible for what is published here, there literally would be no Working Paper without their ideas and counsel. We hope the final product does these ideas justice.

Similarly, a team from the Lippman Kanfer Family Foundation spent countless hours helping to design and implement the process that led to this Working Paper. Their expertise and ideas are reflected throughout the paper, though they too cannot be held accountable for its final form and content.

That responsibility rests with the authors of the Working Paper, and, ultimately, with its chief author, Dr. Jonathan Woocher, Director of the Lippman Kanfer Institute. Renee Rubin Ross and Dr. Meredith Woocher drafted important sections of the Working Paper and did a great deal of the underlying research. They deserve much credit, but no blame for the final version. There would also be no paper without the work of Amy Amiel, JESNA's Director of Project Development, who served as Project Manager for the entire process that led to this Working Paper, from conceptualization to printing. She has been an invaluable partner and insightful voice throughout.

Finally, immense thanks are due to the Lippman Kanfer Family Foundation for having the conviction that Jewish education can be a vibrant, vital, creative force that enriches the lives of individual Jews, the Jewish community, and the world, and the courage to act on that conviction by supporting a new and untested venture.

This Working Paper is the first formal product of the Lippman Kanfer Institute, but, hopefully, far from its last. It is the outgrowth of lively and far-ranging conversations, and our greatest hope is that it will serve as the catalyst for many more such conversations as we work together to create a dynamic, engaging, and inspiring Jewish educational system for the 21st century.

Executive Summary

The Case for Change

The last 25 years have seen dramatic political, economic, social and cultural changes affecting virtually every dimension of North American Jewish life. Jewish education has responded to these changes only partially and unsystematically. A more far-reaching effort is now required to redesign Jewish education to keep it relevant and effective in the 21st century.

Jewish education can point to several signal achievements over the course of the 20th century. At the same time, 21st century Jewish education continues to confront persistent challenges, many of which are legacies from its past and others of which reflect rapidly changing conditions in the present. These changes encompass nearly every aspect of our existence, from geo-politics to religious life to technology to popular culture. We have seen the phenomenon of choice become the dominant defining characteristic of post-modern Jewish existence, and with it a flowering of diversity and a crossing and blurring of boundaries unprecedented in Jewish history. The experiences of Jews born during this period are dramatically different from those of the baby-boomers who today guide Jewish institutions — including Jewish education.

These changes must be accounted for in any serious consideration of Jewish education's future direction. They are critical for understanding who today's and tomorrow's learners are and what they seek; for defining the content of what we teach and when, where, how, and by whom it is taught; and for elaborating the connection between Jewish education, the Jewish community, and the wider world.

Jewish education has hardly been oblivious to these changes, but it has had a difficult time responding to them on the scale required to make it a vibrant, pervasive, positive force in the lives of large numbers of contemporary Jews. On the programmatic and institutional level, efforts at change have produced individual examples of renewal and success, but hardly a dramatic transformation of the overall landscape. When we look beyond individual programs and institutions, we discover an even more debilitating limitation. As a recent publication points out, “the current challenge in the field of Jewish education is to build cooperation across institutional lines and thereby enable learners to benefit from mutually reinforcing experiences and to help families negotiate their way through the rich array of educational options created over the past decade and longer.” (Jack Wertheimer, “Linking the Silos: How to Accelerate the Momentum in Jewish Education Today,” The AVI CHAI Foundation, 2005, p. 2.)

Scattered innovation and incremental improvement alone cannot address some of the deep structural and cultural challenges that beset Jewish education today: institutions that operate in relative isolation; under-developed systems for sharing learnings; a predominant focus in discussions on the situation of “providers,” rather than “consumers;” an unwillingness to recognize that we cannot deliver a consistently excellent product while treating educators as marginal figures. These issues demand a more radical, ambitious approach.

Michael Fullan, one of today's leading change architects in the field of general education, argues that the work of education reform requires that we embrace complex change on multiple levels. Even as we work to make incremental improvements within existing frameworks, we need as well to rethink the nature of those frameworks themselves, to imagine better ways of deploying and complementing them, to experiment with new models and approaches, and to redesign the system as a whole so that it can more successfully achieve its ultimate objective: inspiring large numbers of Jews to live Jewish lives of meaning and purpose.

Design Principles for the 21st Century

The new environment in which Jewish education operates in the 21st century demands a new set of design principles for Jewish education itself. The design principles that we propose are built around three key concepts:

1. Empowering the learner as an active agent in fashioning his/her own learning experience.
2. The centrality of relationships and the social experience of learning as dynamic forces that shape an evolving identity and build commitment and community in a fragmented world.
3. Jewish learning as “life-centered,” addressing the totality of our aspirations, concerns, and experiences.

Empowering the Learner

Beginning with the learner — her/his needs, desires, and capacities — necessarily reframes a host of critical questions — what we seek to teach, why, how learners are involved in the educational process, the role of the educator, how we make education accessible and attractive, and what the learner’s journey looks like beyond the boundaries of single programs and institutions — in ways that open up and may even demand new answers. At least four corollary requisites flow from the “Copernican shift” of placing learners at the core of our thinking:

1. Understanding, listening to, and trusting those whom we seek to engage.
2. Involving learners (and their families, where relevant) as co-producers of their learning experiences.
3. Delivering quality and accessibility.
4. Actively helping to guide and facilitate learners in what will hopefully be a lifelong journey.

The Centrality of Relationships

Jewish education should be individualized, but not individualistic. Traditional Jewish learning is

inherently social and relational, and so too must be 21st century Jewish learning. To fulfill the purposes of Jewish education it is vital that we fashion learning experiences that draw on and nurture the yearning for connectedness. Even in an age of technological wizardry where self-guided learning is as easy as a mouse click, personal relationships remain almost invariably at the core of our most memorable and impactful learning experiences.

In the contemporary world, achieving such relationships between teachers and students places special burdens on educators. We need educators who can work with 21st century learners, who can serve as partners and guides for them, and who can create compelling experiences that will help individuals learn what they want to know and simultaneously discover what they did not even know that they wanted.

Beyond this, Jewish education must create opportunities for active learners to engage with others, to become immersed in social contexts where they can experience personal meaning in and through connectedness and community. The goal should be to create learning communities that are genuinely dialogical (active, intense, yet diverse and open) and that link individuals to other learners across time and space. In an era that is to a dismaying extent commitment- and community-phobic (seeing in these constraints on the self), Jewish education can offer a counterpoint. Pursuing a vision of Jewish learning that respects learners as active agents will lead almost inevitably to a new appreciation of what is needed to construct truly transformative social environments and experiences, and vice versa.

Life-Centered Jewish Education

Nearly a century ago, Franz Rosenzweig argued that we need a “new Jewish learning,” one that “no longer starts from the Torah and leads into life, but the other way round: from life, from a world that knows nothing of the Law, or pretends to know nothing, back to the Torah.” (Franz Rosenzweig, “On Jewish Learning,” in Nahum N. Glatzer, *Franz Rosenzweig: His Life and Work*, Schocken Books, 1953, p. 231.)

continued >

Life-centered Jewish education means several things:

1. First, it means that learning should be relevant to the lives of students.
2. Second, life-centered Jewish education should deal with the whole person and the full set of human concerns, not just the “Jewish” part.
3. Finally, life-centered Jewish education must be grounded in lived experience.

Jewish tradition itself offers a paradigm for the kind of learning that we should aspire to provide: the Passover Seder. The Seder uses immediate experience to stimulate provocative questions; it provides multiple access points in real time for learners of different ages and temperaments; it brings people together in a learning process that is inter-generational and collaborative; it transmits a unique story and value that people can relate to diverse dimensions of our lives, both personal and social; it is open and adaptable; and it offers a profound understanding of the human experience and its purposes that is both challenging and exhilarating.

This vision of “life-centered” Jewish education and the core design principles it engenders suggest a number of practical guidelines for the design and delivery of Jewish education in the 21st century:

1. The venues and settings for Jewish education must be expanded.
2. Modes of Jewish learning must be broadened.
3. Expanding the scope of Jewish education must be accompanied by strengthening the connections among and pathways through its multiple settings and modes.
4. We must recruit and retain the “right” people.
5. Educators’ professionalism must be respected and supported.
6. We must empower educators to be innovators.
7. We must foster opportunities for collaboration among educators.
8. We must create a culture of innovation.

These design principles for 21st century education are by no means new, but they are radical. Only a Jewish education that empowers learners as active agents shaping their own educational journeys, that fosters relationships and connections in a world at once fragmented and homogenized, and that addresses the full scope of our lives will be effective in engaging a generation of students — children and adults — who are both demanding and searching. Such an education will be able to absorb technology without being distorted by it, accommodate choice without abandoning its integrity, and offer multiple options for diverse learners without collapsing into anarchy. This is the kind of education we will need in order to thrive in the 21st century.

Envisioning the Future: Educational Journeys

To better understand how Jewish education grounded in these design principles would look in the “real world,” we can cite examples of programs that already exist and models that have been imagined, but not yet implemented. A number of such programs are described in the course of following three Jewish families on their educational journeys. Others are listed in an Appendix to this paper.

These examples point the way toward the kind of Jewish education we envision because they:

- Meet families’ real needs — educational, spiritual and practical.
- Are experiential and enjoyable, blending formal and informal.
- Build connections and community, often across generations.
- Are both guided by professionals, and shaped by the interests of the learner.
- Go beyond the walls of the synagogue and the day school, taking place in public schools, libraries, retreat centers, community institutions, and homes.
- Take full advantage of the power and potential of technology, especially the internet.

- Are part of a continuous educational system in which professionals anticipate what families' educational needs and desires will be in the next stage of their lives, and provide the knowledge and connections they need to fulfill them seamlessly.

From Design Principles to a Strategy for Change

Redesigning Jewish education requires both a vision for where we wish to go and a strategy for getting there. Action will be needed simultaneously on three levels: that of individual programs (where those with great potential need to be identified and analyzed so that they can be adopted and adapted elsewhere); of institutions (which need to become more agile and more able to generate and absorb a regular flow of new practices); and of the system as a whole (which needs to be configured and to operate in ways that facilitate, rather than inhibit, the spread of innovation).

There are principles that can guide us here as well. In order to achieve broad-scale innovation in Jewish education, the change process must:

1. Motivate key actors to change
2. Make these actors aware of alternatives to current policy and practice
3. Generate guiding vision(s) for what change is needed or desirable
4. Instill an understanding of the situation to be changed, the nature of the changes to be made, the benefits to be derived from change, and how to make change (including how to deal with anticipated obstacles)
5. Develop committed and effective leadership among these actors
6. Provide the information needed for actors to formulate and take ownership of the specific changes that will be pursued (this will include examples of successful similar changes, policies and practices; however, specific changes cannot be imposed or merely “copied” from elsewhere)
7. Make available adequate resources to implement and sustain change

8. Make available outside assistance where needed
9. Provide perceived rewards for engaging in change
10. Encourage ongoing learning and adaptation (since one-time change will not be adequate)

This is a formidable set of requisites — which helps to explain why broad systemic change is so rare and why so many innovations, even demonstrably successful ones, remain idiosyncratic. But we can identify a small number of potentially high-leverage strategic interventions aligned with these change principles that could help move the Jewish educational enterprise toward wide-scale adoption of the design principles laid out above:

1. Identify, Empower and Connect a Cadre of Change Agents
2. Create a “Literature of Success”
3. Establish “Hothouses” for Collaborative Innovation
4. Provide Incentives for Change
5. Introduce New Modalities for Change

The five action steps proposed here are all “scalable.” We can begin work on them tomorrow.

To have their full impact, however, they will need to be implemented broadly and systematically. This will require that resources be committed not only to specific programs and initiatives, but to putting in place the infra-structure for ongoing large-scale change outlined here.


This investment is not only worthwhile, it is essential. Jewish education can be even better than it is — and it must be if Jewish life is to thrive. The investment is also prudent, since it will leverage the billions of dollars already being spent on Jewish education that could yield far more than they do. The combination of the design principles and the intervention strategies laid out in this paper can produce the change that is needed to increase this yield. The result will be a Jewish education that is truly redesigned for the 21st century — one that will engage a wider array of participants, inspire energetic learning, connect more organically to other dimensions of Jewish and human life, and evolve continuously to remain relevant and effective in a changing world.



Part One: The Case for Change

The last 25 years have seen dramatic political, economic, social and cultural changes affecting virtually every dimension of North American Jewish life. Jewish education has responded to these changes only partially and unsystematically. A more far-reaching effort is now required to redesign Jewish education to keep it relevant and effective in the 21st century.

A. Jewish Education's Achievements

Jewish education has much to feel good about. According to the National Jewish Population Study of 2000–2001, Jewish children today receive more full-time Jewish schooling than did their parents' generation, with 29% attending day school or yeshiva (as compared to 12% of Jewish adults who attended Jewish day school or yeshiva), 24% attending a Jewish school that meets more than once a week, and 25% attending a Jewish school that meets weekly. 21% of Jewish children receive no Jewish education, as compared to 27% of Jewish adults who received no Jewish education. Among those who have been to college, proportionally more young Jews have taken a Jewish studies course than ever before. 

Jewish education can point to several signal achievements over the course of the 20th century:

- a. *The modernization of Jewish education.* In many instances, Jewish education has literally been lifted out of dark basements into well-lit modern classrooms. Content, teaching methods, materials, environment have all vastly improved over the course of a century, to the point where most observers agree that, qualitatively and on the whole, Jewish education in North America is better today than it has ever been before.
- b. *The persistence of Jewish schooling as a Jewish norm.* The fact that more than 70% of all Jewish children receive some form of Jewish schooling today is itself a signal achievement, given the fact that such participation is not only entirely voluntary, but likely to cost the family thousands, if not tens of thousands, of dollars.
- c. *The re-emergence of intensive, all-day Jewish schooling.* If there is one dimension of 21st century North American Jewish education that is most improbable from an historical standpoint, it is surely the growth of Jewish day schools. Though the reasons for this growth are complex and not all benign, and though the quality of the education available is inconsistent, the fact that approximately 200,000 Jewish young people are studying in all-day Jewish schools of diverse ideological bents today cannot be considered as anything other than a triumph for Jewish education.



Four reports were prepared on the basis of the NJPS data dealing with Jewish education, and may be downloaded from the UJC website at: www.ujc.org/content_display.html?ArticleID=155417#edu.

1. Jewish Education of Jewish Children examines the Jewish education of today's Jewish children.

2. Adult Jewish Education analyzes Jewish adults who participated in adult Jewish education during the year that NJPS was being conducted.

3. Jewish Educational Background: Trends and Variations Among Today's Jewish Adults examines the extent to which today's Jewish adults engaged in both formal and informal Jewish education in their youth. It also looks at trends and variations in educational participation.

4. The Impact of Childhood Jewish Education on Adults' Jewish Identity analyzes today's Jewish adults on a variety of Jewish behaviors and attitudes, and assesses the impact of both formal and informal Jewish education during childhood upon their current Jewish identity.

“At the same time, 21st century Jewish education continues to confront persistent challenges, many of which are legacies from its past and others of which reflect rapidly changing conditions in the present.”

- d. *The creation of a culture of experiential Jewish education: camps, youth movements, Israel programs.* North American Jews did not stop with creating (or continuing) Jewish schools. During the 20th century they also built a number of additional, in some cases historically unprecedented, educational institutions, formats, and programs. What is more, these have often proven to be strikingly effective.
- e. *The move beyond children: family education and adult Jewish learning.* In recent decades especially, North American Jewish education has begun to broaden its reach. Family education has become almost normative as a complement to the schooling of young children. After many decades of decline, serious adult Jewish learning appears to be expanding again in North America today, and not only among traditional Jews. The growth of Jewish studies in the university has also exposed large numbers of young adults to sophisticated study of Jewish material and themes.
- f. *Improvements in the profession.* These include: better compensation and benefits; graduate degrees as the norm for professional educators; increased communal commitment to professional development; and growth of higher education programs for Jewish educators.
- g. *The increased involvement and support of foundations, philanthropists, and federations.* These play a key role not only in providing financial resources, but as sources of ideas and engines of positive change.

