



think

THE LOLA STEIN INSTITUTE JOURNAL

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THIS ISSUE

**WHAT MAKES A SCHOOL
THOUGHTFUL?**

**THE SCIENCE
OF COLLABORATION**

**TORONTO HESCHEL
SCHOOL AT 18: A
PARENT'S GRATITUDE**

**DR. DAVID GOLDBLOOM
TALKS THEATRE WITH
RABBI JOE KANOFSKY**



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THE LOLA STEIN INSTITUTE JOURNAL

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Lola Stein z"l was an early female pharmacist in South Africa, but her special talent was in hospitality and friendship. She cared for family and friends, at home and abroad, individually, uniquely, and lovingly. We honour her memory in a way that also reaches out to many.

Ideas generated and insights learned will be shared in **think** magazine, Spring 2014



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ACADEMIC SKILLS AND CHARACTER AT THE SAME TIME


"Talent, knowledge, success are important to human existence. Yet talent without dedication, knowledge without reverence, success without humility may end in futility."

A.J. Heschel

A.J. Heschel's statement nicely summarizes the challenge that good educators face. The best educational strategy will deliver academic skills and build character at the same time. In this issue, we explore these layers. We look at specific educational practices that advance child development even as they expand the students' academic reach. Our writers say that good education happens when children look inward to improve themselves and look outward to understand the world at large.

At *think* our priority is thoughtful education, especially thoughtful Jewish education. In a two-part feature, Greg Beiles looks at how collections of ideas and traditions coalesce into "schools of thought." He then considers what constitutes a "thoughtful school," where thinking through a particular vision and practice creates an intentionally unique school experience.

Gail Baker uses role play to embed an understanding of social action in her students; creative drama flexes their imaginations and engenders empathy which is valuable



Our writers say
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to students' interpersonal relationships as well as to their social conscience and appreciation of civil rights. Lesley Cohen advances junior high writing skills through a process of peer editing among her students that motivates self-improvement; her technique demands that students develop their composure and critical integrity which also serve to strengthen friendships and class community. Brandeis University researchers Orit Kent and Allison Cook find that when learning Judaic texts in junior high is carefully structured using the age-old Jewish modality of *chevrutah* (two students working together on one text), textual knowledge arrives with an emergent ethical and spiritual sensibility in each preteen.

Daniel Abramson reflects on his observations of scientists at the McEwen Centre for Regenerative Medicine who are combining efforts of leading-edge research and discovery: as a teacher Daniel explains how he structures classroom collaboration for discovery, while remembering that good teaching and successful teamwork hinge on respect for the individual. As Heidi Friedman and Talya Metz introduce

five-year-olds to self-reflection, the children's personal victories become common cause in Senior Kindergarten; the youngsters learn to address their personal challenges over time as skills to be mastered. Lisa Richler highlights the insight and self-confidence garnered by sixth graders who experience what elderly and junior collaborators can offer to each other in an intergenerational program. Toronto's literary rabbi, Joe Kanofsky, discusses theatre and emotional well-being with Dr. David Goldbloom. Thankfully, learning through the arts is a lifelong activity and one that we all can enjoy!

This year is The Toronto Heschel School's 18th anniversary. Michelle Shulman shares why the school means so much to her.

HAPPY BIRTHDAY TORONTO HESCHEL!
From strength to strength!



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We will ask: Is the body "holy" or a source of sin and temptation? What do Jewish approaches to sexuality teach about body and gender? What do Jewish ethics teach about our responsibilities for our bodies and health? How has Jewish history in the Diaspora and State of Israel affected Jewish attitudes towards the physical body?

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SCHOOL OF THOUGHT

PART ONE: WHAT MAKES A SCHOOL JEWISH?

Scholars have long debated whether Judaism is a religion, ethnicity, or civilization. I wonder if it is more apt to describe Judaism as a “school of thought.” Without question, we should consider schools of thought when we think about Jewish education.

The term “school of thought” refers to more than a collection of “thoughts” or “ideas.” In philosophy, art, architecture, or politics, a school of thought denotes interrelated elements such as values, beliefs, practices, communal forms, even political and economic systems. Judaism does this; it integrates a value system based on a theology, daily practices and rituals, strong communal forms, a prophetic politic that demands justice, and an economic system based on the principle of *tzedakah* (fairness). Judaism is an example par excellence of the confluence of ideas and practices that characterizes a school of thought.

A school of thought also involves a group of people engaged in dynamic productive conversation. Nowhere is this more evident than in the rabbinic tradition where sages ardently debate all matters of law and diverse interpretations rule the

day. Sometimes Talmudic debates ensue between smaller “houses” within the larger school of Jewish thought. Long before the Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry gave us the Houses of Gryffindor and Slytherin, the School of Judaism gave us *Beit Hillel* – the House of Hillel, and *Beit Shammai* – the House of Shammai.

Beit Hillel and *Beit Shammai* represent two, typically opposing, schools of thought that trace back to the scholars named Hillel and Shammai of the first century BCE. While later rabbis generally adopted the rulings of *Beit Hillel* for their practicality and compassion over the stricter decisions of *Beit Shammai*, the views of both houses were regarded as valid – or, in the words of the Talmud, both espoused “the words of the living God.”

When we ask what it means today for our Jewish schools to be Jewish schools of thought, the question helps us consider the kinds of Jewish schools we desire. The Jewish school must ask, “What is Jewish about the way we teach and learn here?” It’s not enough to name the school after a great rabbi, thinker, or leader, a Jewish school of thought must teach and

learn Jewishly; its Jewish connection must live and breathe in daily practices and community spirit.

Jewish ways of learning can inform teaching and learning at all levels. PaRDeS is an acronym for a rabbinic technique that calls for multiple approaches to reading a text:

P for *peshat* means considering the “simple, plain meaning.”

R for *remez* means looking for “clues” or “inferences.”

D for *drash* means engaging in “interpretation.”

S for *sod* means “secret” and refers to exploring deeper meanings.

Although PaRDeS was developed for reading Jewish texts, it applies widely to reading in any language, solving mathematical problems, interpreting science experiments, and even addressing interpersonal conflicts such as bullying. It is a Jewish method of analysis with value across the curriculum; it offers students a Jewish lens.

Of course, the key to teaching “Jewishly” is to have Jewish teachers whose own Jewish learning continues. Several years ago when I ran a middle school, our biweekly staff meetings began with a *devar* Torah that connected the weekly *parshah* (Torah reading) to our craft of teaching and learning. One week we studied Moshe’s encounter with the burning bush and saw him pass through several important stages of learning: he consciously turned his attention from a previous task to the task at hand; he examined the strange phenomenon closely; he wondered, posed a question – and, only then, did the voice within the burning bush speak to him.

Great schools of thought glean new ideas from ways of thinking, that are beyond their comfort zones. Judaism has engaged with many diverse schools of thought over the centuries – Babylonian, Greek, Roman, European, and, most recently, North American. As the Jewish philosopher Franz Rosenzweig evocatively writes, Judaism “continuously assimilates itself outwardly in order again and again to set itself apart inwardly.”¹

Just as Judaism enriches its identity through interaction with other cultures, so a Jewish school polishes its pedagogy by studying other schools of educational thought. A few years ago my colleagues and I took a strong interest in the framework of Teaching for Understanding, as developed by Howard Gardner and his associates at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. Gardner was integrating his theory of multiple intelligences with new research showing the cognitive efficacy of learning through the arts and teaching particular “Habits of Mind.”

As we investigated Teaching for Understanding as a foundational educational approach, we explored how Gardner’s insights meshed with Jewish thought. We asked what was, or might be, “Jewish” about Teaching for Understanding? Were Gardner’s notions of experiential education reflected in the signature Jewish idea of *na’aseh venishmah* (first do, then understand)? How did the Habits of Mind articulated in Teaching for Understanding relate to the components of artisanship described in the Torah – *chacham lev* (the skilled heart) and *nadiv lev* (the generous heart)? Are there certain Jewish habits of mind that can be nurtured through particularly Jewish practices such as *tefillah* (prayer) or *chevruta* (studying in pairs)?

A school of thought focuses its internal conversation on how to implement its core vision and practices. Working to improve the “how” is the most challenging school ethic: How do we implement a dynamic Torah program that is based on *chevruta*? How do we teach second-language fluency (whether French or Hebrew) through drama? How do we embed performance of *middot* (Jewish virtues) as Habits of Mind? As one teacher at The Toronto Heschel School said recently, “These days, we aren’t talking so much about ‘what’ to do but about ‘how’ to do it.”