B. Why Innovation and Redesign Are Needed

1. Persistent challenges


At the same time, 21st century Jewish education continues to confront persistent challenges, many of which are legacies from its past and others of which reflect rapidly changing conditions in the present:

- a. Unclear (and often unrealistic) goals.
- b. A continuing pediatric focus centered around the Bar/Bat Mitzvah.
- c. Fragmentation of educational efforts, making smooth handoffs, synergies and multiplier effects difficult to achieve.
- d. Limited time allocations for Jewish learning, in terms of hours per week, weeks during the year, and years during the lifetime.
- e. A shortage of quality personnel in every type of educational setting at every level.
- f. The isolation of Jewish education from “real living” — too much Jewish education still takes place in “bubbles” detached from the settings in which it is

ostensibly located, the larger Jewish and general communities whose activity it is supposed to inform, and the real life concerns and experiences of its students.

- g. The difficulty in promoting genuine, open interchange among Jews with differing ideological perspectives.
- h. A “digital divide” between generations that slows Jewish education’s adaptation to the new technological era characterized by learning in small chunks, multi-tasking, distributed learning and new uses of technology like gaming, simulations, and learning objects.
- i. A pattern of investment in innovation that emphasizes programmatic support, but not the building of organizational capacity that can develop, sustain, and improve innovation beyond the life of a particular program.

2. The changing landscape of North American and Jewish life

The past quarter century has seen dramatic changes in the world and in the situation of North American Jewry. 

These changes encompass nearly every aspect of our existence, from geo-politics to religious life to technology to popular culture. We have seen the phenomenon of choice become the dominant defining characteristic of post-modern Jewish existence, and with it a flowering of diversity and a crossing and blurring of boundaries unprecedented in Jewish history. The experiences of Jews born during this period are dramatically different from those of the baby-boomers who today guide Jewish institutions — including Jewish education.

The generation born after 1980 knows a world in which

- Cable, satellite, cell phones and the internet make instant global communication ubiquitous;
- “Mass customization” gives consumers power to get what they want, where and when they want it;
- Institutions cannot expect loyalty, but must prove themselves again and again;
- More than half of all new “Jewish” households also include a non-Jew;
- Both secularism and religious fundamentalism claim large spaces in our national culture;
- Jews enjoy unfettered access to wealth and power;
- Everyone eats bagels (and drinks lattes);
- Women serve alongside men as religious leaders;



For a fuller discussion of some of these changes, see the Lippman Kanfer Institute research note, “How Has the World Changed Over the Past Twenty-Five Years? (Appendix 1), and the paper by Jonathan Woocher, “Jewish Education in the Age of Google”

(www.jcpa.org/cjc/cjc-woocher-06.htm).

Most of the changes that have taken place in recent years have affected society broadly, but have special implications for Jewish life (e.g., the decline in community documented by Robert Putnam and others). Some relate specifically to Jewish life, e.g., diminishing attachment to Israel among younger Jews. The changes also include so-called generational succession, with Millennials, following Gen Xers, following Baby Boomers, each generation being marked by certain characteristic patterns of thought and behavior.

“On the programmatic and institutional level, efforts at change have produced individual examples of renewal and success, but hardly a dramatic transformation of the overall landscape.”

“What is needed is not only more choices, but a fundamental change in the way that the options that do exist are made available and accessible.”

- Israel is sometimes seen as both a troubled “occupier” and a hi-tech power;
- High-level Jewish studies may be pursued at nearly every elite college and university;
- The web makes a vast virtual library of Jewish learning accessible to anyone;
- “Jewishness” is continually being reinvented in dozens of traditional and new ways.

These changes must be accounted for in any serious consideration of Jewish education’s future direction. They are critical for understanding who today’s and tomorrow’s learners are and what they seek; for defining the content of what we teach and when, where, how, and by whom it is taught; and for elaborating the connection between Jewish education, the Jewish community, and the wider world.

3. The limitations of current models and approaches

Jewish education has hardly been oblivious to these changes, but it has had a difficult time responding to them on the scale required to make it a vibrant, pervasive, positive force in the lives of large numbers of contemporary Jews. The positive statistics about participation emanating from the National Jewish Population Survey mask the fact that a growing number of nominal Jews are staying outside of the formal educational system altogether. Teens continue to “drop out” of Jewish education in large numbers before they graduate from high school and many do not find their way back (if they ever do) until they are raising families themselves — which a large proportion will do with non-Jewish partners.

On the programmatic and institutional level, efforts at change have produced individual examples of renewal and success, but hardly a dramatic transformation of the overall landscape. For example, several initiatives around the continent have made an effort to transform congregational education and the religious school — still the largest component of the Jewish educational system — and to create new learning models. Yet, the majority of part-time education programs have not been transformed, but rather have essentially the same educational structure as they did half a century ago (though often with fewer hours).

When we look beyond individual programs and institutions, we discover an even more debilitating limitation. As a recent publication points out, “the current challenge in the field of Jewish education is to build cooperation across institutional lines and thereby enable learners to benefit from mutually reinforcing experiences and to help families negotiate their way through the rich array of educational options created over the past decade and longer.¹

So what is needed is not only more choices, but a fundamental change in the way that the options that do exist are made available and accessible.

¹ Jack Wertheimer, “Linking the Silos: How to Accelerate the Momentum in Jewish Education Today,” The AVI CHAI Foundation, 2005, p. 2. (www.avi-chai.org/Static/Binaries/Publications/Linking%20The%20Silos_0.pdf)

The challenge of achieving real breakthroughs in the area of congregational education is illustrated in a small-scale study conducted by the Lippman Kanfer Institute looking at the curricula of synagogue schools in one mid-Atlantic city.

Breaking Through the Synagogue Walls: A Research Probe Into Congregational School Curricula

The “stars” of Jewish education today are well-known: day schools, summer camping, trips to Israel. Everyone agrees that they work, and that they merit vastly greater investment. But, what of Jewish education’s single largest arena: part-time congregational schooling? There the story is quite different. Critics are blunt: it’s a disaster area, not worth trying to fix. Even defenders often wind up arguing that it’s not so bad. A few shining examples show us what success could look like, and, besides, there are simply too many children and families there to ignore.

The last years have seen a number of determined efforts, both locally and nationally, to revitalize congregational education. Some are showing signs of promise, though it’s way too soon to proclaim victory. But, what is the current reality that these endeavors are seeking to transform? What do congregational schools actually teach, and how do they measure up against some of the criteria for visionary Jewish education that are emerging in the work of projects like the Lippman Kanfer Institute’s “Redesigning Jewish Education for the 21st Century”?

The questions are worthy of extended research, but as a first step, the Lippman Kanfer Institute undertook a modest research “probe,” looking at the self-descriptions and publicly disseminated curricula of congregational religious schools in one mid-Atlantic community, accessed via synagogue websites. What we found was encouraging in some respects: Most of the schools had thoughtful statements about their educational goals and could present detailed outlines of the content they claim to cover in order to reach these.

But, in at least one crucial respect, the results of the research probe were troubling: Although there are certainly pockets of innovation in synagogue religious schools in this community and around the country, most seem to follow educational models that have not changed much in the last few decades. Most, regardless of denomination, still cover similar topics (God, Torah stories, holidays, mitzvot, prayer) in essentially similar ways. Most religious schools seemingly have not found a way to “break through” the walls of the synagogue to connect what is being learned in a meaningful and organic way with the students’ lives outside the classroom or the synagogue itself.

For example, many curricula spend a great deal of time teaching prayer, siddur Hebrew, and synagogue ritual, even though prayer is only one way to engage children and teens in Jewish life (and, for many, likely not the best way). The reason for this emphasis is clear as one reads these curricula further: many religious schools have accepted,

whether enthusiastically or reluctantly, the all-too-common view of both parents and children that they are essentially extended Bar/Bat Mitzvah training programs. The price for this decision is evidenced in the large numbers of students who cease all Jewish education after that milestone has passed. While synagogue educators bemoan this fact, they may not be considering how their own curricular choices might be encouraging it.[1]

The situation post-Bar/Bat Mitzvah is problematic as well. Most of the offerings are fairly thin. So, here we have a “chicken and egg” problem: is synagogue Jewish education for teens weak because most teens don’t want to participate, or are teens dropping out because they find the education options to be unsatisfying “Jewish education lite” at the very time in their development when they might be ready for something deeper and more challenging?

Other issues include the paucity of hands-on, experiential learning. While most of the religious schools do have a place for art and music in the early years, this seems to fade as children grow, to be replaced solely by verbal and textual learning. While Jewish text and stories should certainly be an important part of any Jewish education program, we know that learning through text is not the only way to absorb content and meaning, particularly for a tradition that is as rich in sensory experience as it is in written wisdom. There is also little mention of using technology as a resource, despite the ever-expanding trove of Jewish sources online, and the fact that children of younger and younger ages are not only comfortable with technology, but thrive on it. And finally, there seem to be almost no opportunities in most of the school curricula for students to shape and direct their learning in accordance with their interests, as each grade has its set topics, goals and material.

In short, few religious schools seem yet to be taking the perspective we advocate in this Working Paper, delivering Jewish education that is experiential, learner-driven, and deeply relevant to students’ lives.

As noted above, these findings come from a preliminary and limited research probe. They bear much deeper examination, including a look at what is actually happening in these schools, not just at what they say about themselves and what they seek to teach. But, we would suggest that if the movement to revitalize congregational education is to succeed, it will have to deal with the limited horizons of current curricular thinking and address the challenge of “breaking through the synagogue walls” to create educational programs that are expansive, multi-dimensional, anchored in the lives of students, and diverse.

[1] Another effect of the widespread emphasis on teaching subjects that relate heavily to the synagogue experience is that the collection of programs in this community (and, we suspect, many others) offers little in the way of variety and options for parents and children who may be seeking something different. If families want, e.g., an immersion program emphasizing modern Hebrew, or a program with a strong component of Jewish history, or one that starts with issues in contemporary Jewish life and then digs back into Jewish sources to illuminate them, one would be hard pressed to find suitable programs. The relative sameness of most religious school curricula (variations on a theme) illustrates the “tragedy of the commons” in Jewish education: what makes sense for each individual school leaves the whole arena narrow and impoverished. This is not to imply that there are no differences, no “outliers” doing innovative and creative programming, or that the schools do similar things in exactly the same way. But, by and large, diversity and variety is not a strong suit in congregational schooling.

4. The limits of incremental improvement: confronting deep structures and embedded cultures

Jewish education is full of innovations: new programs; new educational resources; new techniques and models; new modes of delivery, such as the web. These innovations provide us with both glimpses of what could and should be on a larger scale and “existence proofs” that different ways of designing and implementing Jewish education are possible, and that they work.

However, the scale, scope, and rate at which change is taking place is simply not sufficient to keep pace with the changes in the larger environment and in the population that Jewish education seeks to attract, engage, and influence. Too many programs, institutions, and communities remain largely unaffected by the islands of innovation and success, continuing to operate in conventional ways with commensurately limited results.

Nor can scattered innovation and incremental improvement alone address some of the deep structural and cultural challenges that beset Jewish education today: institutions that operate in relative isolation; under-developed systems for sharing learnings; a predominant focus in discussions on the situation of “providers,” rather than “consumers;” an unwillingness to recognize that we cannot deliver a consistently excellent product while treating educators as marginal figures. These issues demand a more radical, ambitious approach that seeks both to understand and overturn fundamental limiting assumptions in our practice today and to extend innovation and change throughout the educational system as the norm, rather than the exception.

C. A Two-Pronged Strategy for Change: Exploitation and Exploration

Complexity theory teaches that maximizing any system’s viability and vitality is rarely an either/or proposition. Change must be pursued along multiple fronts simultaneously, some small-scale and close to home — what complexity theory calls “exploitation” — and some bold and far-reaching — what is characterized as “exploration.”

Michael Fullan, one of today’s leading change architects in the field of general education, argues that the work of education reform requires that we embrace this type of complex change on multiple levels.²

We believe the same holds true for Jewish education. Even as we work to make incremental improvements within existing frameworks, we need as well to rethink the nature of those frameworks themselves, to imagine better ways of deploying and complementing them, to experiment with new models and approaches, and to redesign the system as a whole so that it can more successfully achieve its ultimate objective: inspiring large numbers of Jews to live Jewish lives of meaning and purpose.

“Nor can scattered innovation and incremental improvement alone address some of the deep structural and cultural challenges that beset Jewish education today: institutions that operate in relative isolation; under-developed systems for sharing learnings; a predominant focus in discussions on the situation of “providers,” rather than “consumers;” an unwillingness to recognize that we cannot deliver a consistently excellent product while treating educators as marginal figures.”

² Michael Fullan, *Change Forces: Probing the Depths of Educational Reform*, The Falmer Press, 1993; *Change Forces: The Sequel*, Falmer Press, 1999; *Change Forces With a Vengeance*, RoutledgeFalmer, 2003.

Part Two: Design Principles for the 21st Century

The new environment in which Jewish education operates in the 21st century demands a new set of design principles for Jewish education itself. These principles do not aim to alter education's purposes or eliminate its traditional content. Jewish education will and should continue to focus on shaping identity, instilling literacy, inspiring commitment, and forging community. Jewish texts, values, history, traditions, and the knowledge and skills needed to appreciate these and actualize them in one's life, will continue to be the "stuff" of which Jewish learning is made.

But *how* identity is shaped, literacy instilled, commitment inspired, and community forged must change, and the meaning of these concepts themselves re-thought in light of how life is lived and how effective learning takes place today. We can neither teach nor organize the educational process as a whole as we have in the past.

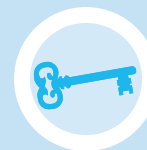
The design principles that we propose are built around three key concepts:

1. Empowering the learner as an active agent in fashioning his/her own learning experience.
2. The centrality of relationships and the social experience of learning as dynamic forces that shape an evolving identity and build commitment and community in a fragmented world.
3. Jewish learning as "life-centered," addressing the totality of our aspirations, concerns, and experiences.

A. *The Learner As Active Agent*

Redesigning Jewish education for the new century will require that we place the active learner at the center of our thinking and practice as a full partner in shaping her/his learning experience.


Placing the learner at the center represents a "Copernican shift" for a system that is used to approaching issues primarily from the vantage point of providers, not consumers. Deliberations on how Jewish education should be conceptualized, designed and delivered that begin from our conventional starting points — programs and institutional settings, content to be taught, or even visions of "the educated Jew" — assume, tacitly or explicitly, that the learner is the "object" of our educational efforts. Such an assumption is, however, increasingly problematic. Beginning with the learner — her/his needs, desires, and capacities — necessarily reframes a host of critical questions — what we seek to teach, why, how learners are involved in the educational process, the role of the educator, how we make education accessible and attractive, and what the learner's



By "learner" we refer both to those who are or might potentially be engaged directly in any form of Jewish study ("consumers") and to those, e.g., parents of young children, who arrange and make it possible for others to study ("customers"). We use the term learner rather than "consumer" or "customer" to avoid the negative associations that sometimes accompany the employment of marketing language when discussing Jewish education. However, we believe that a marketing perspective on Jewish education is highly relevant today, and in no way demeans Jewish learning as a sacred act. Learners behave as consumers, and expect to be treated as such.



These conventional starting points should, of course, figure prominently in educational discourse. However, the issue is where to begin the conversation and what to keep at the center of our attention. By initiating the discussion, e.g., of how to engage families more deeply in Jewish learning with a focus on synagogues and synagogue schools, we immediately tend to channel the discussion into certain pathways and foreclose others. By beginning with a focus on the families themselves, we remain open to a range of approaches to engagement that include, but are not limited to, those that take place in conventional settings. This is the “Copernican shift” that we refer to.

journey looks like beyond the boundaries of single programs and institutions — in ways that open up and may even demand new answers. This is not merely a tactical change or a pedagogical stance (so-called learner-centered or constructivist learning). It calls for rethinking what we do and how we do it from the bottom up. 

Recognizing the centrality of the learner and her/his experience is not new in Jewish thinking about education:

- Proverbs (22:6) tells us to: “Educate a child according to her/his way,” which has frequently been interpreted to mean “according to his/her own unique nature,” i.e., the need to individualize the learning experience.
- The Talmud (*Avodah Zara* 19a) teaches: “A person does not learn Torah except from a place that one’s heart desires,” which is interpreted as meaning that the learner must be able to choose the topic and even the teacher.


However, this focus is often lost today in our (understandable but limiting) anxiety to transmit what is seen as vital content and to ensure Jewish continuity.

There are at least four corollary requisites that flow from the “Copernican shift” of placing learners at the core of our thinking.