The key to being a school of thought (and, especially, a Jewish day school of thought) is to determine a set of practices, optimize them, and implement them with consistency and discipline. Here again, Judaism gives guidance. Two thousand years ago, the rabbis canonized the Hebrew Bible; they included some books and excluded others. The idea to consciously delimit boundaries models educational practice for a Jewish school.

By “drawing a circle around the text,” the rabbis established a remarkably rich tradition of interpretation. They forced a custom of self-assessment and a wealth of literature on standards for the canon that we call the Torah. The practice reaches into what we define as our domain as Jews and searches its depths – a tradition that continues to this day. Likewise, schools need a clear definition of their vision and mission for their school standards, accountability, and creativity to be effectively measured.

Also like Judaism, a Jewish school of thought is distinguished by committed participants and a living culture. Its students love to learn and, one day, they will build their own schools of thought.

¹ Franz Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption* (South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1985), p. 427.

PART TWO: WHAT MAKES A JEWISH SCHOOL THOUGHTFUL?

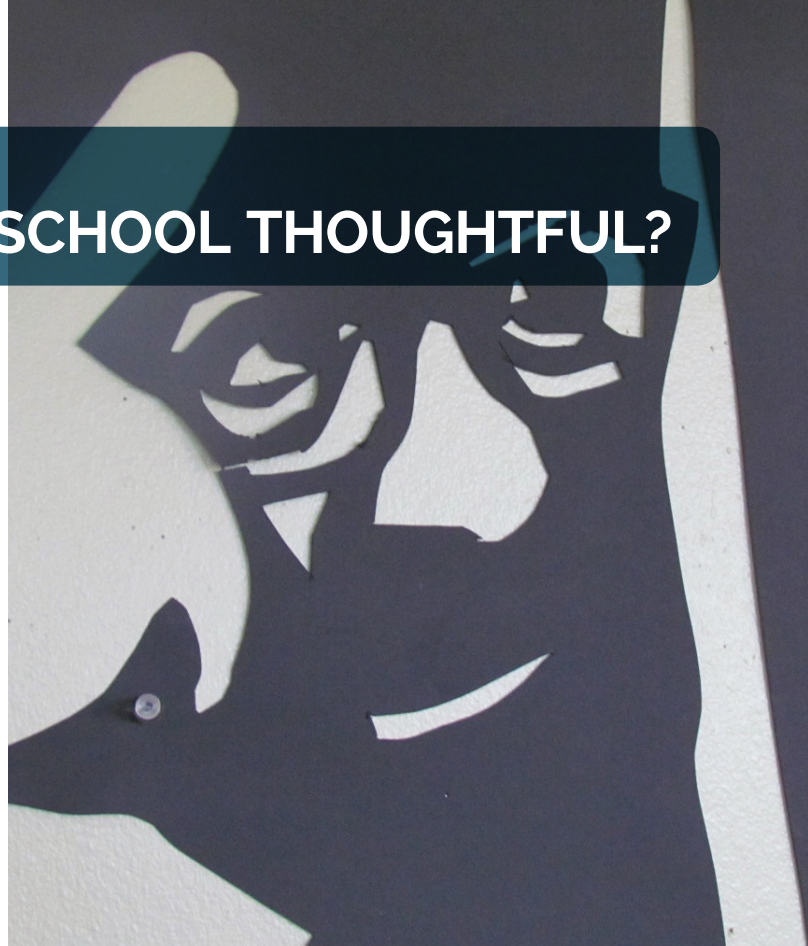
BY GREG BEILES

For the past 17 years I have had the privilege to be associated with a thoughtful Jewish school. I could also describe this school as dynamic, innovative, progressive, caring, and mention other positive attributes; yet, when it comes down to it, I prefer to call it a “thoughtful” school and this is what I mean:

A “thoughtful” school is intentional and considers all aspects of its students’ educational experience. A thoughtful school is based on a well-honed educational philosophy which permeates everything from the choice of curriculum and teaching methods to the design of its classrooms and timetable, from the way it nurtures a sense of community among its teachers, parents, and students to how it guides individual students to comport themselves in class and on school excursions.

Examples of thoughtful schools with embedded philosophies of learning include the Waldorf, Montessori, and Reggio Emilia schools. Each has a distinct educational philosophy that pervades the school’s environment. Whether it is the use of natural materials and craft in a Waldorf school, independent learning centres in a Montessori school, or the *atelier* – the school studio and laboratory – in a Reggio school. Each draws its inspiration from specific sources: German Romanticism and the thought of Rudolf Steiner in the case of Waldorf, and the community-centred ideas of Loris Malaguzzi for Reggio Emilia. For a *Jewish* school to be a *thoughtful* Jewish school it must root its educational approach in Jewish thought and historical context.

The thoughtful Jewish school, with which I am most familiar, sources its educational philosophy in the ideas and life work of Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel. Born in Poland to a Hasidic dynasty, A.J. Heschel was educated in modern philosophy at the University of Berlin where he also attended a non-denominational rabbinical seminary. He escaped Europe for the United States in 1938, where he first taught at the Hebrew Union College (HUC), the main seminary of Reform Judaism, and then, for most of his career, at the Jewish Theological Seminary of America (JTS), the main seminary of Conservative Judaism. All the while, Heschel remained dedicated to his own practice of traditional *halakhic* Judaism.



Heschel is best known for combining three essential ingredients: a deep sense of Jewish spirituality (what he called “awe and wonder”), a respect for the dignity of every person “born in the image of God,” and civil activism inspired by the prophetic tradition of the Bible. He strongly supported the American Civil Rights movement and openly opposed the Vietnam War.

Heschel’s relationship to diverse articulations of Judaism, and his animation of Jewish spirituality through ethical activism, made him a unique figure for his time. It also made him an ideal representative for a school in Toronto that wished to grow from a deeply rooted, authentically Jewish, yet modern educational philosophy. Each aspect of The Toronto Heschel School connects back to Heschel’s ideas about Judaism and the purpose of human existence. The ideas were not his alone; they derive, as he would readily agree, from ancient Jewish thought and tradition. Heschel lived and taught these ideas in practice as a modern Jewish citizen.

The school’s pluralistic philosophy emerges from Heschel’s experience across the denominations. His thinking echoes the phrase “We were all at Sinai,” the traditional Jewish notion that each Jew was present to hear the revelation of the Torah, and therefore, each has something authentic to contribute to its understanding and fulfilment. Heschel recognized that each stream of Judaism has something to offer.

Inspired by Heschel's ideas, each child at The Toronto Heschel School is recognized as a legitimate and valued contributor to classroom discourse. Classrooms are arranged in a circle or small groupings; children face one another and not each other's backs. Practices of respect for the learner nurture children who sense their legitimacy as participants. This results in students who have reputations for asking the best questions when they go on field trips, as well as graduates who are identifiable by the questions they ask when they sit in high school classes with students from other schools. It begins with respect.

Heschel wrote, "Wonder, not doubt, is the beginning of knowledge."¹ He regarded radical amazement at all of God's creation to be essential for learning; he called for "awe and wonder." The Toronto Heschel School classroom is designed to inspire wonder and is filled with objects, texts, and images that spark curiosity, questions, and discussion. Teachers display remarkable examples of nature – a beehive, a conch shell, a magnificently curled shofar – to evoke each child's natural sense of wonder and to inspire investigation. The school's full commitment to environmental stewardship is grounded in Heschel's deep respect for creation and his view that the natural world is our "sibling," co-created with us,² and deserving of our care and concern. It begins with wonder.

When The Toronto Heschel School founders investigated Howard Gardener's work on multiple intelligences, they were attracted not only by its pedagogical efficacy but also by its reflection of Heschel's respect for each human being as a unique learner. Likewise, the school's arts-based approach is developed from the recognition that the arts can inspire awe and wonder and offer opportunities for exploration and interpretation – Jewish and universal alike.

Heschel was a rigorous thinker who demanded the highest standards from himself and his students. He placed tremendous emphasis on study, and stated that "the role of learning is decisive" for human living. He saw learning as "the greatest adventure" and as "a source of joy." He believed that the highest purpose of learning was to discover "the importance of self-discipline; that a life without self-discipline is not worth living."³

The Toronto Heschel School has made Heschel's three purposes of learning the pillars of its educational philosophy: joy, adventure, and self-discipline. Contemporary educational research, including the discoveries of neuroscience, correlates remarkably with these principles. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's well-known concept of "flow"⁴ tells us that learning occurs best in the engaged state of mind and correlates with

Heschel's notion of "joy." Recent research that one of the most important determinants of academic success is the strength of "executive function" or "self-regulation" echoes Heschel's view that self-discipline is the "decisive" outcome of learning. The same principles apply whether children are learning a text from Torah, engaging in a difficult math question, or learning to pace themselves as they run laps around the school's outdoor field.

For Heschel, personal dignity, discovered through learning prayer and *mitzvot*, was the preparation for an even higher form of Jewish activity, namely, civic activism. Heschel's writings accentuate the prophetic tradition in Judaism that holds redress of inequity and injustice as the core teaching of Torah. The Toronto Heschel School integrates *tzedakah* (fairness) projects into its academic curriculum with programs such as Jewish civics and the requirement for each graduating student to prepare and deliver a speech about human rights. Practices such as "Weekly Middot" and "Derekh Eretz" (ethical actions) develop students' respect for one another on a daily basis. Social action and community participation are standard school fare in the tradition of A.J. Heschel.

Not surprisingly, the Heschel-inspired Jewish education attracts thoughtful teachers and thoughtful parents. Toronto Heschel teachers are those who aspire to a higher standard of Jewish teaching and learning and who want to enhance their professional growth. The school is disciplined in its support for educators; teachers are afforded professional development, ongoing mentorship and guidance, as well as specialty courses. Likewise, it is no surprise that the Heschel-inspired school sees the evolution of a school community of families who share an interest in learning for their children's sake and their own, who support the ethos of community action and want their children to become responsible participants in society.

Thoughtful education doesn't happen by accident; it takes the discipline of deliberate, painstaking, and rigorous foresight. Following in the footsteps of Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, the thoughtful school walks the talk.

Greg Beiles is Director of The Lola Stein Institute and Curriculum Consultant at The Toronto Heschel School.

1 A.J. Heschel, *Man Is Not Alone* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Young, 1951), pp. 11–12.

2 A.J. Heschel, *God in Search of Man* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Cudahy, 1955), p. 94.

3 A.J. Heschel interview with Carl Stern, in A.J. Heschel, *Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity*, ed. Susannah Heschel (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1996), p. 369.

4 Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2008).



IMAGINE & UNDERSTAND

CREATIVE DRAMA IN THE CLASSROOM

We want complex thinkers. We want our children to be ready when complications arise. Creative drama offers students a truly dynamic opportunity to explore the clash of values and "real life" dilemmas through their imaginations. When they attempt to solve problems wearing someone else's shoes, they are trying on different points of view and considering what various opinions may or may not mean. Creative drama sets up the kind of *reflective practice* that expands a student's understanding of human nature and fosters the development of empathy.

We developed one particular creative drama project for a Grade 8 course studying the respective roles of Rabbi A.J. Heschel and Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. during the civil rights struggle. The course encompassed the tension between the individual and social responsibility, something very much on the minds of emerging adolescents.

The imaginary context of the project placed the students in a southern U.S. town in the 1960s: civil rights workers from the North were coming to demonstrate and were asking members of the local synagogue for housing during their stay. Local residents were up in arms. As their teacher I was not looking for a "right" answer. I wanted them to experience that dilemmas can be complex and to see that the capacity to carry on an emotionally charged dialogue is a critical skill when important decisions need to be made.

To carry on an emotionally charged dialogue is a critical skill when important decisions need to be made.

Initially the students agreed that the synagogue should billet the civil rights workers because it was such an important cause and certainly the right thing to do. Then we gave

each student a specific personality to role-play: each student was to be a member of the synagogue's board of directors charged with deciding whether or not to billet the demonstrators. One was a shopkeeper who feared how he would support his family if his store was fire bombed by the town folk who were against civil rights. Another was disinclined to support the demonstration because her sister in Chicago told her that forced integration didn't work. Several members out and out demanded that hospitality be offered. We asked the students to argue the differing points of view as if they were sitting around a boardroom table. They found the experience challenging, and I believe this was due to the power of creative drama.

Reflecting later, the students made comments such as:

"Learning this way really helped me to understand the situation."

"Because of the role play, I had to rethink my original opinion and think of different perspectives."

Creative drama is just as valuable in the younger years. For a Grade 2 science class, where students were studying water, its properties and importance to survival, we created a drama based on the work of drama educator David Booth. In his work, he uses *The King's Fountain* by Lloyd Alexander. So we decided to incorporate this story into our project.

We could see the political action wheels beginning to turn.

One morning I entered the Grade 2 classroom in the role of queen. I gathered the children and told them that they were my villagers and that I was going to build a beautiful fountain to the glory of my kingdom. I described it to them in evocative detail and they were mesmerized. I did mention that the fountain would mean a loss of water for them but that I didn't care. Then I left the room.

The classroom teacher, my partner in the program, suggested to the class that as villagers they should protest. What the queen had announced had dire consequences for them and their families. The children wrote out their concerns to present to the queen the next day. As the queen, I engaged the villagers in an energetic dialogue: I challenged their assumptions to the right to have water and they answered back why it was my duty to let them have water and why they felt that way.

One of our goals was to have the children experience how decisions can be made through a Jewish lens; they knew

from Chumash class that God had created the world and that it was up to each of them to partner with God as co-creators who are responsible for the goings-on around them. This imaginary scenario let them feel the social action impetus that is part of the Jewish tradition.

Our discussions were very animated with the children fully immersed in the discussion. Because I was participating in character with them, the students felt respected, entitled to play act to the hilt, and willing to take risks with their communications and sensibilities in this monitored yet open environment. We could see the political action wheels beginning to turn as social justice and *B'zelem Elokim* – in the image of God – motivated our seven-year-old villagers to stand up for what they felt was right.

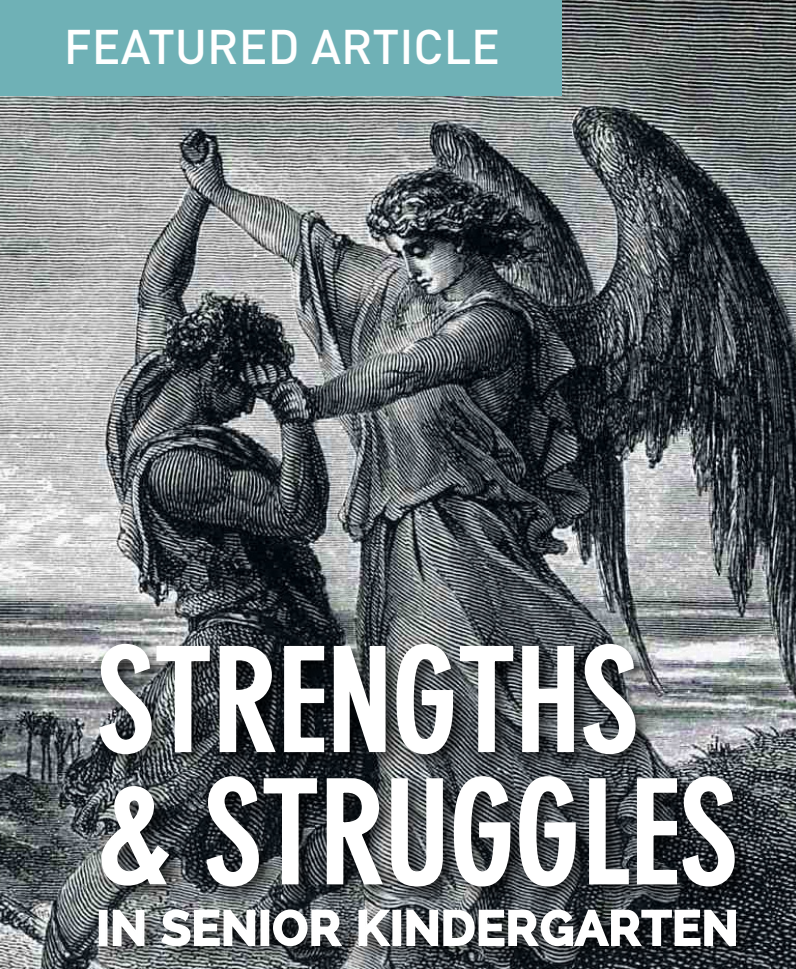
At all ages, our students are called upon to make decisions. Creative drama is an exercise in improvisation, a life skill that is essential to have as children mature. It involves making decisions in real time, taking risks with opinions, actively listening; practising improvisation trains students to remain mindful in the moment. In creative drama, as in daily life, we cannot control what another person is going to say or do, but we can control our own responses. Developing this control empowers students to assume roles and elicit reactions that are more thoughtful and perhaps not as impulsive.