1. *Understanding, listening to, and trusting those whom we seek to engage.*

Jewish education needs to be far more “market sensitive” than it traditionally has been. The best way to do this is through actively seeking the opinions of current and potential consumers and customers about what they are seeking in both content and form and why. Underlying the engagement with learners must be a basic trust that a) the choices they make are thoughtful and intended to help them develop a more meaningful relationship to Jewish life;³ and b) the process of Jewish learning, if well implemented, will in fact produce a deeper relationship over time.

³ The recent research conducted by the team led by Prof. Jack Wertheimer that is summarized in “Linking the Silos” illuminates the multiple factors at play in these educational choices as well as the implications they have for other aspects of the Jewish lives of those making them. Even among those who make apparently similar choices, there may be quite different sets of motivating factors. This buttresses the need to attend seriously to learners in their individuality. The research also demonstrates that the choices made are most often careful and not arbitrary ones.

2. *Involving learners (and their families, where relevant) as co-producers of their learning experiences.* 

This attitude of trust needs to be extended to the learning process itself. Educators and institutions must be prepared to share control and invite learners to help design and implement the experiences they participate in. The involvement of learners in shaping their educational experiences will produce more authentic, powerful learning. Adopting this paradigm does not mean abandoning responsibility for creating frameworks (structures and contents) within which learning can take place. But, it does mean that these frameworks need to be outgrowths of dialogue and conversation, not imposed a priori. And, the frameworks need to be flexible and diverse. One size simply does not fit all today. Making education genuinely personal given the real limitations on resources is a daunting, but unavoidable challenge to the creativity of educators and institutions.

3. *Delivering quality and accessibility.*

Today's learners have high expectations. They seek, and will respond to, quality in every sphere of their lives. Jewish education can ill-afford to be seen as an arena where mediocrity prevails. Experience with demanding, but high quality learning programs for adults like the Wexner Heritage Foundation, the Melton Adult Mini-School, and Me'ah demonstrates that individuals respect their seriousness and high standards in both teaching and content. Day schools, camping, and other educational arenas are similarly seeing that the ability to deliver "excellence" matters. At the same time, learners also seek experiences that are accessible — that fit their schedules, lifestyles, and other commitments. Keeping the learner at the center of our focus means re-thinking when, where, and how educational opportunities are made available so as to maximize the likelihood that those who wish to can in fact take advantage of them.

4. *Actively helping to guide and facilitate learners in what will hopefully be a lifelong journey.*


Giving power to learners to shape their own learning does not mean abandoning them to their own devices. Rather, it opens the door for educators and institutions to assume a new role and responsibility: serving as educational guides and facilitators. Negotiating the Jewish educational landscape, sifting through options, finding appropriate settings and teachers, identifying potential next steps on one's educational journey, is not easy today. We can make it more so by providing the kind of personal attention and support that a good concierge or personal trainer does. This role of "educational stewardship" assumes special importance when we recognize that the impact of educational experiences is cumulative: one (quality) experience is good; many are even better. Creating an educational system that operates to encourage synergies and smooth handoffs (what has been called "linking the silos") will enable learners to pursue personal pathways that at the same time greatly enhance the payoff for the Jewish community on its investment in each individual program or institution.



The concept of "co-production" by consumers (sometimes now called "prosumers") is becoming more commonplace in business. It is tied to other concepts that have been cited as increasingly characteristic of 21st century life: the phenomenon of "mass customization" in which millions of individuals can have a product (e.g., a computer) that is mass-produced, but specifically tailored to their specifications; the "democratization of cultural production"; and the concept of the "experience economy" in which consumers seek, value, and help to create experiences rather than simply using products. What all of these have in common is that individuals are active agents, rather than merely passive "absorbers," thereby extending the concept of choice beyond that of merely selecting among pre-determined alternatives. Increasingly, we believe, Jews will seek this kind of active role with respect to their Jewish educational experiences as well.



The need to place greater emphasis on linking the “silos” of what are frequently unconnected educational experiences is tied directly to the growing prominence of choice in the educational marketplace. Wertheimer and his fellow authors argue, as does this Working Paper, that at a time when “consumer choice” is a powerful force in the educational arena, institutions and the larger Jewish community need to take steps to increase the likelihood and the feasibility of consumers choosing to partake in multiple educational experiences over an extended period of time. Wertheimer et al call for “bus drivers” to help guide learners through the diverse opportunities that exist. In addition, institutions themselves (synagogues, e.g.) will need to be more open and pro-active in guiding their constituents toward other settings that can enrich and extend their Jewish learning, a concept we call “educational stewardship.”

These four dimensions of a Jewish education that places learners at the center of its thinking are inter-related. If we respect and trust our prospective learners, we will allow them to be active participants in shaping the learning experiences they engage in so that they will be personally meaningful and relevant. The more satisfying the experiences, the more likely it is that they will seek out more such experiences. And the more that they see that we do respect and trust them, the more likely they will be in turn to accept guidance and assistance in staking out a pathway of ongoing learning. 

B. The Power of Relationships and the Social Experience of Learning

Jewish education should be individualized, but not individualistic. As important as it is to listen to the voices of learners and to help them design personally meaningful and satisfying educational journeys, neither Jewish values nor sound learning theory allows us to imagine that a serious Jewish identity or enduring Jewish commitment can be fashioned in isolation from other learners — or from teachers. Traditional Jewish learning is inherently social and relational, and so too must be 21st century Jewish learning.

Human beings naturally seek meaning in their lives and to experience efficacy in those areas of living that matter to them — career, family, avocations. They also seek connections with others. Contemporary life is filled with centrifugal forces that constrain or erode these connections: the pace of life itself, distrust of large institutions, the ability to satisfy one’s basic needs without direct personal relationships to others (how many farmers are we likely to know?), ease of mobility, technologies that allow us to construct highly personalized worlds — iPods, DVRs. Education is being reshaped by these same forces, which make possible — but not desirable — modes of learning that are almost solipsistic. However to fulfill the purposes of Jewish education it is vital that we fashion learning experiences that draw on and nurture the yearning for connectedness. In fact, we know that such experiences are both natural and powerful. People self-organize into networks and clusters to share experiences and ideas, to affirm their identities as unique individuals to and with others, and to seek from others confirmation, support, and guidance. As much as we want to be in control of our own lives, we do not want to live those lives alone.

This holds true all the more in the realm of education. Even in an age of technological wizardry where self-guided learning is as easy as a mouse click, personal relationships remain almost invariably at the core of our most memorable and impactful learning experiences. Jewish tradition sees the relationship of teacher and student as not only instrumentally important, but sacred. Contemporary experience argues for the power of what Heschel called “text people,” individuals who embody in their person the knowledge and values they seek to transmit. Whether it is teachers in a classroom, counselors in camp, guides on a trip, or parents at home, access to individuals with whom learners can forge intimate relationships is critical to creating a context within which personally compelling learning can take place. And, as Jewish tradition also recognizes, sometimes our most powerful teachers are our peers, a lesson that, again, social science theory and contemporary experience only reinforce.

Dr. David Ariel, past president of Siegal College of Jewish Studies in Cleveland and a member of the Advisory Council for the Redesigning Jewish Education project, offers these thoughts on the phenomenon of “learners” as “consumers.”

“Consumer Choice” and Jewish Education: Some Reflections

While Jewish education has made great advances in recent years, we have to be careful that the cure is not worse than the disease. In the past, Jewish education was the domain of knowing educators who struggled, often in vain, to fill empty vessels with knowledge that they thought their students ought to possess. Today, with a better understanding of how people learn, and with a more humble approach, we see education as more democratic and participatory. We have a more sophisticated understanding of how people learn and see learners as consumers who exercise choices at every point in the transactional learning process.

At the same time, there are several modifications to the consumerist approach to Jewish education. First, Judaism is a comprehensive way of life, not a product. It is a complete world view, a guide to life, and a powerful set of cultural norms that competes with other cultural systems in the marketplace of contemporary ideas. Jewish educators are not sales staff; they are mediators of the great Jewish ideas between the tradition and the Jewish community, role models who must talk the talk and walk the walk, and mentors to those who are seeking a spiritual home in the world.

Still, there are many virtues to the consumer orientation as applied to Jewish education. An understanding of the consumer experience should teach us to incorporate and integrate rich, personal experience into the learning process. Jewish education should even embrace the concept of edutainment by staging memorable experiential events that might include group ritual, retreats, camping, travel, and more. The criteria for creating Jewish educational experiences should include immersion into the experience, absorption, aesthetics (engaging the senses), and entertainment. Experiences alter human experience of time and space, create social affiliation, and create indelible impressions. Jewish education could learn from Disneyland, Planet Hollywood, and the Israel experience how to touch the heart, mind, and senses in ways that create enduring Jewish experiences.

Second, our understanding of consumer choice should be more sophisticated than simply letting the buyer help shape the product. Certainly, Jewish education would benefit from embracing the concepts of customization and personalization. Because the trajectory of Jewish identity is

a personal journey that differs from person to person, weaving different strands of Jewishness into a unique tapestry, one size no longer fits all. Jewish educators need to customize the delivery of Jewish educational resources to meet the unique needs and expectations of the learner.

Although the Jewish journey is highly personal, and each learner pursues his own highly selective path, Jewish education should not provide the consumer with total choice. When an online company offers to build the consumer her own customized computer, they offer a limited range of choices from which to choose. You might have one option or another option, but you can't choose an option off the menu. The same should be true for Jewish education. Jewish educators should offer a limited number of choices from which consumers may choose, but should not let the consumer dictate all choices. To use the salad bar metaphor, you may choose from the salad bar but cannot order off the menu. Consumers may approach Judaism as a salad bar of personal choices, but Judaism is not a salad. Judaism may be a salad bar, and every one might make their salad differently, but Judaism is always more than the items selected.

We might learn how to find the balance between consumer choice and personalization from TIVO, the digital television recorder service. TIVO records what the consumer selects and asks the viewer to indicate their rating of each recorded program. TIVO then notifies the viewer that if she liked that program, she might consider recording this program. Each time she indicates a program, TIVO creates a more personalized viewer profile. Based on how the specific viewer correlates to the choices of other viewers in the same profile pool, TIVO suggests other program choices that the viewer may never have even considered. By aggregating viewer preferences, creating viewer profiles, and correlating viewers with similar profiles, TIVO is able to push new content to users who don't even know what they might like.

Jewish education could embrace the TIVO model by embracing the notion of becoming a subscription service that allows consumer choice within a limited range while also pushing new content to consumers based on the pattern of their preferences. What is true in the consumer arena is true in Jewish education: While people know what they want, the successful Jewish educational service will provide what people don't yet know they want. Under this model, a person will subscribe to a Jewish educational service that delivers personalized content based on their preferences. The educational service can then use their past experience to recommend the next set of experiences. In becoming aware of the developmental nature of Jewish identity, we can find a proper balance between consumer choice and the Jewish enterprise.

“We need educators who can work with 21st century learners, who can serve as partners and guides for them, and who can create compelling experiences that will help individuals learn what they want to know and simultaneously discover what they did not even know that they wanted.”

“Achieving a deep sense of connectedness is not about submerging the individual self in the group (as intoxicating as that experience can sometimes be), but about involving learners in a common task or experience in which each individual is important, but none can sustain the experience or complete the task on his/her own.”

The proposition that relationships are at the core of effective education holds true in every era. But, in the contemporary world, achieving such relationships between teachers and students places special burdens on educators. And, truthfully, in Jewish education, it is a burden that we often fail to meet. We need educators who can work with 21st century learners, who can serve as partners and guides for them, and who can create compelling experiences that will help individuals learn what they want to know and simultaneously discover what they did not even know that they wanted.

Beyond this, Jewish education must create opportunities for active learners to engage with others, to become immersed in social contexts where they can experience personal meaning in and through connectedness and community. This is important both from a sociological standpoint — in order to tap into the power of what Peter Berger called “plausibility structures” to shape and anchor personal meaning-making — and an ideological (or theological) one. For Judaism, community is not merely a means to facilitate individual fulfillment; it is a vehicle for perfecting the world. Jewish education needs to foster connections among learners through its organization of the educational process itself (how, when, where, and with whom it is conducted) as well as through the content it seeks to transmit. The goal should be to create learning communities that are genuinely dialogical (active, intense, yet diverse and open) and that link individuals to other learners across time and space.

This will not happen automatically simply by placing learners alongside one another in conventional settings (schools, synagogues, even camps). More is needed than mere propinquity. Nor can this happen only in formal settings — it is by now evident that networking in cyberspace can create dynamic connections across spatial boundaries. Community happens when individuals are involved in shared processes of encounter and exploration. Achieving a deep sense of connectedness is not about submerging the individual self in the group (as intoxicating as that experience can sometimes be), but about involving learners in a common task or experience in which each individual is important, but none can sustain the experience or complete the task on his/her own. This can happen in a prayer service, a Talmud hevruva, a canoe-trip into the wilderness, a Jewish arts festival with teens from around the country, a two-week “vacation” repairing damaged homes in northern Israel or southern Louisiana, or a multi-player game on the internet. All of these will be integral parts of 21st century Jewish education. From such experiences will come a renewed appreciation of the importance of community as a vehicle through which individuals grow and become more fully themselves (as Martin Buber taught more than 80 years ago). In an era that is to a dismaying extent commitment- and community-phobic (seeing in these constraints on the self), Jewish education can offer a counterpoint — if it focuses on creating experiences of genuine connectedness, not the pseudo-connectedness that is too often experienced in institutional life of all sorts today.

There is, then, no contradiction between calling for a Copernican shift that places the learner at the center of educational thinking and practice and seeking expanded opportunities to enmesh learners in relationships, social experiences and networks that catalyze the growth and development of both identity and community. A viable and dynamic vision for contemporary Jewish education will embrace both. Pursuing a vision of Jewish learning that respects learners as active agents will lead almost inevitably to a

In the following essay, Daniel Bennett, Executive Director of the Colorado Agency for Jewish Education, shares an expansive vision of a radically restructured Jewish community as a “virtual mall” designed to maximize Jewish engagement by expanding the options available to Jewish “consumers.”

The Jewish Community of the Future

My career as a Jewish educator has spanned the past three decades, and I’ve seen rapid change in our customers and constituents over those years; much has been written about why this is the case, with strong arguments made for understanding changes through the multiple lenses of Jewish emancipation and true acceptance into society, intermarriage, distance from the Holocaust and from a victim mentality, affluence, technology, the rise of individualism and the me-generation, and other social phenomena. Whatever the cause, those of us in the business of delivering Jewish educational products and services spend a great deal of time and energy trying to find the right strategies and tactics to engage more Jewish individuals and families in Jewish education, and to make the experience of those who are involved more meaningful.

Of course there are no magic bullets, and many of the current good-practice interventions in teacher training, institutional improvement, and technological products will help. But it seems to me that how we view the marketplace might be even more important than how we intervene and innovate.

For example, suppose for a minute we lose the traditional labels of affiliated and unaffiliated. Suppose instead we see every Jewish learner as on a journey, and we recognize that most of our community’s Jews come in and out of connection with Jewish community many times during their lives. Next, suppose that we could suspend our judgment about these behaviors, and instead of working to change this customer-based mind set and fluid behavior, we build a community that openly and strategically supports it.

Of course there is an important place for synagogues, Jewish institutions, camps and schools in this new paradigm, and those organizations that truly understand and engage their customers in meaningful community will prosper and thrive. But our community of the future would acknowledge what we already know to be the case — that an increasing number of our customers already live their Jewish lives outside of these traditional institutions, and that many who are *affiliated* are dissatisfied with what they encounter in what used to be the only games in town.

I would suggest that instead of expending resources to bring Jews into *affiliation* (many would say unsuccessfully), instead we allocate our resources to create, enable and support a “Virtual Jewish Mall,” one with multiple and varied access points for every kind of Jew, where traditional institutions (synagogues, agencies, schools, camps) live side by side with havurot, salons, kabbalah classes, home-shuling and tutoring options, backyard bnai mitzvah, on-line classes, blogs & podcasts. Our mall would have no walls, although many of the storefronts would be entrances to existing Jewish buildings and institutions. Other storefronts would be truly virtual,

portals having customers but no physical meeting space. Storefronts would close, others would open; the best would endure because the customers would find meaning there generation after generation, but many would need to remake themselves to remain relevant.