When my students engage in dramatic play, their learning is visible. As they act out their roles in the various scenarios, I observe their thought processes. This "window" into their thinking allows me to know whether or not they've understood the issues at hand and whether or not their thoughts on these issues are clear and sensible.

Critical and creative thinking, collaboration and communication, innovation, tolerance, and understanding are descriptors of core competencies for the 21st century learner. Creative drama enhances these standards and offers students a dynamic way to explore social justice.

Gail Baker, M.Ed., is Head of The Toronto Heschel School and Learning Community Director of the Lola Stein Institute.





STRENGTHS & STRUGGLES IN SENIOR KINDERGARTEN

BY HEIDI FRIEDMAN AND TALYA METZ

In 1995, Daniel Goleman published his groundbreaking book *Emotional Intelligence* and prompted the academic community to rethink definitions that traditionally framed intelligence. It used to be that intelligence was defined as “a set of cognitive abilities, which allows us to acquire knowledge, to learn and to solve problems.”¹ Goleman defined emotional intelligence as:

... a different way of being smart. It includes knowing your feelings and using them to make good decisions; managing your feelings well; motivating yourself with zeal and persistence; maintaining hope in the face of frustration; exhibiting empathy and compassion; interacting smoothly; and managing your relationships effectively.²

Goleman’s work engendered the practice of social and emotional learning (SEL) in schools. With renowned educator Linda Lantieri and other leaders, Goleman founded the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning. CASEL defines social and emotional learning as

...the processes of developing social and emotional competencies in children. SEL programming is based on the understanding that the best learning emerges in the context of supportive relationships that make learning challenging, engaging, and meaningful; social and emotional skills are critical to being a good student,

citizen, and worker. Effective SEL programming begins in preschool and continues through high school.³

To incorporate SEL in a focused manner into our classrooms, The Toronto Heschel School developed the Strengths and Struggles Program. It is now an integral component of the Senior Kindergarten curriculum and encompasses the five skill sets that comprise emotional intelligence:

Self-awareness: Identifying your thoughts, feelings, strengths, and limitations.

Social Awareness: Identifying and understanding the thoughts and feelings of others; developing empathy.

Self-management: Handling emotions; setting long- and short-term goals; dealing with obstacles that may come your way.

Responsible Decision Making: Generating, implementing, and evaluating positive and informed solutions to problems.

Relationship Skills: Avoiding negative peer pressure and working to resolve conflicts.⁴

The Strengths and Struggles Program is based on two kinds of self-reflection: understanding one’s own behaviour and navigating social interactions. Children contemplate their individual strengths and personal struggles. (What are you good at now and what are you working to improve?) They also assess how their classroom community fares as a whole. (Do we all help tidy up? Are we listening attentively to our friends when they speak?)

Preparation for the Strengths and Struggles Program begins with the school year; the teacher establishes a classroom environment that makes the room an emotionally safe place to work and play, a haven where children and teachers feel comfortable to communicate thoughts and feelings with each other and the group. Preparation includes ongoing informal non-judgmental observation as the teacher discerns and records patterns in each child’s behaviour. For example, Jerry has trouble sharing toys and this creates conflict in his social interactions. The teacher chats with him about this from time to time and during one conversation he acknowledges that he does not like to share but prefers to build structures alone using all the toys at hand. Jerry identifies that he has a struggle with sharing.

Once the teacher has collected enough information and the class has had time to experience itself as a community, the Strengths and Struggles Program is ready to be launched. The program is introduced openly to the whole class together as a forum for self-reflection and self-improvement. The stated goal is to encourage the children to work together to turn individual struggles into personal strengths.

Sitting in a circle, the children and teacher share a strength and/or struggle which is noted on a card and placed in the Strengths and Struggles Book (or kept private if preferred). Including the teacher in the conversation highlights that social and emotional learning is a lifelong journey; the fact that the teacher shares his/her struggles as well has a strong positive affect on the children.

The Strengths and Struggles Book is an interactive visual representation that charts each student's progress. Each student's card is moveable, and as a struggle becomes a strength, the card is repositioned in the book to show the achievement. The children find it highly motivational to watch their struggles become strengths. They feel proud and are excited that they'll have a new opportunity for further self-reflection when the process is repeated.

To help turn their struggles into strengths the children are offered specific strategies. For example, Jerry learns techniques that develop sharing skills. This might involve asking a classmate whose strength is sharing toys to support Jerry's struggle.

The collaboration between the two children helps in two ways: one child's personal struggles are addressed and two children have the chance to practise social awareness, relationship, and empathy. This simple collaboration has a long-term advantage as the children begin to learn how to work openly and confidently in a group.

A class is a microcosm of society; understanding social dynamics this early and this thoughtfully is an invaluable foundation. The children identify their classroom community's challenges and achievements and place them on cards in a separate section of the Strengths and Struggles Book. They are very happy to watch their collective accomplishments develop and grow.

The hidden gem of the Strengths and Struggles Program is that it introduces children to the possibility that their own successes lie within their reach. Even at the young age of five years they can become conscious of the role that emotions and feelings play in their capacity to transform struggles into strengths. This fundamental awareness is an important understanding that can help children develop a healthy sense of well-being.

Linda Lantieri writes: "When social and emotional skills are taught and mastered, they help children succeed not just in school, but in all avenues of life. Social and emotional learning is like an insurance policy for a healthy, positive, successful life."⁵ In the Senior Kindergarten class at The Toronto Heschel

School, the dream is that each student passing through the doors will be equipped with the inner strength and resilience to approach the challenges of life.



Heidi Friedman, M.Sc. (Ed.), views education holistically, with goals to teach academic skills, foster critical thinking and inquiry, and help children navigate their social world. With expertise in leadership as well as teaching, Heidi believes in the infinite potential of children. She is a Literacy and Learning Specialist at The Toronto Heschel School.

Talya Metz, B.A. (McGill), M.A. (UofT), holds degrees in Psychology, Child Study and Education. She has taught in the Jewish Day School system for five years. Talya is particularly interested in social and emotional development, which is the focus of her Senior Kindergarten program at The Toronto Heschel School.

1. Bard Value Analysis and Standardization: Systematic Steps to Support System-Wide Change (June 2009), retrieved August 20, 2013, from http://www.crbard.com/uploadedFiles/CorpSite/Healthcare_Professionals/emotional-intelligence.pdf

2. D. Goleman, *Emotional Intelligence* (New York: Bantam Books, 1995); quote cited by O.W. Leslie, *Newer Views of Learning: Highlights on EQ* (March 2005), retrieved August 20, 2013, from <http://www4.uwsp.edu/education/eilson/learning/emot.htm>

3. Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (2011), retrieved August 20, 2013, from <http://casel.org/about-us/our-people/collaborator-network/>

4. Adapted from L. Lantieri, *Building Emotional Intelligence* (Boulder: Sounds True, 2008), p. 18.

5. Ibid., p. 19.

peer editing

CRITICAL FRIENDS MAKE GOOD WRITERS & STRONG COMMUNITY

BY LESLEY COHEN

The development of trust is essential to the growth of young students. At The Toronto Heschel School, we foster collaborative learning as a key step in anchoring the student experience and building a sense of community, each of which is of immeasurable value to all of our students. Working closely with peers can offer our students much-needed academic support as they push through challenging curricula, and it fosters the all-important dynamic of mutual engagement and respect.

Students challenge themselves and their classmates personally and academically.

While trust is instrumental for a team to successfully reach a common academic goal, it is even more critical when the target of that success has a personal meaning to one individual in the group. An example of this is the practice of peer editing, in which a small group of students reviews another student's writing. Peer editing requires students to challenge themselves and their classmates personally and academically: it assigns them the roles of both the "editor" and the "edited."

As the editors, the students delve into another person's work. They examine it closely, attempt to understand it, and suggest improvements. In turn, when others edit their writing, the students must hear and accept comments from their peers, shedding feelings of vulnerability and insecurity along the way. For many students, this is a daunting task, but with preparation and attentive teacher support, peer editing can become a revolutionary strategy for building community and deepening the bonds of trust within the classroom walls.



At the junior high level, "Heschel-style" *chevrutah* rarely pairs students with the same partners repeatedly; the students come to know that on any given task, they may be working with any of their classmates, or perhaps in a group of three. They learn not to rely on a consistent buddy or partner, but understand their class as a jigsaw puzzle of shifting pairs or trios that is continually rearranged. Students come to trust that each classmate has something to offer in this collaborative process; each can enrich the learning in new and different ways.

At Heschel, peer editing is embedded throughout our entire Grade 6 language arts curriculum. We begin in the fall with a poetry unit, where students use peer editing to strengthen one another's poems. They next peer edit each other's formal artist statements during the winter preparation for their Eco-Seder, and in the spring, they apply the peer-editing process to their creative short stories in the unit that explores life before the Second World War. Different thematic questions guide the students through these three editing experiences, but a few key elements remain consistent.

The first of these elements is to improve students' writing skills. Knowing that changes will inevitably be made to their words, our young writers learn not to "fall in love" with their first drafts. This openness to change is foundational to students actively improving their writing; it orients them to key habits of mind as they acclimatize to thinking flexibly and meta-cognitively about the writing process.



and the outcomes that the person or group is working toward. The friend is an advocate for the success of that work.”¹

Another benefit of peer editing is developing compassion in students. Each student knows that he/she will be reading and editing another student’s work and that his/her own work will undergo the same rigorous treatment. This reciprocal interaction creates and establishes empathy. Our student editors must proffer a piece of positive feedback before a critical one, and pose questions before suggesting improvements. These guidelines develop a level of respect among peers that is not cultivated on the playground or in the traditional classroom setting.

Motivating the desire for self *and* peer improvement is fundamental to helping students become better writers. Students are very interested in what their peers produce, and even feel pride in each other’s finished products. The peer-editing process develops a vested interest in each other’s success and the class begins to demonstrate a key characteristic of a community that is engaged and that shares a sense of communal accomplishment.

Our writers learn not to “fall in love” with their first drafts.

When the school year begins, students might be reluctant to change their own way of writing, but as the months roll by they become enthusiastic about opening up to peer scrutiny and become more willing to make changes that are needed. Often in my class when a student has been absent on a peer-editing day, and has missed the group interaction, other students volunteer to go through the process with him/her during free time. Students want the critique and their peers want to give it.

One of the objectives of education is to inspire young people to maintain a thirst for learning. As such, it is incumbent upon us as educators to equip our students with the skills to persevere, the confidence to ask questions, and the strength to reflect and revise. One path to this overarching goal is to guide students as they examine their own efforts through the eyes of a trusted, critical friend. In doing so, we not only inspire our students to become better learners but also encourage them to become better people.

Lesley Cohen received her teaching degree at OISE, and also holds a B.A. in Psychology and an M.A. in Religion and Cultural Studies. This is her second year teaching at The Toronto Heschel School, where she teaches Grade 6 and junior high music.

¹ A. Costa and B. Kallick, “Through the Lens of a Critical Friend,” *Educational Leadership* 51(2) (1993), pp. 49–51, retrieved July 8, 2013, from <http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/oct93/vol51/num02/Through-the-Lens-of-a-Critical-Friend.aspx>

The second element is to teach students the difference between critique and criticism, between providing feedback and exacting judgment. The ability to wonder is essential to peer editing; editors learn to give thoughtful consideration to the writing and the writer’s ideas. According to A.J. Heschel, wonder lies at the root of all knowledge. To encourage wonder, we ensure that students know they are not being asked to *evaluate* their peers’ work but to *engage* in the work – to ask questions, to probe, and to thoughtfully consider what they are reading.

A third critical element is to understand the common purpose of helping the writer accomplish his/her objective, which might be to complete a strong final draft of a poem or an essay. A student editor does not work independently through a classmate’s writing and then return a heavily marked-up assignment without questions or discussion. Instead, students work in groups of two or three, posing questions to the one being edited as they read their peer’s writing. The editors can offer suggestions only when they understand the writer’s topic, thought process, and intention.

Through this process, the students begin to see themselves as *critical friends* – which is defined by educational consultants Arthur Costa and Bena Kallick as “a trusted person who asks provocative questions, provides data to be examined through another lens, and offers critique of a person’s work as a friend.” Costa and Kallick emphasize that this individual “takes the time to fully understand the context of the work presented

COLLABORATION IN SCIENCE AND THE SCIENCE IN COLLABORATION

BY DANIEL ABRAMSON



Last year, I had the pleasure to bring my Grade 8 class to the McEwen Centre for Regenerative Medicine. It was an amazing opportunity for students to see scientists at the cutting edge of their fields working to solve real problems in a first-class laboratory. Under the microscope we saw beating heart cells that were grown from stem cells in a Petri dish, and bone marrow that was engineered from a patient's own cells. The Centre has assembled a world-class team to pursue research here in Toronto and to translate their discoveries into cures for diseases today. Even in our short time there, we came to see that collaboration is a cornerstone of the McEwen Centre's philosophy; it is a foundational belief that they will achieve their goals faster if they work together as a team and collaborate with other institutions worldwide.

I was very inspired, not only by the scientific accomplishments of the McEwen Centre but also by how it fosters an environment that supports collaborative work at its best. They make cooperative, interactive, integrated teamwork look easy, even seamless, but anyone who has worked as part of a successful crew knows that real collaboration is far from easy. It requires very specific skills that, like all competencies, need to be fostered and practised. I believe it behooves all teachers to help students learn these skills.

For example, I could ask a student to move a heavy load from one place to another. If the load were weighty enough, logically the task could require the efforts of multiple students. The students could work in concert, with a shared goal. They could each contribute the same skill in the same way and achieve something together that could not be

accomplished by one of them alone. While there is some value in this cooperation, I don't think it's enough.

I would rather ask our group of students to lift a load that they could never budge, even if trying it together. This would force the group to devise a strategy that addresses the problem in a new way, beyond combined muscle power to collective invention. I would ask each member to consider what the group could do differently and to offer suggestions that the team could consider and try. Eventually, when members of the team develop a successful strategy, they will walk away from the collaboration with knowledge that they did not have before. This is the kind of inventive collaboration that science teachers should target.

To stimulate this level of cooperation, a learning environment needs two key features: classroom culture that encourages individuals to create and share ideas, and tasks that are real, complex and in need of inventive thinking. The best collaborative teams, such as the scientists at the McEwen Centre, create an atmosphere where team members feel confident that their ideas will be heard. McEwen scientists meet weekly over lunch to share their progress and reflections; they call their lunches "Working in Progress." Hard challenges, like curing deadly disease, build great resolve and long-lasting professional satisfaction. We also want our students to understand how empowering real success can be.

In Grade 7, we ask students to create functional wind turbines that generate enough power to light a small bulb. The task is daunting, but when the light goes on, the students' gratification glows with it. Students use their knowledge

of energy and integrate independent research with models of wind technology observed on field trips. When each student has developed an idea to offer, we assemble collaborative teams to evaluate, build, and test an initial design. Each team assesses its own success and that of the others and then revises its first design based on its observations. The exercise creates a model for high-quality collaboration: the students bring their individual expertise to the team and the team builds on this collected knowledge to create an idea that did not exist before the team convened. In this carefully supervised and structured way, teaching collaboration fosters a core value of our school's science curriculum: innovation.

The approach also builds resilience in learners. When we set out to accomplish a task that is too difficult without the creation of new knowledge, we must expect trial and error, i.e., initial failures. In class, I describe how scientists fail in their experiments and use failure to learn. I remind my class that no one has yet fully discovered how to cure all cancers, yet scientists persist in their investigation and learn from each task they target. As individuals and team players, we want students to learn persistence and perseverance, and to appreciate the value of both unsuccessful and successful efforts.