The key is that our community of the future would stand on five pillars:

1. a judgment-free environment where it is safe to explore Jewish values and behaviors, where we trust the journey of all customers of Jewish products and services — acknowledging not only their right to seek the best options to fit their lifestyles and current interests, but also their savvy and intelligence as seekers
2. the belief that community is still important to Jews — always will be — but that there are new, dynamic ways to define community today, and there will be even others tomorrow
3. equal footing in the mall for all forms of Jewish expression — old and new, large and small, traditional and innovative — with the marketplace being the ultimate arbiter of success or failure
4. a comprehensive system to publicize the full extent of the “virtual mall” electronically to all potential customers — with the ability to update — adding, subtracting, and revising — offerings seamlessly and easily
5. a welcoming community Jewish education *Family-Connector Concierge Service*, where trained community volunteers serve as short or long-term personal educational “guides or trainers” — since most Jewish journeys begin or are re-energized around educational desires

I am not naïve or a dreamer, but I do live by Henry David Thoreau’s maxim that, “if you have built castles in the air, your work need not be lost; there is where they should be. Now put foundations under them.”

My years of graduate study in the Jewish History Department at the Ohio State University taught me that we are in deep trouble as a People every time we get too attached to “what has always been.” Our present institutions (if they are open to change) are a critical part of the future, but they cannot carry the future of the Jewish community alone — any more than Federations can ignore that family philanthropy is already sharing power in determining our community’s future.

Perhaps the castle — or the mall — is already being built; perhaps it will stand with or without our help. But if we take our responsibility as Jewish educators and community leaders seriously, we must be social engineers every bit as much as we are free market entrepreneurs. Every time we turn away from the difficult and controversial work of building the mall, we concede another several dozen potential Jewish customers while relegating hundreds more to participation in programs and services that they describe as sub-standard.

Some smart people will read these words and cite startling demographics to prove that it is already too late. Others, equally well-meaning and intelligent will call my analysis and strategies alarmist, and lacking both in standards and in understanding the importance of traditional *community* to the Jewish community. Both groups must be at the table in full force as the discussion unfolds, but neither must hold its banner too high. We are all, after all, a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.

“Nearly a century ago, Franz Rosenzweig argued that we need a “new Jewish learning,” one that “no longer starts from the Torah and leads into life, but the other way round: from life, from a world that knows nothing of the Law, or pretends to know nothing, back to the Torah.””

“Jewish education needs to focus on helping learners make life-shaping choices. These will not come out of learning a string of random facts. Details are critical, but only if they are connected in some way to big themes (enduring ideas) that illuminate important spheres of life.”

new appreciation of what is needed to construct truly transformative social environments and experiences, and vice versa.

C. “Life-Centered” Jewish Education

Nearly a century ago, Franz Rosenzweig argued that we need a “new Jewish learning,” one that “no longer starts from the Torah and leads into life, but the other way round: from life, from a world that knows nothing of the Law, or pretends to know nothing, back to the Torah.”⁴

Rosenzweig’s call for a Jewish learning designed to engage those who do not begin with an a priori commitment to the value of Jewish knowledge and Jewish living is, if anything, more relevant today than it was when first articulated. The challenge and the promise inherent in it remain unrealized. If 21st century Jewish education is to succeed, we have no choice but to follow Rosenzweig’s counsel.

Life-centered Jewish education means several things:

1. *First, it means that learning should be relevant to the lives of students.*

This does not mean a superficial quest for what is au courant. Rather, it asks that the content of Jewish education grow out of, reflect, and respond to authentic questions, aspirations and life experiences of the learners. Life-centered Jewish education will avoid spending large amounts of time trying to answer questions that no one is asking, at the same time as it ensures that genuine concerns — what is really on people’s (including children’s) minds — are being addressed. Curricula that begin and end in the past, that present Jewish life as something largely confined to specific times or special places (like synagogues), or that teach skills whose relevance in the “real world” is unclear, position Jewish learning as something external to the individual, disconnected from large segments of his/her experience, and ultimately of doubtful import or interest. We have all seen too often the effect of this type of Jewish education.

Current curricular thinking offers an alternative more in line with Rosenzweig’s vision. It emphasizes that learning is inevitably selective, and that determining what is truly important to learn is vital to meaningful and memorable learning. Jewish education needs to focus on helping learners make life-shaping choices. These will not come out of learning a string of random facts. Details are critical, but only if they are connected in some way to big themes (enduring ideas) that illuminate important spheres of life. E.g., teaching holidays as sets of customs and observances or history as a succession of events misses the opportunity to engage learners in exploring what is really important about these and why they are worth remembering and incorporating in their lives.

⁴ Franz Rosenzweig, “On Jewish Learning,” in Nahum N. Glatzer, ed., *Franz Rosenzweig: His Life and Thought*, Schocken Books, 1953, p. 231.

2. *Second, life-centered Jewish education should deal with the whole person and the full set of human concerns, not just the “Jewish” part.*

Much Jewish educational rhetoric today focuses on how Jewish education can make Jews “more Jewish” (“strengthen their Jewish identity”). But, the real goal of Jewish education should be to make us more human, more like “images of God,” since this is Judaism’s purpose. Jewish identity is a means, not an end in itself. Rosenzweig’s new Jewish learning had as its aim to “not give up anything, not renounce anything, but lead everything back to Judaism.” To forge this connection between the entirety of our lives and Jewish tradition will require that we broaden the scope of Jewish learning to incorporate issues and dimensions of human experience — personal growth and social justice, science and cultural creation — that may initially be seen as outside the boundaries of Jewish education’s concerns. But, they are clearly not outside of Judaism’s concerns or the historic experience of the people who have lived and shaped Judaism. And thus, they must be part of life-centered Jewish learning.

3. *Finally, life-centered Jewish education must be grounded in lived experience.*

Judaism is not a “subject” to be studied; it is a way of life to be lived. Textual learning must be grounded in and accompanied by experiences that bring the content of the text to life. Nearly every aspect of Jewish learning lends itself to this approach with a little effort — the study of Jewish values, rituals, history, current events. This includes the study of Torah itself, which is clearly a primary and powerful Jewish experience. However, such study cannot be pursued only academically; it must be both engaging and intellectually and spiritually stimulating. Understanding that all learning must be “experiential” in this sense can help to break down the increasingly unhelpful distinction between “formal” and “informal” education.

Jewish tradition itself offers a paradigm for the kind of learning that we should aspire to provide: the Passover Seder. The Seder uses immediate experience to stimulate provocative questions; it provides multiple access points in real time for learners of different ages and temperaments; it brings people together in a learning process that is inter-generational and collaborative; it transmits a unique story and value that people can relate to diverse dimensions of our lives, both personal and social; it is open and adaptable; and it offers a profound understanding of the human experience and its purposes that is both challenging and exhilarating. Would that all Jewish education were so designed, so effective, and so enduring!

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“Every venue in which important life activities take place — including those that are not specifically “Jewish” — is potentially a setting for Jewish learning. These include workplaces, public settings, and (pre-eminently) the home.”

“Realizing the full potential of a wider educational canvas requires that we make it easier for learners to access the many options that will be available and to move smoothly from experience to experience across institutional boundaries.”

D. *Putting the Design Principles to Work: Implications for Educational Policy and Practice*

This vision of “life-centered” Jewish education and the core design principles it engenders suggest a number of practical guidelines for the design and delivery of Jewish education in the 21st century.

1. *The venues and settings for Jewish education must be expanded.*

It is by now a truism that Jewish education is far more than just Jewish schooling (important as schooling is). Many Jewish institutions that heretofore had little to do with Jewish education (e.g., JCCs, social justice programs, social service agencies) now infuse Jewish learning into their activities. But, the Jewish community can go even further in broadening the number and range of venues and modes in which Jewish learning takes place. Every venue in which important life activities take place — including those that are not specifically “Jewish” — is potentially a setting for Jewish learning. These include workplaces, public settings, and (pre-eminently) the home. Technology can also vastly expand access to Jewish learning, especially among those disinclined to participate in traditional venues.

2. *Modes of Jewish learning must be broadened.*

Jews may be “the people of the book,” but textual learning is not the only type of learning that should be validated as “Jewish.” We recognize today the diversity of learning styles and the existence of “multiple intelligences.” Jewish education must embrace this diversity, making greater use of the arts, kinetic activity, and multi-media technologies. This broadening of the modes of learning will both expand Jewish education’s reach (one TV program can reach the equivalent of hundreds of classrooms) and its credibility (by being seen to “speak a contemporary idiom”).

3. *Expanding the scope of Jewish education must be accompanied by strengthening the connections among and pathways through its multiple settings and modes.*

Realizing the full potential of a wider educational canvas requires that we make it easier for learners to access the many options that will be available and to move smoothly from experience to experience across institutional boundaries. Wertheimer et al speak of “linking the silos.” From a learner-centered perspective, we can think in terms of facilitating steps along a pathway so that Jewish education is experienced as a whole (journey) greater than the sum of its parts.

4. *We must recruit and retain the “right” people.*

In his book, *Good to Great*, Jim Collins emphasizes the importance to any successful enterprise of “getting the right people on the bus.” Life-centered Jewish education requires educators who are both comfortable and skilled in being guides

Educator Saul Kaiserman discusses how design principles similar to those proposed here can be applied to the world of congregational education in this essay, "Synagogue Schools and Congregational Agendas," reprinted with permission from the January 2007 edition of the journal Sh'ma, published by Jewish Family & Life! Saul Kaiserman is a Jerusalem Fellow at the Mandel Leadership Institute in Israel and the editor of the weblog "New Jewish Education" (www.newjewisheducation.org). He previously served as Director of Education for Central Synagogue in New York City. To subscribe to Sh'ma, please visit www.shma.com.

Synagogue Schools and Congregational Agendas

As a synagogue attempts to develop its membership into a cohesive community with a shared institutional identity, it may promote a particular vision of Judaism and embody it in its programs. At the same time, its constituents may participate simultaneously in a number of outside communities, each endorsing its own configuration of values, beliefs, and behaviors. A problem arises, therefore, when the synagogue agenda fails to recognize or devalues (covertly or explicitly) ideas or practices that its members embrace.

A synagogue's program may be an ideal context within which the negotiations between its institutional ideology and the diverse identities of its constituency can occur. Such an approach to education can revitalize and reinvigorate the function and purpose of the supplementary school and of Bar/Bat Mitzvah.

Education is not akin to the filling of empty vessels (the students) with fine wine (knowledge). Learners must actively engage in the process of making meaning for themselves by relating new information to what they already know. A synagogue education program can provide the opportunity for individuals to examine and make explicit the assumptions that underlie their beliefs and compare them with the ideals and principles for which the synagogue advocates. The learners can ask themselves how the normative behaviors the synagogue promotes, as well as the viewpoints of their contemporaries, might inform what they do in the rest of their lives — in other words, how their practices or beliefs might be changed as a result of their study.

Such a study will identify both connections and conflicts between a synagogue's core principles and how they might be enacted in the lives of its constituency. These conflicts are opportunities to deepen the connection between the synagogue and its members. Negotiations between different points of view require the development of a common language of shared references. Working together toward a shared goal of mutual comprehension and collective purpose, participants can build rich and trusting relationships.

If we want congregants to see themselves as stakeholders in the success of the institution, reflecting upon communal norms should also provide the opportunity to play a role in setting and shaping the congregational agenda and their experiences within it. There must be potential not only for the lives of the learners, but the practices of the synagogue itself, to be transformed through learning.

The supplementary school ought to provide opportunities for such personal and communal self-exploration. Its key purpose is to transform young people into Jewish adults, able to make decisions informed by Jewish values and to knowledgeably and competently participate in Jewish observances. This can only happen when synagogue schools provide students opportunities to engage in learning that is informed by their lives outside the school. If not, anything they are taught will come across as irrelevant. All too often, though, students discover instead that their ideas have no place in the synagogue and, equally, that synagogue's norms have no place in their lives once they walk out its doors.

The classroom can become a place where students and teachers together explore the intersections between Judaism (as embodied in the norms of the synagogue) and the daily lives of the individuals who form its community. In such programs, teachers must be both role models who embody the ideals of the synagogue and individuals open to rethinking those ideals in light of the students' challenges. They must ensure that the classroom allows for risk taking and experimenting with new ideas. Through the shared and collective exploration of Jewish identity, the classroom itself can become an intentional community formed around a common sense of purpose: the growth of all of its members as Jewish individuals.

As the children become reflective practitioners of Jewish living, the responsibility of the congregational school toward parents grows. The school must empower parents in their role as the primary agents shaping the Jewish identities of their children by supporting their negotiation between the values of the synagogue, those of the home, and those of the other influences upon their children's lives. Teachers can bring parents into a conversation about the connections and disconnections, intentional or not, between the messages in Jewish texts, congregational life, individual family practices, and the world at large.

In many congregations, Bar/Bat Mitzvah has become the point at which students end their participation in the school and the synagogue, and often, Jewish life. But what if the Bar or Bat Mitzvah ceremony were reframed as an authentic demonstration of mastery of the skills that the synagogue expects of all its adult participants? Becoming Bar or Bat Mitzvah would then require the young adult to share in the responsibility for the community's outcomes and practices — not only by attending congregational worship or participating in its social action activities, but also by having a voice in setting its agendas. Teens, no less than any other members of a congregation, should be able to serve on committees, be included in the hiring process for clergy, teachers, and other staff, and share in the leading of worship and organization of congregational activities.

The educational program should be a vibrant, integral component of synagogue life. On the one hand, it should push both the participants and the institution toward experimenting with new possibilities and new directions for Jewish living; on the other hand, it should enable participants to more fully embody the ideals of the synagogue in their daily lives. What is learned will influence how participants express their values not only within the congregation but in the totality of their lives. Education is a key vehicle by which the synagogue can become a change agent in the world.



Organizations and systems that innovate on an ongoing basis have certain characteristics that differ from those that are relatively static. Innovative organizations/systems tend to be:

- a) flexibly structured with broadly-defined roles;
- b) trusting and people-centered;
- c) risk-taking, with a high tolerance for ambiguity;
- d) use collaborative decision-making and treat decisions as hypotheses to be tested;
- e) have open, multi-directional communication;
- f) use feedback to adjust their visions and ideas;
- g) encourage diversity of thinking; and
- h) move toward a vision through constant reinvention.

This is the type of culture that Jewish education needs in order to be maximally successful.

(not authorities), in working in multiple learning modes, and in engaging diverse learners at many points along their educational journeys. It will require focused efforts and the investment of additional resources to attract individuals with these capabilities to the field of Jewish education and to keep them in the field.

5. *Educators' professionalism must be respected and supported.*

Central to retaining the right people is building a culture in Jewish education that treats educators as professionals (whether they work full-time or not). This involves both expectations and supports. High standards and rewards for meeting them (both financial and “psychic”) must go together. Above all, Jewish educators need to receive support for pursuing excellence in the form of exemplary working conditions, access to high quality professional development, recognition, and the value placed on learning in the community as a whole.

6. *We must empower educators to be innovators.*

Taking full advantage of educators of this caliber requires more than just respect for their professionalism. Educators must be encouraged and given the resources to innovate and experiment in finding ever-more effective ways of facilitating powerful learning experiences. Front-line educators in particular are often expected to be “implementers,” not “designers.” But, this dichotomy needs to be transcended. Learner-centered education must be flexible and adaptable, and this in turn requires educators who are both responsive and creative, and who are allowed to exercise these talents by stretching the boundaries of current practice.

7. *We must foster opportunities for collaboration among educators.*

Many of the most creative, engaging, effective Jewish educational programs and resources have been the products of collaborative efforts among educators from different institutions and different types of settings. We must work to create opportunities (structured and unstructured, formal and informal) for this type of collaboration to occur. The internet and other digital communication technologies render this task easier than ever.

8. *We must create a culture of innovation.* 

Beyond the introduction and diffusion of specific innovations in design and practice that reflect the “life-centered” paradigm laid out above, Jewish education must develop the capacity to generate and integrate innovation on an on-going basis. No system in today’s world can remain vibrant and vital without this capacity to adapt and transform itself continuously. This capacity will grow out of a “culture of conversation” in which reflective discussion and deliberation about educational issues, models, approaches, and outcomes is regular, widespread and involves “consumers” as well as “producers.” Jewish education must also develop the mechanisms and capabilities that allow effective innovations to spread rapidly and not (as they too often do today) to remain as isolated islands of success on an otherwise slow-to-change landscape.