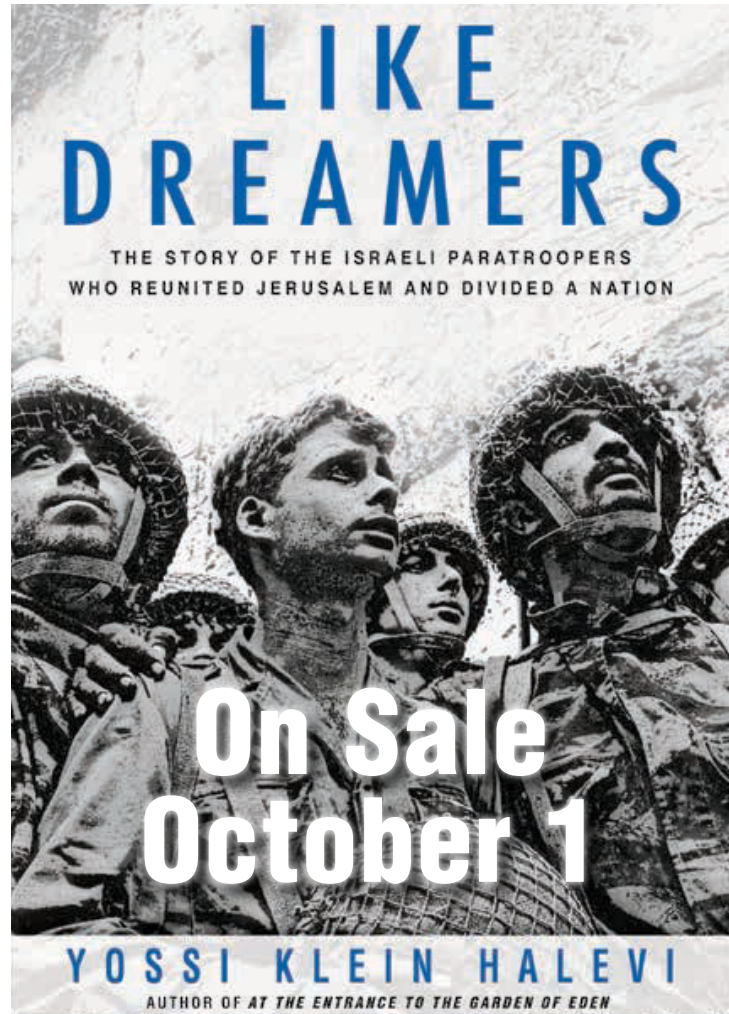
Currently, in education, business, science, and society at large, the trend seems to be valuing the skill to work as a team player. My job is to prepare my students for their world, and in doing so I am cognizant that collaborative work is not antithetical to individual work, that it is not one way or the other. To teach our students collaborative skills, we teachers should take care in how we frame tasks and define teams. We must provide adequate time and space for students on teams to develop their individual thinking. Otherwise we risk overlooking the preconditions that allow innovation and creativity to flourish.

Collaboration skills need to be fostered and practised. Scientists use failure to learn.

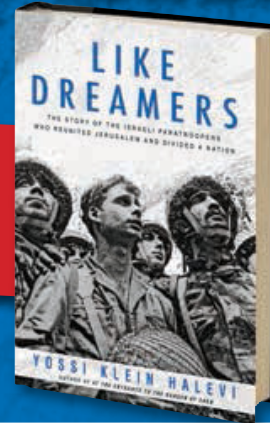
In a recent interview on CBC Radio, Canadian astronaut Julie Payette beautifully presented the delicate balance between the individual and the team. She described how in her interview for the Canadian Space Program she was asked to talk about a time when she had worked as a team player. She answered that she had sung in choirs for 20 years. To sing in harmony and in tempo to create beautiful music, she explained that you need to be able to listen to others and to adjust your own performance accordingly.

In the end, there is an art to the science of collaboration.

Daniel Abramson has long explored learning through creative self-expression. Before earning his teaching degree at York University, he coordinated arts and culture at Hillel of Greater Toronto. A lifelong camper, Daniel's passion for nature drives him to connect his students to the world they inhabit. He teaches junior high at The Toronto Heschel School.



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HAPPY 18TH BIRTHDAY TORONTO HESCHEL & THANK YOU!



BY MICHELLE SHULMAN

As we meet in the halls, on the field, or socially, I find myself frequently talking with other Heschel moms and dads about how grateful we are for The Toronto Heschel School. It is a wonderful feeling to be so confident in your choice of school for your children and to have your decision validated so often. This fall, as Toronto Heschel turns 18 years old, I have been reflecting on why I feel so grateful.

Our teachers travel to Harvard to study, lead seminars at international math conferences, and engage in serious Jewish learning with the Shalom Hartman Institute.

Some days, I think I am most appreciative of Heschel simply because of the intellectual training that my children are receiving. The questions that they discuss at home and in the car, the topics that they raise, and the debates that they pursue all show me that my children are becoming thinkers. Daily they receive encouragement to be curious and are challenged to ask questions. I can hear for myself that they are learning the art of thoughtful conversation.

Other days I am grateful that their teachers understand that a joyful nurturing environment offers children the best advantage to reach their full potential. In this age of emotional intelligence and neuropsychological discovery, it feels good to know that my family is at a school that keeps itself at the forefront of educational research. Whether it's how to advance reading, writing, or math skills, or how to establish a class environment where students are empowered so they can stretch to reach their potential, the school continually re-evaluates its techniques and practices.

I see our teachers travel to Harvard to study, lead seminars at international math conferences, and engage in serious Jewish learning with the Shalom Hartman Institute. As a parent I feel secure knowing that my children's teachers take their own continuing education seriously.

I am very glad that academic skills go hand in hand with contemplation at Toronto Heschel. The school's firm expectation of academic mastery exists within a culture of deeper thinking. My children are being introduced early in their lives to big questions; they are seeing how academic disciplines intertwine and what universal themes look like when observed through a Jewish lens; they are learning that human rights are Jewish ethics and that conservation shows respect for creation. We are not just preparing our children for high school; we are preparing them to participate successfully as citizens in a new world. I am so grateful for the foundational learning they are receiving now.

We are not just preparing our children for high school; we are preparing them to participate successfully as citizens in a new world.

I want my children to have a meaningful Jewish identity, yet I often wonder exactly what this means. Of course, I want them to love Shabbat and appreciate the holidays, to respect the *mitzvot* and traditions. I want them to be able to pick up a Siddur anywhere in the world and feel comfortable to lead or join a service, and I profoundly want my children to be emotionally and spiritually attached to Israel. But I want more.

For me Judaism is not only for Pesach or Sukkot. Jewish history is not simply for Yom HaShoah or Tisha b'Av. I want my children to cherish Judaism as a living and breathing

ethical blueprint that will accompany them on their journey through life. Deep in their hearts and souls I want them to know that our Judaism is one of the great, moral traditions and philosophies of the world.

Amazing as it sounds, I see this all supported by a day school curriculum at Toronto Heschel which seamlessly integrates Jewish and secular subjects. All day long Jewish values, texts, and ideas are interwoven with science, writing, reading, mathematics, history, and geography. The integration is invaluable to the students' understanding of Judaism and compatible with the blended identity of the North American Jewish child in 2013. I am truly thankful for the beautiful and pervasive Jewish sensibility that The Toronto Heschel School engenders in my children.

But often, I think that I am most grateful to be at Toronto Heschel because of the way I see the children in the school behave towards one another, to guests in the school, and to others when they are out in the broader community. I know this is the result of an intentional philosophy that seeps into all parts of our children's education. There is a sense of community that is carefully nurtured from the moment a child walks into Junior Kindergarten. I remember thinking 10 years ago that this was sweet and lovely, but now as my children have grown, I see clearly that this ethic of mutual respect and dignity has helped to shape my children and their peers into confident, empathetic, and responsible individuals.

Heschel is a destination school for families from all over Toronto, from all the Jewish affiliations and backgrounds.

I am overwhelmed this birthday year by the enthusiasm and appreciation we are receiving from current families, alumni, and alumni families. Those of us who have been around the school for many years know what we have. The buzzwords featured on advertisements for schools around town today reflect ideas that have been mainstream at Heschel since 1996 when the doors first opened – the whole child, learning through the arts, environmental programming, critical thinking, creativity, character development, experiential learning, ethics. This year we celebrate 18 years of leadership in these areas.

I am very grateful for the Heschel school community. Heschel is a destination school for families from all over Toronto, from all Jewish affiliations and backgrounds. The result is a warm and special collection of families who want their children in a nurturing and educationally advanced Jewish environment. Everyone is so happy about the 18th birthday and the milestone that it is. We are families who have a school we call home, and I am thankful for it all.

Michelle Shulman has been a Toronto Heschel School parent for 10 years and will be there for six more. She is Vice Chair of The Lola Stein Institute.



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AWE AND ENGAGEMENT: A PSYCHIATRIST AND A RABBI TALK THEATRE

A THINK INTERVIEW WITH DR. DAVID GOLDBLOOM BY RABBI JOE KANOFSKY

Scott Wentworth (centre) as Shylock with members of the company in *The Merchant of Venice*. Photo by David Hou.