E. Conclusion

These design principles for 21st century education are by no means new, but they are radical. As is evident from the citation of figures such as Rosenzweig, Buber, and Heschel (not to mention Tanakh and Talmud), many of these principles are deeply embedded within the fabric of Jewish thought, and some even in Jewish educational practice over the centuries. Nonetheless, they do not characterize the normative practice of Jewish education today, and were they put into practice widely and consistently, they would dramatically change the face of Jewish education as we know it.

And, such change is needed. Only a Jewish education that empowers learners as active agents shaping their own educational journeys, that fosters relationships and connections in a world at once fragmented and homogenized, and that addresses the full scope of our lives will be effective in engaging a generation of students — children and adults — who are both demanding and searching. Such an education will be able to absorb technology without being distorted by it, accommodate choice without abandoning its integrity, and offer multiple options for diverse learners without collapsing into anarchy. This is the kind of education we will need in order to thrive in the 21st century.

In the next section we will imagine what “life-centered” Jewish education might look like and how it might work for three contemporary families. Then, we will turn to the question of what it will take to put these design principles to work broadly in order to reshape the Jewish educational experience of hundreds of thousands, if not millions.

“Only a Jewish education that empowers learners as active agents shaping their own educational journeys, that fosters relationships and connections in a world at once fragmented and homogenized, and that addresses the full scope of our lives will be effective in engaging a generation of students — children and adults — who are both demanding and searching.”

Part Three: Envisioning the Future — Three Families’ Jewish Education Journeys

To illustrate how Jewish education grounded in the design principles laid out in Part Two would look in the “real world,” this section will trace the educational “journeys” of three Jewish families in one community. These soon-to-be parents meet in a “Jewish Lamaze” class sponsored jointly by the hospital where it is held and the local Jewish Federation. The class is co-taught by a certified childbirth instructor, who leads the parents in breathing techniques and visualizations, and a Jewish Community Educator, who talks with the future parents about Jewish traditions and customs surrounding childbirth, baby naming, and infancy. In the class are:

- *Karen and Jeff:* A couple in a “Jewish mixed marriage,” as Karen was raised with quite a bit more Jewish education and observance than Jeff was. They are seeking a Jewish path that falls somewhere in the middle and feels comfortable to both of them.
- *Susan:* A Jewish single mother by choice, Susan is seeking a warm and close Jewish community that can provide her with the support and fellowship she will need while raising her child by herself.
- *Gary and Michael:* A gay, intermarried couple adopting a girl from China (who attend the class for the Jewish education, not the childbirth training), they are seeking an inclusive Jewish community that welcomes non-traditional families.

Some of the educational models described in the families’ narratives are already known to exist in various institutions. These will be identified in the footnotes. (Additional examples of programs that embody design principles discussed in this Working Paper may be found in Appendix 2, *Noteworthy Programs*.) Real-life examples of some of the other programs described below may also exist, but have not yet received attention outside of their local community. Still others of the programs described exist at this point only in our vision of the future. Altogether, these portraits represent plausible best case scenarios, envisioning the possible paths of motivated families in a community with bounteous resources devoted to Jewish education.

“Altogether, these portraits represent plausible best case scenarios, envisioning the possible paths of motivated families in a community with bounteous resources devoted to Jewish education.”

Karen and Jeff

Within a few weeks of giving birth to their son, Noah, Karen and Jeff receive a phone call from Rachel, a Central Agency for Jewish Education employee who introduces herself as a “Jewish family coach” — a resource and source of information about Jewish life in their community. At Rachel’s suggestion, Karen signs up for a new parents’ support group at a local synagogue, where every Tuesday afternoon Karen shares parenting stories, tips and challenges with other, mostly Jewish moms (and an occasional dad). Although the group officially lasts only a few months, the members continue to meet socially for months afterwards, and Karen and Jeff form a few friendships with other couples that last for years.

Through the synagogue group, Karen and Jeff learn about the various Jewish early childhood education options available to them in their community. Karen returns to work when Noah is six months old, and they enroll him in Gan Yeladim, a full-time Jewish day care/pre-school program for infants through Pre-Kindergarten. Gan, as it’s commonly called, is known to be a superior early childhood program by every measure. Because it’s partially subsidized by the Federation, it can provide its teachers with good salaries and full benefits, and thus attracts the highest quality early childhood educators (and with stronger Jewish backgrounds than is typical for the field). The program is fun, stimulating, and rich with Jewish content and activities. Noah thrives there, and Karen and Jeff, who make time to participate in the monthly Jewish family education programs, feel like they are part of a community. When they pick up Noah on Friday afternoons, they can also take home a challah and ready-made Shabbat meal — courtesy of the school’s arrangement with a local Kosher market — a boon for a busy family. Noah’s little sister, Emma, three years younger, happily joins him at Gan.

With the ready-made community at Gan, Karen and Jeff feel little need to join a synagogue during their children’s early years, particularly since they disagree about what kind of synagogue to join. However, once Noah starts Kindergarten, they realize how important it is to them that he, and Emma after him, continue their Jewish education. Although they valued the daily Jewish education Noah received as a preschooler, they don’t want quite the level of Jewish intensity — or the high tuition bills — of a day school, particularly with an excellent local public elementary school. Fortunately, they have another option: Beyachad, a community-wide Jewish afterschool program, which they hear of when Beyachad’s director comes to meet with the parents in Noah’s pre-school class.⁵

Three days a week, Noah takes a bus directly from his school to the Beyachad building, where he enjoys three hours of play, snack, and Hebrew and Judaic instruction (which blends formal and informal education). For Karen and Jeff, Beyachad meets a multitude of needs: for quality Jewish education, reliable after-school care, and a non-denominational Jewish community in which they both feel at home. Like about half of Beyachad’s families, they decide not to join a synagogue, taking advantage instead of Beyachad’s holiday celebrations and opportunities for adult and family education.

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⁵ Based on the Keshet Community After School Hebrew School program in Cambridge and Newton, MA (www.keshetweb.org/)

“With her tech savvy, Emma introduces her family to the myriad of Jewish learning options on-line. She and Noah soon begin to help shape the family’s holiday celebrations with commentaries from myjewishlearning.com (www.myjewishlearning.com), new rituals from ritualwell.org (www.ritualwell.org), and provocative blog entries from jewschool.com (www.jewishschool.com).”

“Upon their graduation from high school, Rachel (the “Jewish coach” who has stayed in touch with the family all these years) notifies the Hillel directors of Emerson and MIT that Noah and Emma will be coming, so they can be welcomed immediately upon arriving on campus.”

In the summers, Noah has an array of day camp options which combine informal, fun Jewish learning with specialized topics — nature, sports, computers, arts, etc. In the first few years, Noah samples a number of programs for a few weeks each. By sixth grade, he knows that he is most drawn to music and arts, and he spends his summers exploring this interest through various programs, some integrating Jewish content and some secular. Emma, by contrast, lives for sports and computers. She spends her summers at a Maccabia camp and taking computer courses at the JCC. With her tech savvy, Emma introduces her family to the myriad of Jewish learning options on-line. She and Noah soon begin to help shape the family’s holiday celebrations with commentaries from myjewishlearning.com (www.myjewishlearning.com), new rituals from ritualwell.org (www.ritualwell.org), and provocative blog entries from jewschool.com (www.jewishschool.com). Karen and Jeff, meanwhile, find that with their busy schedules, on-line courses and hevruta offer a way to continue their own Jewish learning that is both meaningful and manageable.

In high school, Noah and Emma take advantage of a Jewish afterschool program located in the school building, through a partnership between the school and a consortium of local synagogues, offering “tracks” focused on service learning, Hebrew immersion, text study, arts, etc.⁶

During the summers, Noah continues to immerse himself in music and drama. He spends the summer after 9th grade at a secular arts camp, the next summer at BIMA (www.brandeis.edu/bima/), a Jewish arts institute at Brandeis University; his 11th grade summer on an arts-focused Israel Experience trip; and the summer before college interning at a local community theatre. Emma, combining her interest in technology with a growing dedication to social action, spends her first two summers working for a Jewish women’s shelter as a technology intern, and her second summers on service programs for teens through the American Jewish Society for Service (www.ajss.org) and the American Jewish World Service (www.ajws.org). She decides to spend a year volunteering in Israel before joining Noah as a college student in Massachusetts, she at MIT and he at Emerson College.

Upon their graduation from high school, Rachel (the “Jewish coach” who has stayed in touch with the family all these years) notifies the Hillel directors of Emerson and MIT that Noah and Emma will be coming, so they can be welcomed immediately upon arriving on campus. Over the next six years, Karen and Jeff follow their children’s college experiences by e-mail, which, while dominated by theater and computer science, also include stimulating Judaic studies courses, spirited celebrations of Shabbat and holidays, and meaningful opportunities to continue to explore their Jewish identities through text study and social action (Emma becomes the editor of MIT’s first Jewish Social Action journal). Karen and Jeff, meanwhile, fill their newly free hours by enrolling in the Florence Melton Adult Mini-School (www.fmams.org.il), beginning a course of adult Jewish learning which will last the rest of their lives.

⁶ This idea is modeled after Baltimore’s Inspiration Express (www.inspirationexpress.org), a Jewish after school club for elementary school students.

Susan

As a single mom, one of Susan's priorities from the moment her son, Sam, is born is to find the support structures that can help her as she navigates the challenges of parenthood on her own. She starts by trying a synagogue-based support group, but often finds that she's often just too exhausted and overwhelmed to make it out of the house in time to get there. Her "coach" at the Federation suggests some on-line Jewish parenting listservs and message boards, and Susan finds them to be a much needed lifeline. At any hour of the day or night, she can log in to find an immediate virtual community. She even learns that some of her e-mail pen pals live in her city, and begins to meet them for regular coffees and play dates.

Once she returns to work, Susan enrolls Sam at the employer-sponsored day care in her office building. Because the community offers numerous Jewish early childhood activities on the weekends geared to working parents — Jewish versions of "Mommy and Me," Gymboree, music classes, and story time held at synagogues, the JCC, libraries, and indoor play gyms — Sam can enjoy fun Jewish experiences from his infancy, and Susan can connect to other Jewish parents. Susan also continues to immerse herself in her on-line community, and even starts her own blog detailing her experiences as a single Jewish mom.

By the time Sam turns four, Susan is ready for a more intensive community for herself and more substantive Jewish education for her son. On the advice of one of the "Jewish Gymboree" instructors, she checks out Hevrat Shalom, a nearby Reform congregation that strives to integrate "religious school" and "family education." At Hevrat Shalom, families are divided geographically into chavurot of about 10 households that include children of mixed ages. Each chavurah works with an educational guide (who is a full-time employee of the synagogue) as they engage in study of both a core curriculum shared by the whole congregation, and additional subjects chosen by the chavurah members. Susan and Sam's chavurah meets in members' homes twice a month for study and socializing, and with the whole congregation twice a month at the synagogue for Shabbat celebration and a potluck meal.⁷

Starting in second grade, Sam also goes to the synagogue one afternoon a week for Hebrew instruction, followed by informal "chuggim" in Jewish art, music, cooking, computers, etc.

Susan and Sam love Hevrat Shalom, and feel that their chavura is truly an extended family. They almost never eat Shabbat dinner or Holiday meals alone — every Friday night brings at least one, often multiple invitations. When Susan has the occasional crises that arise in every working parent's life (the late meeting, the sick child on the day of the big presentation), she knows that she can call any member of her chavura to ask for help.

"At Hevrat Shalom, families are divided geographically into chavurot of about 10 households that include children of mixed ages. Each chavurah works with an educational guide (who is a full-time employee of the synagogue) as they engage in study of both a core curriculum shared by the whole congregation, and additional subjects chosen by the chavurah members."

⁷ This idea was shared by Rabbi Misha Zinkow of Temple Israel (www.templeisrael.org) in Columbus, OH, as part of his vision of the ideal religious education program.

“As most of the children in Susan and Sam’s chavura move into adolescence, the nature of the group’s study changes, becoming less “family” education and more adult education (with the teens treated as equals in learning.)”

“As Susan becomes more and more immersed in Jewish learning and service, she eventually decides at age sixty-one to embark upon a new career. After studying for three years in a distance learning program that combines web courses, video conferencing, and face-to-face seminars, and mentoring from a “master teacher” in her community, Susan receives a Masters in Jewish Education and becomes a Community Jewish Educator.”

Unlike many synagogue religious schools, Hevrat Shalom’s Jewish education doesn’t end (or significantly diminish) after Bar/Bat Mitzvah, although teen participation does wane somewhat as other social activity increases. As most of the children in Susan and Sam’s chavura move into adolescence, the nature of the group’s study changes, becoming less “family” education and more adult education (with the teens treated as equals in learning.) In addition to his Jewish learning with the chavurah, Sam decides that he would like to intensify his Hebrew education, with the goal of spending a year in Israel during college. The chavura’s educational guide suggests that he attend a community-wide Hebrew “magnet” afterschool program at another synagogue, where he studies Hebrew twice a week.

By college application time, Sam has decided to major in Judaic Studies. He chooses the joint program of the University of Southern California and Hebrew Union College, attracted by the rich Judaic Studies offerings of the two schools, and the promise of four years of great weather. During his undergraduate and graduate years (in HUC’s Jewish Communal Service program), Sam samples L.A.’s rich Jewish scene for young adults: Makor (www.makor.net), which sponsors Shabbat dinners and other group events for 20- and 30-somethings, a community Beit Midrash for young adults, and a steady stream of Jewish music events, poetry readings, and literary salons.

Although Susan wishes her son weren’t quite so far away, the close Jewish communities she has created for herself, both real and virtual, help make her nest feel a bit less empty. Already in her late fifties when Sam leaves for college, Susan begins to explore Jewish opportunities for “mature adults” in her area. She particularly enjoys a program sponsored by the JCC that integrates Jewish learning with volunteer work in the community. As Susan becomes more and more immersed in Jewish learning and service, she eventually decides at age 61 to embark upon a new career. After studying for three years in a distance learning program that combines web courses, video conferencing, and face-to-face seminars, and mentoring from a “master teacher” in her community, Susan receives a Masters in Jewish Education and becomes a Community Jewish Educator.

Gary and Michael

Upon first glimpsing their adopted daughter, Olivia, Gary and Michael immediately recite the Shechiyanu blessing, which they learned for the first time at their “Jewish Lamaze” class. Gary decides to be a stay at home parent while Olivia is young. He contacts the JCC professional who co-taught the course (along with the certified childbirth instructor), to find out what activities are available for him to take Olivia to during the weekdays. She recommends the same Jewish early childhood activities that Susan and Sam enjoyed, which all have weekday as well as weekend schedules. She also helps Gary sign up for “PJ Library Plus,” a national program that provides Jewish-content books and music to families with children through age six, and connects families in the same community through playgroups, holiday celebrations, and museum outings.⁸

Not having been raised Jewish, Gary finds himself absorbing as much Jewish content as Olivia from the activities and materials. Even though Gary is usually the only father in attendance at these programs, he finds that shared Jewish interests help him create connections to the community of moms. Michael, who works long hours during the week, takes part by accompanying Olivia to activities on the weekend, and reading her “PJ Library” bedtime story to her every night. All three enjoy spending family time watching Jewish children’s TV programs, available “on-demand” through a local access cable channel in their community.

When Olivia enters Kindergarten (at a private Montessori school), Gary and Michael start thinking about how to continue her Jewish education and their Jewish connections. Their challenge is that, as a gay, interfaith couple with an adopted daughter from China, they want to be part of a community that not only tolerates, but actively welcomes non-traditional Jewish families. Their internet research and tips from other parents leads them to Kehillat Keshet, a Reconstructionist congregation about forty-five minutes from their home. Because many Kehillat Keshet members live a significant distance from the synagogue and from each other, the education program combines twice-monthly programming at the synagogue with an extensive and sophisticated “home schooling” system. Gary and Michael teach Olivia during the week in the evenings, using both print materials provided by the religious school, and online resources that they select themselves to follow their interests, with guidance from the education director.⁹

On Sundays at the Kehillat Keshet building, Olivia learns together with her age group, while Gary and Michael join the other parents for adult Jewish learning programs. On the Sundays that they are not in the synagogue, the family goes online to learn together with Olivia’s classmates and their families, using web chats and instant messaging for online hevrutas and group discussions.

“She also helps Gary sign up for “PJ Library Plus,” a national program that provides Jewish-content books and music to families with children through age six, and connects families in the same community through playgroups, holiday celebrations, and museum outings.”

“Because many Kehillat Keshet members live a significant distance from the synagogue and from each other, the education program combines twice-monthly programming at the synagogue with an extensive and sophisticated “home schooling” system.”

⁸ The “PJ Library” (www.pjlibrary.org) program, distributing Jewish books and CDs to families with young children, has been developed and disseminated by the Harold Grinspoon Foundation of Springfield, MA. The “plus” elements are now being discussed as possible expansions of the program.

⁹ This model of learning at home is inspired by the home school program of Congregation Oseh Shalom (www.oseh-shalom.org) in Laurel, MD.

“The retreat, held in a beautiful mountain setting, offers outdoor activities for Olivia, recreation and relaxation for Gary and Michael, and Jewish connection, celebration, and informal learning for the whole family.”

During the summers, Olivia, who loves the outdoors, attends day and overnight camps that specialize in nature and environmental education. Every August the family spends a week at a Jewish Family Retreat Center, where Kehillat Keshet’s rabbi is one of the retreat leaders. The retreat, held in a beautiful mountain setting, offers outdoor activities for Olivia, recreation and relaxation for Gary and Michael, and Jewish connection, celebration, and informal learning for the whole family. They see many of the same families year after year (some of whom are other Kehillat Keshet families) and think of the retreat center as a home away from home. When the center begins offering wintertime “Shabbat and ski” retreats during Olivia’s school vacations, they try to attend one every year as well.

When Olivia reaches the 6th and final grade of her Montessori school, David and Michael must find another educational option for her. Not satisfied with the public schools in their city neighborhood, they investigate private schools, and find themselves intrigued by their community day school’s progressive general and Jewish education. They are a bit nervous, however, about whether Olivia would be able to catch up with her classmates in Hebrew and Judaic subjects. When they meet with the Head of School, she assures them that the school program is designed to welcome and quickly mainstream students coming from public and secular private schools, and that Olivia will have many classmates who are also entering the school in 7th grade. Indeed, Olivia finds she is able to catch up to her classmates within the year, and thrives at the school, finding many ways to integrate her passion for the environment with the school’s general and Judaic studies curriculum. She also starts a small club for students of color, and soon becomes a student leader in Ayecha (www.ayecha.org), a national organization promoting Jewish diversity. Gary and Michael find the school’s parent community to be friendly and welcoming, if perhaps not quite as diverse as they might like. Kehillat Keshet continues to provide their closest Jewish friends and ties. They continue to travel to the synagogue for adult education and Shabbat services, and to use the home-school resources to enrich their family celebrations. When Olivia leaves for college at the University of Colorado, after a summer working as a guide for The Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel, she promises that she will set aside time every week for on-line hevruta study with her dads.

Conclusion

These narratives present a possible future of Jewish education that is rich and varied enough to attract every Jewish family. While not every promising idea or possibility can be included here, those described above were chosen to illustrate the central themes of our vision for 21st Century Jewish education. The educational options and opportunities that we envision:

- Meet families' real needs — educational, spiritual and practical
- Are experiential and enjoyable, blending formal and informal
- Build connections and community, often across generations
- Are both guided by professionals, and shaped by the interests of the learner
- Go beyond the walls of the synagogue and the day school, taking place in public schools, libraries, retreat centers, community institutions, and homes
- Take full advantage of the power and potential of technology, especially the internet
- Are part of a continuous educational system in which professionals anticipate what families' educational needs and desires will be in the next stage of their lives, and provide the knowledge and connections they need to fulfill them seamlessly.

“These narratives present a possible future of Jewish education that is rich and varied enough to attract every Jewish family.”

Part 4: From Design Principles to a Strategy for Change

“The challenge is less to invent (though inventing new models certainly will continue to be needed), than to expand and diffuse. What is now exceptional needs to become normal.”

“The good news is that Jewish education can learn much from the experience of others who are trying to make innovations normative. The bad news is that no one has found a magic bullet, so the challenge to Jewish education cannot be met simply by following a recipe or formula.”

A. *The Challenge of Systemic Change*

Redesigning Jewish education requires both a vision for where we wish to go and a strategy for getting there. We have laid out the vision in the form of the design principles enumerated in Part 2 of this Working Paper and the three “case studies” of these principles in operation in Part 3. The challenge now is to articulate a strategy for moving from principles and examples to broadly implemented policies and practices.

It bears noting that this is not a case of starting from scratch. Programs exist today that embody the three design principles of life-centered, learner-focused, relationship-infused Jewish education (see Appendix 2). The challenge is less to invent (though inventing new models certainly will continue to be needed), than to expand and diffuse. What is now exceptional needs to become normal.

This is not, however, simply a matter of multiplication or replication. In order for innovative practices to take root widely, there will need to be changes that are systemic. Conditions need to be put in place that make it easier for diffusion to happen and for new innovations to be generated on a continuing basis (since yesterday’s innovation is tomorrow’s burdensome legacy). Action will be needed simultaneously, then, on three levels: that of individual programs (where those with great potential need to be identified and analyzed so that they can be adopted and adapted elsewhere); of institutions (which need to become more agile and more able to generate and absorb a regular flow of new practices); and of the system as a whole (which needs to be configured and to operate in ways that facilitate, rather than inhibit, the spread of innovation).

These challenges are hardly unique to Jewish education. There is an extensive literature in the fields of business and social change addressing the issue of how to diffuse innovation. In the world of general education, “scaling up” small instances of success — a classroom here, a school there — to systemic proportions (“no child left behind”) is the “holy grail” of school reform, much discussed, if too rarely achieved. So, the good news is that Jewish education can learn much from the experience of others who are trying to make innovations normative. The bad news is that no one has found a magic bullet, so the challenge to Jewish education cannot be met simply by following a recipe or formula.

B. *Guiding Principles for Change*

Nonetheless, there are principles that can guide us here as well. The application of these principles to the unique environment and structural configuration of Jewish education (in some ways even less conducive to large scale change than other settings) will be neither automatic nor easy. But, identifying and understanding these change principles is

the necessary first step in fashioning a change strategy that has any hope of being effective.

Based on analysis of the literature on change in diverse fields, we suggest that there are ten key elements to focus upon. In order to achieve broad-scale innovation in Jewish education, the change process must:

1. Motivate key actors to change
2. Make these actors aware of alternatives to current policy and practice
3. Generate guiding vision(s) for what change is needed or desirable
4. Instill an understanding of the situation to be changed, the nature of the changes to be made, the benefits to be derived from change, and how to make change (including how to deal with anticipated obstacles)
5. Develop committed and effective leadership among these actors
6. Provide the information needed for actors to formulate and take ownership of the specific changes that will be pursued (this will include examples of successful similar changes, policies and practices; however, specific changes cannot be imposed or merely “copied” from elsewhere)
7. Make available adequate resources to implement and sustain change
8. Make available outside assistance where needed
9. Provide perceived rewards for engaging in change
10. Encourage ongoing learning and adaptation (since one-time change will not be adequate).

This is a formidable set of requisites — which helps to explain why broad systemic change is so rare and why so many innovations, even demonstrably successful ones, remain idiosyncratic. But, it does provide a framework for analyzing what is missing today in the way that Jewish education pursues change. And, it can help us identify leverage points for pushing Jewish education in a different direction. In light of this framework, what concrete action steps can be taken to infuse Jewish education broadly with the ideas laid out earlier in this working paper, and to expand, extend, and replicate some of the programs and initiatives already in operation that embody these principles?

A full-scale analysis of each step in the change process and how it would/could/should be implemented within Jewish education is well beyond the scope of what is possible or intended here. The process will necessarily be enormously complex, multi-dimensional, and involve a myriad of actors over relatively long periods of time. But we can identify a small number of potentially high-leverage strategic interventions aligned with these change principles — we propose five here — that could help move the Jewish educational

“We can identify a small number of potentially high-leverage strategic interventions aligned with these change principles — we propose five here — that could help move the Jewish educational enterprise toward wide-scale adoption of the design principles laid out above.”



The concept of “self-organization” and the idea that small increments of change can have large ripple effects (the so-called “butterfly effect”) are both key elements in complexity theory. Complexity theory is an important contribution to our ability to understand and produce change in real-world systems — including the Jewish community — that tend not to lend themselves to top-down, mechanistic, social engineering type of change management. Complexity theory argues for change strategies that rely more heavily on directions and momentum generated from within the system itself, facilitating and “steering” rather than pushing and directing. Complexity theory also endorses a more experimental approach to change and one that simultaneously “exploits” opportunities that are immediately at hand (e.g., getting those already enrolled in educational programs to participate in additional ones) and “exploring” opportunities that may be unrecognized as such until they are tested (e.g., offering new types of programs that will attract those who have not participated at all).

enterprise toward wide-scale adoption of the design principles laid out above. These interventions will not in themselves be sufficient to produce broad change — other things will need to be done as well, many of which, such as capacity-building for individual institutions and training of leadership and personnel, are already widely accepted as important and in need of additional impetus. However, the interventions listed below are by and large underutilized and under-explored. Their incorporation into a comprehensive change strategy could well create the “tipping point” needed to generate more rapid and extensive adoption of worthwhile innovations in Jewish education than has been achieved thus far.


C. *Five Steps Toward Changing Jewish Education*

1. **Identify, Empower and Connect a Cadre of Change Agents**

The first and most basic step is to identify, develop, and connect those who will lead and assist the change effort. Precisely because change is difficult and energy-consuming it needs champions and supporters. Large-scale change, in turn, needs coalitions of such individuals who have the vision to see the big picture, who are well-placed to influence change in multiple settings, and who are prepared to persist in driving change forward in the face of inevitable obstacles.

There are many in Jewish education today who are implementing changes and developing new practices in individual contexts. But, there is no framework for organizing for change on a more systematic and expansive basis. Many localized change agents operate in relative isolation. Many of those with large visions for change are disconnected from those working on the front lines, especially in fields other than their own. As a result, change endeavors tend to be under-capitalized, under-resourced, and poorly coordinated with other efforts.

Achieving a critical mass of support for the kinds of changes we have advocated in this paper cannot be engineered from the top down. But, it can be built from the bottom up by identifying those committed to these design principles — professional educators, lay leaders, financial supporters — (or having them identify themselves), and providing them with opportunities to connect with one another and to mobilize their collective strength. This can be done through conferences, communities of practice, blogs, wikis, and other methods for fostering relationships and sharing knowledge and experience. Nurturing a cadre of leaders for redesigning Jewish education will make feasible and worthwhile many of the other interventions outlined below.

Who, then, will “lead the leaders” and take action to forge this cadre? Hopefully, those who are sympathetic to the vision of change articulated here, and are already in a position to command some measure of resources, will rise to this challenge. We should not underestimate the capacity of humans to self-organize, and we should look for opportunities to set this dynamic in motion in small ways that can produce large impacts down the road. 

2. Create a “Literature of Success”

If people are the first key to successful change, knowledge is the second. One of the key barriers to achieving broad change in Jewish education is simply the lack of awareness of what is possible and of how others have achieved success. Providing examples of programs and practices that can become models for adoption and adaptation elsewhere is one of the most powerful single actions we can take because it addresses simultaneously several of the dimensions of our theoretical change model:

- Examples help individuals, institutions, and communities become aware that there are alternatives to current policies and practices.
- Examples motivate actors to change by holding out the promise of greater success and by instilling confidence that pursuing change is worthwhile and feasible.
- Examples inform actors about what changes to make, not merely in the abstract, but concretely.
- Examples can stimulate creativity to produce ideas for change that are extensions, modifications, and improvements on the examples themselves, and that are indigenous to the settings in which they will be implemented.
- Examples can even contribute to the process of setting a vision for change by embodying ideas and aspirations that can guide new efforts.

The key question is what it means to put forward examples of successful change. On one level, simply making known the existence of programs or practices that are new or different is itself a contribution to diffusing change. But, far better is creating a “literature of success” that not only points to innovative programs as “existence proofs,” but enriches our understanding of how such programs work, why they are successful (if they are), what they achieve, what principles of design and implementation they embody, and what lessons we can learn from them. This is a tall order since it requires sophisticated evaluations that may not be feasible or even suitable for new, often still experimental ventures.

So, we need to find a balance between seeking out and analyzing in detail what might be termed “best practices” in innovation (to create a substantial literature of success) and pointing people towards unproven, but promising “new practices” that are worth watching and from which we can draw some measure of inspiration and learning even before we know if their promise will be completely fulfilled. A systematic approach to identifying, cataloguing, documenting, and disseminating information about (potentially) exemplary programs, initiatives, policies, and practices is the critical first step. Having a continually growing database of “success stories” (at whatever stage) then opens up many possible strategies for the multiplication of these successes — dissemination oriented evaluations, partnerships pairing “mentor” and “mentee” institutions, communities of practice, diffusion networks, collaborations among similar projects to further refine their approaches. These further steps will clearly need additional thoughtful planning and resources, but building the “literature of success” on which they are grounded is a relatively straightforward and inexpensive initial investment.

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3. Establish “Hothouses” for Collaborative Innovation

A third key strategic intervention that applies several of the change principles identified above would be the establishment of “hothouses” that would serve as laboratories for developing and testing innovations. We imagine these hothouses as settings where groups of educators, institutional leaders, funders, and researchers would come together to formulate initiatives in areas of shared interest and to serve as “project teams” overseeing the implementation of these initiatives in one or more settings to which they were connected. Each major community could maintain at least one such hothouse, perhaps attached to its central agency for Jewish education. And domain-specific hothouses could be established by national organizations such as PEJE (day school), the Foundation for Jewish Camping, JECEI (early childhood education), the Consortium for the Future of the Jewish Family (family education), Jexnet (experiential youth education), Hillel, and birthright israel (engagement of young adults) to promote innovation in their respective fields.

A hothouse and team would serve partly as an “idea lab,” partly as an incubator, partly as a support system, partly as an “after-action review” group, and partly as an already assembled coalition to promote further dissemination of the projects it generates. By providing such teams with a home base, resources, opportunities for cross-fertilization, and institutional supports, the hothouse would facilitate sophisticated R&D work in Jewish education that is simply beyond the capacity of the vast majority of operating or academic institutions working on their own.

Such hothouses would, again, serve multiple purposes within the framework of an overall change strategy:

- The hothouses would draw considerable attention to the processes of innovation and diffusion.
- The hothouses be a breeding ground for leadership.
- The hothouses would encourage collaboration among key constituencies that need to work together for change to occur.
- The hothouses would promote the sharing of information among those involved in change in diverse settings.
- The hothouses would afford opportunities through collaborative inquiry to deepen and refine our understanding of both specific innovations and the process of implementing new approaches generally.
- The hothouses would reward individuals and institutions engaged in making change with both tangible support and enhanced visibility and prestige.
- The hothouses would provide critical resources and support for change efforts (including time).

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“The hothouses would afford opportunities through collaborative inquiry to deepen and refine our understanding of both specific innovations and the process of implementing new approaches generally.”

Hothouses are surely not a panacea, and the scope of the change they would be able to support would certainly be limited. They would also require dedicated resources beyond those committed to the innovative programs or practices themselves. But, by focusing attention and energies on a select number of highly promising innovative initiatives, they would create an environment in which the diffusion of innovation is far more likely to occur. The hothouses would simultaneously build intellectual, social, and human capital, all of which could then be deployed subsequently to catalyze change broadly throughout the Jewish educational system.

4. Provide Incentives for Change

The great paradox of change is that it is almost inevitably both welcomed and feared. Even the most promising change also involves loss, and frequently the loss is both more immediate and more personal than the promised gain. Humans will make sacrifices for “the greater good,” but it helps if the sacrifice can be minimized and the rewards enlarged and advanced.

For widespread change to take place in Jewish education, we must confront honestly and creatively the very real barriers and disincentives that stand in the way of such change. For years, observers of Jewish communal, including educational, life have decried the prominence of “turf” and the possessiveness and resistance to change that frequently accompanies it. Without question, such attitudes — “we must hold onto our Jews and do things our way” — are antithetical to the design principles articulated above that emphasize facilitating good choices and smooth journeys. But, the impulse to protect one’s turf is often rooted in positive and legitimate concerns, ranging from maintaining institutional viability to a desire to build strong communities in a highly individualistic world.

Jewish education also has its own versions of the “tragedy of the commons”  whereby individual institutions, each acting in what it not unjustifiably perceives as its own best interest, nonetheless produce a collective result that is far from optimal for the system as a whole.