“Though this be madness, yet there is method in’t,” says Polonius in Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* (act 2, scene 2).

While there’s no guarantee that theatregoing will improve your mental health, there is a lot to be said for theatre attendance. I can recall the experience some 20 years ago of sitting in a theatre with tears welling up in my eyes during the climactic scene of Arthur Miller’s *All My Sons*. I had already read the play several times and even memorized some scenes, yet seeing it presented on stage affected me in a way it never had before.

What made an even greater impression on me was what I saw and heard when the house lights came up and the audience stood and made its way to the exits. I was truly stunned by the amount of sniffles that I suddenly became aware of, and of the Kleenex and handkerchiefs that appeared in my fellow audience members’ hands. So many of us were moved to tears by a script, a 50-year-old text that we probably already knew well. The audience experience had touched something inside us deeply and profoundly; we felt something at the core of our beings.

It’s quite well known that acting in various forms has a significant place in several forms of psychotherapy, be it role playing, the empty-chair technique, or psychodrama. But what can be said about the experience of the observer of drama, the theatregoer? Of what benefit is it to be part of an audience watching a play unfold on stage, to be witness to a performance as opposed to taking part in it? There must be something to it. After all, theatre is one of the enduring literary and artistic forms of Western civilization, a spectrum from classical Greek drama to the Shakespearean tradition to the contemporary *Purimshpiel*.

I deepened my insight and appreciation of theatregoing in a recent conversation with Dr. David Goldbloom. Not only

is he the Senior Medical Advisor of the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) and a professor of psychiatry at the University of Toronto, he is also the chair of the Board of Governors of the Stratford Shakespeare Festival of Canada, and he has been an actor and theatregoer most of his life.

We first discussed a few very practical elements in the theatre experience that distinguish it from other forms of entertainment in our world, from cinema to home DVD viewing to TiVo to YouTube.

“A theatregoer is having an experience in real time, with real people,” Dr. Goldbloom noted. “This makes it different from the experience of watching a television show or a movie, for several reasons ... Sitting in a theatre, you are in a darkened room with your cellphone off. Distractions are minimized, and for some of us, going to theatre may provide some of our closest experiences with focused, sustained attention. In our hyper-connected world, it may be one of the only times in our lives when we are awake without our cellphones threatening to divide our attention at any moment.”

I agreed that this kind of intense focus is increasingly rare in our world. We continue to deceive ourselves that we can “multi-task” efficiently as we busily pay partial attention to two, three, or four directions at once.

The theatre experience is immediate, whole, and complex. A film or a TV show is likely filmed out of sequence, and the pieces later edited together. As Dr. Goldbloom pointed out, “There’s no way to know in which order the scenes were shot; or whether you are watching the third take or the thirty-seventh.” This gap admits distance between the observer and the drama.

Further comparing the screen to stage, Dr. Goldbloom added, “You also have no certainty as to voice dubbing or other mixing effects that go into film production ... Sitting in a theatre you are almost near enough to touch the actors.

You can see the fullness of their movements, positioning, and body language." Watching theatre differs even from reading a script or listening to the live reading of a play. A reader has only one voice, but when a play is acted out on stage, the range and combination of interpretive possibilities is really endless.

Theatre is a living performance, which, Dr. Goldbloom emphasized, distinguishes it from any other kind of audience experience, "There is a certain peril in live performance which underscores and magnifies the achievement. It adds a sense of infectious excitement and expectation to watching a performance on the stage that we will never experience with recorded media ... Once a film has been released, we know that the filmmaker believes it to be a finished product. This is never the case on the stage even though the play has been well rehearsed, directed, and stage-managed. The audience literally watches the action unfold. Human frailty being what it is, anything can happen." It can be an outstanding performance, or a dud. It can scale the heights, or an actor can drop a line or miss a cue.

When I asked Dr. Goldbloom to recall a theatre highlight, a memorable or transformative moment in his theatregoing experience, he recalled an opening a few years ago of Stratford's production of Samuel Beckett's *Krapp's Last Tape*. The lead and lone actor on stage, Brian Dennehy, opened the play with an approximately two-minute long silent look of awe and wonder.

"It allowed everyone to empathize, to project their own thoughts onto the character," Dr. Goldbloom said. "In our world, it is noteworthy that moments of silence still have power. The moment allowed each audience member to embroider onto the actor's silent awe whatever he or she was thinking and feeling."

Dr. Goldbloom cited the work of Dr. Vivian Rakoff, a psychiatrist who writes about the psychological aspects of theatre and describes theatre as a safe venue to explore our most horrible emotions such as hatred, murder, lust, jealousy. When I asked why someone playing an interactive video game couldn't explore the same emotions, Dr. Goldbloom explained that the video game experience doesn't force the player to think in a deep and sustained way about the questions. Nor does it offer any sense of objectivity or transcendence to the player's experiences of violence or other strong emotions as he plays.

In one of this season's repertory plays at the Stratford Shakespeare Festival, *Mary Stuart*, the storyline involves

murder as well as politics. Elizabeth I of England holds her cousin, Mary Queen of Scots, prisoner and deliberates whether to execute her. Elizabeth's anxiety over her course of action introduces the notion of "plausible deniability," a watchword coined during the Kennedy Administration and commonly connected to Watergate in late 20th-century politics. It's quite interesting that the play is over 200 years old. It was written by Friedrich Schiller, and debuted on the German stage in the year 1800.

"In our world, it is noteworthy that moments of silence still have power."

In another Stratford production this year, *The Merchant of Venice* is set in a different Italy than the Italy that Shakespeare imagined; Stratford sets the play in 1938 under a fascist regime. The staging of the end of the play connects it to the actuality of the Holocaust, underscoring the questions and conflicts that Shakespeare raises about identities, both of Shylock and of the other characters in the play.

The two plays demonstrate the enduring capacity of theatre to touch on universal, even transcendent themes. The engaged and attentive audience member has the latitude to be removed and objective while at the same time intensely engaged with nuances of character and plot. Seeing ever-present human tensions presented on stage allows us to observe conflicts and interactions that are difficult, even tragic. We can either digest them or let them continue to bother and trouble us long after we've walked out of the theatre.

"I don't go to the theatre to improve my mental health. However, as a story unfolds over two hours on stage, I'm surprised by the awe and engagement that I feel by the end of the production," says Dr. Goldbloom.

Seeing live theatre lets us develop an increasingly rare and challenging skill; we practise our capacity to minimize distraction and focus on a matter at hand. Theatre allows us the intimacy to experience the story line of a play for a brief finite period and to willingly suspend our disbelief, in Coleridge's terms. We can find ourselves being quite amused, deeply enraged, genuinely fearful, or absolutely mesmerized by a scenario as we are drawn in to its real-time and real-life tension. The theatre's ability to develop in its audience the capacity to focus, reflect, empathize, and even experience catharsis remains unique among the performing arts.

Joe Kanofsky is the Rabbi of Kehillat Shaarei Torah. He holds a Ph.D. in Literature and was an Honors Thes pian.



INTENTIONAL CHEVRUTA LEARNING

CULTIVATING ETHICAL AND SPIRITUAL GROWTH IN LEARNERS

BY ALISON COOK AND ORIT KENT



Jewish educators are drawn to using *chevruta* learning in their classrooms for many satisfying reasons. As a traditional mode of Jewish study, simply studying text in pairs lets students experience a valued Jewish way of learning.¹ Educators and students alike get excited about the intellectual possibilities – picture images of lively pairs fulfilling the Talmudic adage of “iron sharpening iron.”

As talk of twenty-first-century learning enlivens educators’ professional discourse, the intellectual and social potential of *chevruta* learning heeds the call for critical thinking, communication, and collaboration. *Chevruta* learning also provides a fertile laboratory for social skills. It is compelling to see how the pedagogical structure of *chevruta*, when thoughtfully designed and supported, meets today’s educational ideals and indeed surpasses them with intriguing potential as an ethical and spiritual practice. There is a lot that Jewish educators can do to deepen their use of this learning structure and become designers of an intentional *chevruta* learning practice that will nurture their students intellectually, socially, ethically, and spiritually.

Consider this component of a *beit midrash* (house of study) exercise designed to induct students into what we call “intentional *chevruta* learning.”