A prime example, cited earlier, is the relative sameness of part-time religious (or Hebrew) schools. Each congregation strives to meet the middle of the market and to offer a fundamental education for the continuity of synagogue life — Hebrew reading, familiarity with the prayer services, study of selected Biblical passages, holidays and customs, perhaps some history or current events, and preparation for Bar or Bat Mitzvah. The outcome is that families seeking alternative educational foci — intensive modern Hebrew, heavy doses of experiential education or the arts; or interested in very different structural arrangements — intensive retreats or learning at home, rather than afternoon and weekend classes; often have a difficult time finding these or getting synagogues to accommodate their needs and desires.¹⁰



The phrase “tragedy of the commons” is associated with Garrett Hardin, whose essay in *Science* magazine in 1968 described the phenomenon whereby actions that appear individually advantageous, e.g., adding one more animal to one’s grazing flock, can turn out to have dire consequences for the collective welfare (including one’s own) when the result is that the common grazing ground that all utilize becomes overgrazed and incapable of supporting everyone’s enlarged flocks (www.garretthardin.org/articles/ar_tragedy_of_the_commons.html).

(See also the Wikipedia entry on the tragedy of the commons at en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tragedy_of_the_commons.)

¹⁰ See the Research Probe on congregational school curricula on p. 11. See also the study done by the late Dr. Egon Mayer for the Center for Cultural Judaism on “Parental Perspectives on Jewish Education in the United States” (www.culturaljudaism.org/pdf/ParentalExpectations.pdf), which argues that there is a significant currently underserved population looking for alternatives to traditional religious schools.

“Protecting and rewarding those willing to experiment and take risks, both programmatically and financially, could take the form of “insurance” or “indemnification” for those who might suffer losses as a result and “bonus” payments to those that demonstrate positive results according to pre-determined metrics.”

“What is most important in crafting an overall strategy for widespread educational change is recognizing that appeals to “what is right” or even to “what works” will not alone overcome natural resistance to change. This resistance needs to be understood, accepted, and counteracted by mitigating the risks involved and by providing positive incentives for institutions and leaders to take actions that will ultimately benefit education’s consumers and the community as a whole.”

The concerns that lead to “turfism” or to “tragedies of the commons” cannot be brushed aside or denounced as merely “short-sighted” (even if they are from an outsider’s perspective). For broad change to take place, these concerns need to be addressed directly. Partly, this can be done by encouraging and assisting institutions to engage in conversations that allow them to step back from their immediate situation and to explore other options for defining and fulfilling their educational missions. (These kinds of conversations happen all too rarely.)

But, real-world, practical concerns, such as financial costs and risks, must be addressed as well. This means providing incentives for institutions to test new financial models, e.g., “finders fees” for referrals to other settings, single payments to access multiple institutions, large discounts for “first time customers” — many of which already exist, but are not utilized as widely as they might be. Protecting and rewarding those willing to experiment and take risks, both programmatically and financially, could take the form of “insurance” or “indemnification” for those who might suffer losses as a result and “bonus” payments to those that demonstrate positive results according to pre-determined metrics.

Incentives can also come in the form of recognition and approbation. Giving visible, public credit to innovators and also to those who adopt innovations pioneered by others, especially if these carry risks (as most innovations do), is a relatively easy and inexpensive way to establish a climate in which innovation is seen as a desirable and even normative pathway to pursue. If such recognition is also tied to the potential for financial reward (e.g., greater support from grantmakers), all the better. The annual Slingshot listing of fifty innovative organizations and projects is an example of this kind of recognition (www.2164.net/slingshot.html).

What is most important in crafting an overall strategy for widespread educational change is recognizing that appeals to “what is right” or even to “what works” will not alone overcome natural resistance to change. This resistance needs to be understood, accepted, and counteracted by mitigating the risks involved and by providing positive incentives for institutions and leaders to take actions that will ultimately benefit education’s consumers and the community as a whole. Identifying and implementing such incentives is itself an opportunity for creative design work and for increasing our understanding of the real dynamics of change on the ground.

5. Introduce New Modalities for Change

There is a fifth practical step that could contribute to a viable change strategy for Jewish education: broadening the array of tools available to those seeking to make change.

As noted above, Jewish education is hardly unique in seeking to find more successful methods for achieving large-scale change. In other domains, approaches are being used that are rarely utilized in Jewish education, some drawing on different paradigms for the change process itself. Two examples are Appreciative Inquiry and social marketing.¹¹

¹¹ There are numerous resources on both Appreciative Inquiry and social marketing available on the internet. For a good starting point in understanding Appreciative Inquiry, try www.appreciativeinquiry.case.edu/. For an introduction to social marketing, see www.social-marketing.org/.

Appreciative Inquiry, developed by Dr. David Cooperrider of Case Western Reserve University, draws on positive psychology to lay out a process for achieving personal, organizational, or communal change that is asset- rather than deficit-based. It sets out not to “solve problems,” but to identify and accentuate those elements in our experience that reveal us at our best. It uses a structured process of inquiry built around four stages — Discover, Dream, Design, and Deliver (or Destiny) — to enable even very large groups to shape a desired future together. Research supports the proposition that focusing on the positive — what we want, not what we are trying to avoid — releases greater energy to see a change process through the inevitable rough spots than does the more typical approach of trying to fix what is not working well.

Social marketing is an approach to achieving behavioral change that is widely used today in public health and other fields. It is based on familiar marketing principles employed in commercial life, but applied to the challenge of changing behaviors to reach social goods (e.g., giving up smoking or reducing obesity). Social marketing uses the logic of product marketing to identify audiences whose actions are critical to achieving the intended outcomes, specify the actions we want these audiences to take, define the “exchange” that must take place for these actions to be undertaken (what benefits the audience gets for doing what we want), and formulate a “campaign” to achieve the desired results using the four “Ps” of marketing: product (the package of benefits), price (keeping the “cost” as low as possible), place (making the product readily accessible to the audiences), and promotion (getting the message to the audiences creatively and in ways they are likely to hear). Social marketing is at bottom a discipline for asking questions that push us to look at change from the “customer’s” perspective — what will make the changes we seek be viewed as desirable and feasible by those who must actually make those changes.

Neither Appreciative Inquiry nor social marketing is *the* answer to the question of how to achieve widespread change. Nor are they the only two “unconventional” methods that might be employed. (We might think also about applying insights from grass-roots organizing or self-help movements.) They are simply examples of ways of going about the process of inspiring and infusing innovation that may produce results that more conventional approaches do not. And, they seem especially apt for situations like the one we live in today when individuals and institutions value self-direction and resist anything that carries the scent of being told what to do. Appreciative Inquiry builds broad ownership of the change process by involving the affected individuals in identifying where they want to go and planning how to get there. It’s a highly participatory approach to change that is both rigorous and expansive. Social marketing forces us not to settle for exhortation or facile encouragement of change, but to deal realistically, yet creatively with how to get messages to where they will be heard and to deliver benefits that people can actually feel.

These approaches to change deserve to be tested in the Jewish educational arena. They may prove powerful, or they may be disappointing. The important thing, however, is that those seeking change recognize that expanding the approaches we employ to do so makes good sense. Opening up the process of change is the analogue to opening up the process of learning, seeking more to release energies, to catalyze, and to guide than to channel and direct. Jewish education needs not only to embrace specific changes, but to become more adept and agile at change itself.

“Research supports the proposition that focusing on the positive — what we want, not what we are trying to avoid — releases greater energy to see a change process through the inevitable rough spots than does the more typical approach of trying to fix what is not working well.”

“Opening up the process of change is the analogue to opening up the process of learning, seeking more to release energies, to catalyze, and to guide than to channel and direct. Jewish education needs not only to embrace specific changes, but to become more adept and agile at change itself.”

D. Conclusion

The five action steps proposed here — empowering and connecting a cadre of change agents, creating a literature of success, establishing “hothouses” for collaborative innovation, providing incentives for change, and introducing new modalities of change — are all themselves “scalable.” We can begin work on them tomorrow. To have their full impact, however, they will need to be implemented broadly and systematically. This will require that resources be committed not only to specific programs and initiatives, but to putting in place the infra-structure for ongoing large-scale change outlined here.

This investment is not only worthwhile, it is essential. Jewish education can be even better than it is — and it must be if Jewish life is to thrive. The investment is also prudent, since it will leverage the billions of dollars already being spent on Jewish education that could yield far more than they do. The combination of the design principles and the intervention strategies laid out in this paper can produce the change that is needed to increase this yield. The result will be a Jewish education that is truly redesigned for the 21st century — one that will engage a wider array of participants, inspire energetic learning, connect more organically to other dimensions of Jewish and human life, and evolve continuously to remain relevant and effective in a changing world.

“This investment is not only worthwhile, it is essential. Jewish education can be even better than it is — and it must be if Jewish life is to thrive. The investment is also prudent, since it will leverage the billions of dollars already being spent on Jewish education that could yield far more than they do.”

Appendix 1

Research Note: How Has the World Changed Over the Past 25 Years? A Quick Review of Trends and Developments

Science, Technology & the Environment

In 1980, telephones were stuck to walls, facts were found in books and people had to browse shelves in a record store if they wanted to buy the latest music. Now, we can access all of this and more just by reaching into our pockets. Information can now be transferred almost instantaneously around the globe, creating the potential for new kinds of connections among individuals, organizations, and communities. Personal computers are pervasive in our offices and our homes, and the internet and wireless communication allow us to be continuously connected. Some commentators claim that technology is changing the very ways in which we think.

Environmental trends — everything from global warming to overfishing the world's oceans — are beginning to affect the quality of our lives. Struggles between economic interests and environmental interests continue around the world. Toxic waste, mineral extraction, deforestation and desertification, and suburban sprawl all contribute to concerns about human and animal welfare.

Health & Medicine

Advances in medicine have contributed to increased longevity. We have also seen an increase in prescription drugs to treat everything from ADHD, to depression and anxiety, to impotence. Health care costs have increased significantly, with both employers and employees paying progressively more of the cost. We have seen increasing rates of obesity, while many Americans have become more interested in fitness and dieting. Despite the advances in research, the AIDS epidemic has claimed over 25 million lives, with an additional 40 million people infected with AIDS, and there are concerns about other pandemics. At the same time, genetic engineering and nano-technology make conceivable an entirely new era in medicine, with

replacement body parts and targeted cures for hitherto intractable diseases.

Social Changes

There has been a shift from the “traditional” family to new family forms, with growing numbers of single and divorced parents, and blended and multi-racial/multi-ethnic families. Gay and lesbian individuals and families with gay and lesbian parents are more widely accepted. Additionally, changes in gender roles and expectations have impacted families and society in general. The struggle for work/life balance seems more challenging, possibly contributing to an observed decline in civic participation over the past 25 years, especially among those younger than 60.

The “culture wars” between religious conservatives and others have generated conflict about everything from movies to morality to education.

Economics & the Workplace

Americans have become the workaholics of the world, putting in far more hours on the job than the Western Europeans or Japanese. The gap between rich and poor has grown steadily, while the middle and working classes have experienced economic stagnation. Part-time, temporary, contract and other nontraditional forms of employment now comprise an increasing share of the labor market. Today, some 30 million Americans are self-employed, and with companies increasingly enamored of outsourcing as a way to control costs and increase flexibility, the use of freelance contractors and consultants is likely to grow. With the advent of the ‘24-7 always on’ globalized world, we will be making many more decisions each day, constantly changing our own and others’ schedules and priorities.

Religion

In the U.S., research indicates that the vast majority of Americans believe in supernatural forces, identify themselves in religious terms, and hunger for a spiritually enhanced life. Many Americans participate regularly in religious and spiritual small groups and form a significant market for religious/spiritual items. Yet there is also evidence of declining institutional membership,

particularly among liberal/mainline Protestant (and Jewish) denominations, and declining participating in religious services, as well as worship services and Bible reading.

Fundamentalism is visible and perhaps growing among all religions. In the US, there is evidence of growing religious diversity, including an increasing Moslem population, which will impact businesses, education, and many other areas.

Politics & International Affairs

We have moved from the end of the Cold War and the demise of the Soviet Union to new concerns about global terrorism. The “march of (free-market) democracy” that appeared to be the inevitable wave of the future in the 1990s has stalled, and conflicts between ethnic and religious groups re-emerge at different points around the globe with alarming regularity. We have also witnessed a split within the U.S. into “red states” and “blue states” that threatens to become a permanent division.

On the Jewish political stage, a perception of Israel as an underdog among hostile Arab nations is no longer as prevalent. Instead, Israel’s situation is viewed more ambiguously. In much of the world, Israel is seen as an aggressor and occupier, and this view has permeated some circles in the U.S. as well.

Education

Education has become more individualized, with concepts such as “multiple intelligences,” portfolio learning and differentiated instruction emphasizing individual learning needs and styles. On the macro-level, more emphasis is being placed on choice among educational options. The implementation of “No Child Left Behind” has accentuated an emphasis on enhanced accountability, but also, according to critics, led to a narrowing of curriculum and an over-emphasis on testing. The widespread use of technology has created new possibilities for distance learning, as well as ongoing debate about the educational uses and value of computers.

Jewish Life

In many ways, Jewish life is experiencing a renaissance, with vibrant cultural expression, particularly in large Jewish geographic centers. Jews are creating music, theater, literature, and even forms of prayer that draw on Jewish tradition and American life. Women’s role in religious leadership has expanded. Following larger trends in American life, however, fewer Jews are affiliated with the formal Jewish community, and North American Jews report a decreasing connection to Israel. Many Jews feel less connected to a particular denomination and to the Jewish people on the whole. Many Jews perceive growing distance between Orthodox and non-Orthodox. Intermarriage is prevalent, and the community continues to debate how to respond to the growing number of intermarried families and their children.

About the Millennials

Recently, much attention has been given to the “Millennials,” the generation born between 1982 and 2002 (currently ages 4-24). Following on their Generation X predecessors, the Millennials are seen as embodying a different sensibility and different values than the Baby Boomers who dominate Jewish institutional life. As a generation, millennials have been described as being special, sheltered, confident, team-oriented, conventional, pressured, and achieving.¹²

Jewish Millennials are proud and comfortable to claim their Jewishness, but often as only one identity among many, and in ways that do not separate them from their non-Jewish peers. Jewish Millennials have little interest in established community institutions, often know little in depth about their heritage, and prefer informal Jewish connections.

(*Note:* Our web survey did identify some generational differences between the 34 and under group and the rest of the respondents. Similar to the finding in other studies, the youngest cohort of our survey felt that the “growing role of personal choice in religious identity” has had a significant impact on Jewish life. Additionally, the “growth of post-denominational religion” was judged to be more important by this group.)¹³

¹² More information on millennials is available at www.millennialsrising.com.

¹³ See, for example, www.rebooters.net/poll/rebootpoll.pdf.

Appendix 2

Noteworthy Jewish Education Programs

Many of the ideas promoted in this working paper have been inspired by and are reflected in programs and institutions already operating in the Jewish community. In these programs, learning is being linked to living; families' educational, spiritual, and practical needs are being met; relevant topics are being addressed with experiential learning; and, by bringing people together, connections and community are being built. Many of these programs are also expanding the scope of Jewish education: they are held in non-traditional venues and settings, use technology, infuse institutions and activities with learning, and focus on providing learning opportunities throughout life transitions.

Most of these programs have not yet been rigorously evaluated, so we cannot cite them as definitive “existence proofs” of the validity of the working paper’s recommendations. However, the fact that many show clear signs of success in terms of participation, longevity, and the positive responses of participants indicates that these ideas do “work” in the real world, and that their wider diffusion could well be a boon to Jewish education.

Below is a sampling of some of these programs that embody the design principles for 21st century Jewish education proposed in the working paper. We invite and encourage you to add others to the list.

1. KESHER, BOSTON, MA www.kesherweb.org

With two sites in the Boston area, Keshet is a daily after school program for students in grades K-9. The curriculum includes Hebrew and Judaic studies, and students can attend every day while their parents are at work.

2. INSPIRATION EXPRESS, BALTIMORE, MD www.inspirationexpress.org

A weekly low-cost, convenient option to parents who would like to provide their children with a recreational but informative supplementary Jewish experience. Recreational activities, creative projects, field trips, and other “camp-style” fun make lessons in Jewish pride and values an experience that will last a lifetime. (*Note:* Similar “alternative” religious/Hebrew school programs exist in a number of communities. Some of these are included below.)

3. HAZON, NEW YORK, NY www.hazon.org

Hazon’s Jewish environmental bike rides raise money for environmental causes, increase environmental awareness, and build and celebrate an inclusive, diverse Jewish community.

4. MY JEWISH LEARNING.COM www.myjewishlearning.com

My JewishLearning.com is a transdenominational website of Jewish information and education geared towards learners of all religious and educational backgrounds. Content is available in a variety of formats, and via partnerships with a diverse array of organizations.

5. GENESIS, BRANDEIS UNIVERSITY, WALTHAM, MA www.brandeis.edu/genesis/

A summer program for high school students, held on the Brandeis University campus. The interactive and experiential content integrates Jewish studies, the arts and humanities, and pluralistic community-building.

6. AN ETHICAL START

www.jcca.org/CIRCLE_PDFs/annual_report_2005.pdf

An Ethical Start is a parallel course for preschool children, teachers, and parents focusing on Jewish values offered through Jewish Community Centers. Using books, music, dolls, and cartoon characters each group learns the same texts from Pirke Avot, in an age appropriate manner.

7. THE CURRICULUM INITIATIVE, NEW YORK, NY

www.tcionline.org

The Curriculum Initiative (TCI) is the leading Jewish educational organization serving independent schools and their Jewish students. Through curriculum development and extra-curricular programming, presentations to student bodies, and professional development for teachers, TCI strengthens Jewish students' Jewish identity and nurtures school communities' appreciation for the Jewish heritage.

8. LIMMUD NY, NEW YORK

www.limmudny.org

Limmud NY is an experience that invites Jews of diverse backgrounds and all ages to come together for a long weekend to form a community that celebrates Jewish life and learning. It is a dynamic, creative, and interactive environment, run almost exclusively by volunteers, which fosters personal growth and learning. (*Note:* Limmud NY was based on the tremendously successful Limmud conference in the United Kingdom. Other communities in North America are introducing their own versions of Limmud.)

9. BIMA, MA

www.brandeis.edu/bima

BIMA is a summer arts program for Jewish teenagers. Its mission is to guide students as they develop their imaginative and artistic faculties and explore the relevance of Jewish tradition to students' lives. BIMA is committed to the value of a serious and dynamic encounter between artistic expression and Jewish life, and aspires to serve as both a nurturing community and a creative catalyst for this interaction.

10. JEWISH YOUTH CONNECTION, NEW YORK, NY

www.jyc.info/

The Jewish Youth Connection at Kehillat Jeshrun (JYC) is a reinvention of the Hebrew school experience. JYC students learn when they are fresh and ready on Sunday mornings with small classes focused on Bible studies, Jewish history, customs, and holidays. JYC provides students from 2nd grade and higher with individual tutors (big brothers/big sisters) for the teaching of Hebrew.

11. JEWISH YOUTH ENCOUNTER PROGRAM, RIVERDALE, NY

www.hir.org/jyep.html

The Jewish Youth Encounter Program (JYEP) is an exciting and innovative alternative to the traditional supplementary Hebrew School. The program is the brainchild of Rabbi Avi Weiss and is housed in the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale. While the traditional Hebrew School goals of instilling a love for, and attachment to Judaism remain, the methods that the JYEP employs for attaining these goals are very different. The program, which spans the years from Kindergarten through 12th grade, is unique in its approach. The JYEP is open to all Jewish students, regardless of Hebrew school background.

12. INSTITUTE FOR JEWISH SPIRITUALITY, RABBINIC, CANTORIAL, EDUCATOR, AND LAY LEADER PROGRAMS

www.ijs-online.org/

These programs are based on three premises: that spiritual growth is a lifelong process which requires commitment, practice and guidance; that leaders best serve and inspire their communities when they cultivate and refine their own inner lives; and that Jewish leaders concerned with the life of the spirit need one another for companionship, study and growth. To that end, the Institute offers programs specifically geared to rabbis, cantors, educators, and laypeople. Participants live and learn together for four five-day retreats over 18 months. Retreats combine text study, meditation, prayer, group discussion, spiritual exercises and one-on-one guidance with faculty members. During the period between retreats, participants continue to learn and grow through a guided program of weekly hevruta study, E-conversations with other participants,

and optional monthly spiritual direction. Lay groups meet one day a month for study, prayer and meditation.

**13. SHABBATON, CONGREGATION BETH AM,
LOS ALTOS HILLS, CA**

www.betham.org/youth/shabbaton.html

Shabbaton, an alternative to the Sunday Judaica program, is a family education program for grades K-5 and their families. Families come to the synagogue on Saturday afternoon to learn in family groups as well as in child-only classes. The day begins with singing and welcome, and ends with havdalah.

**14. HOME SCHOOLING OPTION,
OSEH SHALOM, LAUREL, MD**

www.oseh-shalom.org/schools.htm

The Oseh Shalom Home Schooling program is available for 3rd through 6th graders who are unable to participate in the on-site Midweek Program. The Home School Program (Midweek) follows the same topics and rotations as the Midweek Program. Parents are required to work with students to complete the year's curriculum at home. Assignments are turned in on a weekly basis. Students receive material packets for each subject that includes a syllabus, assignments and all reading materials. Topics for study this year include Peace at Home (Shalom bayit); Taking Care of One's Body (Shmirat ha-guf); The Jewish People Live! (Am yisrael chai); Pursuing Peace (Rodef shalom); and Israel — Living on a Kibbutz.

The clubs (chuggim) segment of the curriculum is broken down into topics on a six-week rotation. Each topic packet will include a text study with questions and a drama, cooking, art and writing assignment. Students complete journal worksheets to turn in each week.

15. B-LINKED

www.b-linked.org

A social networking site for BBYO members and other Jewish teens. The site included over 8,000 members as of October 2006. Members can create a profile, join groups, create a blog, track community service hours, and find out about Jewish life on college campuses.

**16. SH'ARIM: FAMILY EDUCATOR INITIATIVE,
CJP OF GREATER BOSTON, MA**

www.cjp.org/content_display.html?ArticleID=140668

Sh'arim — “Gateways” into Jewish living — helps transmit a love of Judaism to parents and their children. Sh'arim Family Educators involve family members in their children's education from the earliest stages and help establish contexts for lifelong learning that will impact the family and strengthen the home as a center of Jewish life.

Family Educators from Sh'arim are currently working in 38 institutions, including preschools, day schools, afternoon schools and Jewish community centers, and have engaged more than 10,000 families. The success of Sh'arim has been due to the ongoing partnership with the Bureau of Jewish Education, Hebrew College and the participating sites. (*Note: Sh'arim is one of the earliest and most ambitious community-wide family education initiatives. Since its creation, and with the help of catalysts like the Whizin Institute, family education has become part of a wide range of congregational, day school, and early childhood programs. The specific components, intensity, and quality of these programs do, however, vary greatly.*)

**17. REKINDLE SHABBAT, ROBERT I. LAPPIN
CHARITABLE FOUNDATION, MA**

www.rilcf.org/shabbat.htm

Now in its 10th season, Rekindle Shabbat has served as an important first step in Jewish living for so many families. Beginning with an educational session for adults on five basic Shabbat evening home rituals, Rekindle Shabbat brings the beautiful Shabbat experience home and creates meaningful experiences and memories. Participants receive a “Shabbat bag” with candlesticks, a silver kiddush cup, a prayer book and other Shabbat items. Then, together with a buddy family, they receive four free, catered Shabbat dinners to enjoy together in their homes.

**18. JEWISH PARENTING GROUP,
TEMPLE MICAH, WA**
www.templemicah.org/micahgroups/jewishparenting/jewishparenting/index_html

A discussion group for parents of babies and young children. The discussion centers around Jewish themes which help set priorities, ease apprehension, and create a positive feeling about the future. The group has tackled issues ranging from respect for adults, assigning chores, meal-time battles, coping with frustration, avoiding over scheduling, over indulgence, and over protecting, keeping expectations in line with a child's temperament, and faith in God.

19. TRIBECA HEBREW, NEW YORK, NY
www.tribecahebrew.org

Tribeca Hebrew seeks to create a fun, stimulating, and inspiring after-school program where the children can express and explore Judaism's rich culture and traditions. The program is designed to achieve a positive Jewish identity which will encourage a life-long interest in learning and discovery. Tribeca Hebrew is not affiliated with any particular Jewish movement or synagogue; but rather an organic manifestation of the local community — a neighborhood which shares the values of diversity, creativity, and openness to all levels of Jewish backgrounds.

**20. FEAST OF JEWISH LEARNING,
SAN FRANCISCO BAY AREA, CA**
www.bjesf.org/adults_feast.htm

The Feast of Jewish Learning is an annual community-wide outreach program for Jews of all ages, backgrounds, and interests. The Feast mission is to provide a taste of Jewish learning, spark interest for further Jewish exploration, and raise the profile of Jewish education. Each year the Feast changes, develops and grows, continuing to devise new ways in which to engage and excite the community by changing the theme and the content of the program. In the past, themes have ranged from the traditions of Tu B'Shevat to the nuances of the Hebrew alphabet to the celebration of 350 Years of Jewish Life in America.

During last year's 13th Annual Feast of Jewish Learning, "Provocative Jewish Voices," 1,300 people took part in four free, regional events on the San Francisco Bay Area. More than 100 Jewish professors, rabbis, performers and educators led dynamic interactive learning session

**21. BOOK CLUB IN A BOX, SAN FRANCISCO
JEWISH COMMUNITY LIBRARY**
www.bjesf.org/library_bookgroups.htm

The San Francisco Jewish Community Library provides the resources to start a Jewish book group, including copies of books, including discussion questions and background and even a one-time facilitator to start off the group.

**22. FROM CHOCOLATE TO THE PRAYERBOOK,
BOARD OF JEWISH EDUCATION OF
METROPOLITAN CHICAGO**
www.bjechicago.org/lh_general_info.asp

From Chocolate to the Prayerbook is an innovative adult Hebrew literacy course. In 13 hours, students learn to read and understand basic prayerbook Hebrew. The program uses music, art and games to teach reading. It presents material in a fun and non-intimidating fashion. Attention is given to studying the content and meaning of the Friday evening services, as well as the body language associated with prayer. Classes are offered at the Marshall Jewish Learning Center and at area synagogues and JCC's. Last year, courses were held at Anshe Emet Synagogue in Chicago and Am Shalom in Glencoe.

**23. THE PJ LIBRARY, HAROLD GRINSPOON
FOUNDATION, SPRINGFIELD, MA**
www.pjlibrary.org/

The PJ Library seeks to engage Jewish families with young children. Each participating child in the community will receive a high quality Jewish children's book or CD every month, from age six months through age five.

Each book and CD comes with resources to help families use the selection in their home. The book and music list has been selected by the foremost children's book experts, includes a wide array of themes related to Jewish holidays, folktales and Jewish family life.

**24. THE RIVERWAY PROJECT,
TEMPLE ISRAEL, BOSTON, MA**
www.riverwayproject.org

The Riverway Project is a bold and expansive outreach and integration initiative that seeks to connect greater numbers of adults in their 20's and 30's to Judaism and to Temple Israel of Boston through a variety of programs, including neighborhood circles, study opportunities (such as Torah and Tonics on Tuesdays), events and celebrations, and a website.

**25. EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING PROGRAMS
AT GANN ACADEMY, WALTHAM, MA**
www.gannacademy.org

Gann Academy, a community day school in the Boston area, offers an extensive set of experiential learning opportunities to complement its formal studies. These include: community service days throughout the school year for faculty and students in cooperation with a variety of Boston-area organizations; travel opportunities and exchange programs with Israel, including a junior year trimester program; an eight-week senior internship program in Boston-area organizations combined with a special Wednesday learning program; and Exploration Week, in which students choose from among a wide array of travel and specialized learning opportunities.

**26. STORAHTELLING: JEWISH RITUAL
THEATER REVIVED, NEW YORK, NY**
www.storahtelling.org

Storahtelling promotes Jewish cultural literacy through theatrical performances and educational programs for multi-generational audiences. Using 21st century performance art, Storahtelling brings personal, contemporary meaning to 5,000 years of Jewish tradition. Programs include: ShulTime — Storahtelling in the synagogue, a revision and revival of the Torah service; ShowTime — Storahtelling performance events, produced in secular settings such as nightclubs and theaters; SchoolTime — Storahteller training, disseminating the Storahtelling model by empowering trainees in their own communities; StorahLAB — Summer Training Institute, in a retreat setting; and RitualLAB, a friendly, open space alternative Shabbat experience, celebrated with drums and drama.

**27. PROZDOR, HEBREW COLLEGE,
BOSTON, MA**
www.hebrewcollege.edu/html/youth_programs/prozdor.htm

Prozdor is a supplementary high school program that currently serves nearly 1,000 teenagers in the greater Boston area. It attributes its recent growth to three factors:

1. serious teaching by an accomplished faculty;
2. giving students the power to make choices in what and when they learn based on their interests; and
3. creating a sense of community through co-curricular programming and informal activities.

In addition to these programs, there are other learner-centered program models that have already spread to multiple locations around the continent. These include:

- “Jewish Lamaze”: Classes that teaches childbirth techniques along with Jewish customs and rituals (new and traditional) about childbirth, baby naming, bris, pidyon ha-ben, etc.
- “PEP” — Parent Education Program — an adaptation of the core Florence Melton Adult Mini-School curriculum (a comprehensive two-year curriculum for adults on Jewish concepts, history, values, and ritual life). The PEP program includes most of the texts from the core FMAMS curriculum, as well as texts related to Jewish lives of families of young children.

Appendix 3

Advisory Council: Redesigning Jewish Education Project*

Yossi Abramowitz <i>Jewish Family & Life!</i> Israel	Charles (Chip) Edelsberg <i>The Jim Joseph Foundation</i> San Francisco, CA	Carol Schechter <i>Academy for Educational Development</i> Washington, DC
Harlene Winnick Appelman <i>The Covenant Foundation</i> New York, NY	Sandy Edwards <i>The Jim Joseph Foundation</i> San Francisco, CA	Jaynie Schultz Romaner <i>Howard and Leslie Schultz Family</i> <i>Foundation, JESNA Board</i> Dallas, TX
David Ariel <i>Laura and Alvin Siegal</i> <i>College of Judaic Studies</i> Cleveland, OH	Arnold Eisen <i>Stanford University</i> Palo Alto, CA	Ricky Shechtel <i>Sierra Foundation, JESNA Board</i> Princeton, NJ
Daniel Bennett <i>Colorado Agency for Jewish Education</i> Denver, CO	Seymour (Epi) Epstein <i>Board of Jewish Education, Toronto</i> Toronto, ON, Canada	Tiffany Shlain <i>Filmmaker, Internet advocate</i> San Francisco, CA
Laurie Blitzer <i>McKinsey Consulting</i> New York, NY	Allan Finkelstein <i>JCC Association</i> New York, NY	Jerry Silverman <i>Foundation for Jewish Camping</i> New York, NY
Rabbi Kenneth Brander <i>Center for the Jewish Future,</i> <i>Yeshiva University</i> New York, NY	Rabbi Hayim Y. Herring <i>STAR, Synagogues:</i> <i>Transformation</i> <i>and Renewal</i> Minneapolis, MN	Ellen Kagen Waghelstein <i>Partnership for Jewish Life and</i> <i>Learning (Washington, DC)</i> Rockville, MD
Rabbi Sharon Brous <i>IKAR</i> Los Angeles, CA	Debby Hirschman <i>DCH Consulting Services, Inc.</i> New York, NY	Francine Weaver <i>Weaver Family Foundation,</i> <i>JESNA Board</i> Boulder, CO
Jonathan Cannon <i>Charles E. Smith Jewish Day School</i> Rockville, MD	Michael Kay <i>New York University,</i> <i>Center for Online Judaic Studies</i> Rockville, MD	Arnee Winshall <i>Founder, Jewish Community Day</i> <i>School (Boston), JESNA Board</i> Weston, MA
Amir Cohen <i>Jewish Family & Life!</i> Newton, MA	John Ruskey <i>UJA-Federation of New York</i> New York, NY	Rabbi Misha Zinkow <i>Temple Israel</i> Columbus, OH
Steven M. Cohen <i>Hebrew Union College</i> New York, NY		

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* Affiliations listed are for identification purposes only.

Notes

Notes



““ The best way to
predict the future
is to invent it.”

— *Alan Kay*