Take a few minutes to write about a time when you felt that someone else really understood you. Then write about a time when you felt misjudged or misunderstood. What happened there? What did the other person do or not do to make you feel understood or misunderstood? Share your stories with your *chevruta*.

For the seventh graders who participated in this exercise, vivid and heartfelt memories of being understood – or not – emerged easily. Stories of teachers, parents, friends, and peers who demonstrated understanding or misunderstanding contributed to a list of attitudes and actions that students’ characterized as leading to understanding on the one hand or to misjudgment on the other. Students explored the idea that their study in a *chevruta* partnership was not only about decoding a text or taking turns talking, but also about “seeking to understand” and “being understood.” Throughout the *chevruta* learning, exploration of the *intent* “to seek understanding” remains a focal point alongside the teaching of standard text study skills. Through the thoughtful use of intentional *chevruta* learning, learners develop ethical and spiritual, intellectual and social capacities in tandem.

We use two main research-based frameworks that help students grow in multiple dimensions. The first framework is “the *chevruta* triangle,”² which opens discussion and

builds imagery for an ideal *chevruta* partnership. This is not a partnership of two, but a partnership of three: two people and the text. “The *chevruta* triangle” can be drawn as an equilateral triangle with one partner at each corner. We “seek to understand” not only that our partner has her/his own ideas, thoughts, and voice, but also that the text has its own “voice” and multiple meanings. Each partner works to demonstrate his/her openness to listen, understand, and respond to the other’s ideas and to achieve new understandings and interpretations.

The shared imagery of the *chevruta* triangle lets students monitor their own activity within the partnership; they can assess how well they hold open the triangle and whether all three partners have a presence and a voice. Here are some reflections from seventh graders on what they learned through their *chevruta* partnerships after a few sessions:

“I need to take a breath and tune in to what I am doing and be more conscious of my partner and myself.”

“I need to analyze [the text] more than once and leave my mind open to other views. I also learned not to judge it [the text].”

“It’s hard to share power but I must.”

The students express an unprompted “I need to” or “I must” message about being a *chevruta* partner to both the text and their peer, implying that their *chevruta* partnership *obligates* them to behave in certain ways for themselves and their partners. This sense of obligation and responsibility to the other taps into an essential and ethical underpinning of the *chevruta* relationship: we are responsible to and for one another and through this mini-universe of obligation we gain new knowledge, interpretations, and insights.

In the student reflections we also hear overtones of a spiritual vitality that allude to attunement, wonder, and a sense of connection. A student reminds herself to “take a breath,” “tune in,” and “become more conscious,” there is a sense of needing to slow down and pay attention. Another student seeks “remaining open,” a stance towards sustaining wonder.

It is one thing to identify the importance of becoming more attuned to one’s partners or to remain open to different ideas; it is another thing to know *how* to do it. The “how” is where our second major framework comes in: “the six practices of *chevruta*.”³ This framework builds the skills needed to establish the relationship and realize the learning possibilities of studying texts closely with others.

Through lessons, tools, exercises, and feedback, we work with

students to enact and enhance “the six practices of *chevruta*” – listening and articulating, wondering and focusing, and challenging and supporting. Each set can entail intellectual, social, ethical, and spiritual engagement, particularly when applied to all three *chevruta* partners. Notice how a *chevruta* student refers to his own experience of “listening and articulating”:

I think that the text is *telling* you something that makes it a partner but you have to *listen* to what it is telling you... you can’t do that with the text...just by scanning it...the same with any person. You really have to get to know them... (Our emphasis.)

What begins as an intellectual exercise in closely reading a Jewish text becomes reframed as a practice of “listening” to a text that has something to “articulate” to readers. Even the text engages in listening and articulating and through our own use of these practices we can “really get to know” and connect with the text and with people. The student’s reflection shows both ethical and spiritual reverberations: an ethical responsibility to seek textual understanding – beyond a cursory look – and the spiritual understanding that the text will speak to us if we listen.

We hear similar reflections from students using the “challenging and supporting” set of practices. These require critical thinking and introduce the idea of “evidence” to build and evaluate ideas together. Students embrace these practices not only as the tools of intellectual creativity and refinement, but also as the means to develop the ethic of intellectual honesty. When students describe the “voice” of the text as “challenging” or “supporting” their ideas, again we see the spiritual significance of *chevruta* practice.

To design and participate in intentional *chevruta* learning requires time and energy. In the words of one pair of seventh graders looking back over their *beit midrash* program: “We worked hard!” For these students and for many others, the pedagogy of intentional *chevruta* learning opens possibilities for growing in multiple ways, a reward that is well worth the effort.

Allison Cook is a Research Associate and **Orit Kent** is a Senior Research Associate at the Mandel Center for Studies in Jewish Education at Brandeis University where they develop, research, and teach “Havruta Inspired Pedagogy.” Both are long-time teachers and teacher-educators.

1 There is scholarly debate about when *chevruta* became a common mode of Talmud study in yeshivot. Today, *chevruta* is used across a spectrum of Jewish settings to learn a range of texts. || 2 M. Raider-Roth and E. Holzer, “Learning to Be Present: How *Hevruta* Learning Can Activate Teachers’ Relationships to Self, Other and Text,” *Journal of Jewish Education* 75 (2009), pp. 216–39; Orit Kent, “Interactive Text Study and the Co-Construction of Meaning: *Chevruta* in the Delet Beit Midrash” (PhD diss., Brandeis, 2008). || 3 Orit Kent, “A Theory of *Chevruta* Learning,” *Journal of Jewish Education* 76, no. 3 (2010), pp. 215–45.

TAKING TANENBAUMCHAT TO THE NEXT LEVEL:

MEET THE NEW **HEAD OF SCHOOL**

A **think** INTERVIEW WITH RABBI LEE BUCKMAN

BY BRYAN BORZYKOWSKI

Rabbi Lee Buckman always knew that he wanted to be a Jewish educator. He was drawn to Torah when he was a child and was a regular tutor during his university years. But, it was in 1999, after spending nearly a decade as a congregational rabbi in Milwaukee, that he got his chance to combine his two passions of Torah and teaching in a school setting: he founded The Frankel Jewish Academy of Metro Detroit and developed new curriculum for it.

Ten years later in 2009, Rabbi Buckman became the head of school at the struggling Greenfield Hebrew Academy in Atlanta. He turned the school around by instituting a culture of philanthropy and setting higher board expectations and fiscal standards. As a respected educator, he has consulted across North America on ways to improve Jewish education. Last spring, Rabbi Buckman was appointed the head of school of TanenbaumCHAT in Toronto. *think* spoke with him to find out more about his educational philosophy and what he plans to do at his new school.

What attracted you to Jewish education?

I love children and teaching, and I love Torah. Teaching combines all three passions. I initially worked as a congregational rabbi where I focused a lot on family education. After a decade of doing that, I wanted to narrow the focus of my rabbinical work on education at school.

What's your approach to Jewish education?

My goal is to instill a love of *Yiddishkeit* in our children in a school setting, so that they're living, loving, and breathing Judaism. I want them to find it so meaningful and compelling that they want to continue deepening their Jewish learning and living. It's my mission statement wherever I go.

How do you do that?

There are three components to it. In a formal school setting, it's about getting the absolute best teachers that a school can recruit, teachers who will inspire children and challenge them. I mean teachers who are not only experts in subject matter but also character educators, people who are good role models and who see that it's not just about imparting information but helping to transform lives.

The second component is breaking down the silos among different Jewish institutions that have a similar mission. To the extent a school can partner with Jewish camps or synagogues or Jewish youth movements, the school will achieve its mission more readily.

The third is strong partnerships with parents, because ultimately a school can teach material, but it's the parents who teach meaning.

What are some of the challenges that Jewish educators face today?

The challenges relate to my three components. Recruiting excellent teachers is hard; recruiting excellent teachers in Judaics is even more difficult. They are often not as valued as other professionals in terms of being appreciated both financially and emotionally. The profession lacks a sense of security and so it's a less appealing profession to go into. Teaching is a difficult skill to master: Judaics teachers do need to be experts in their subject matter, but they also need to know pedagogy.

Many institutions think they can do it alone. It takes a great degree of humility to say we have a mission, but here's something we don't do well and we need to do it in collaboration with others.

Finally, we're all a part of a world where there are things that compete with Judaism in the market place, and so we need constantly to make the case for what the school is trying to accomplish. We have to articulate a vision and present a case to move kids and families into the system and through the system. And we need to stay with them well after they graduate.

How has Jewish education changed over the years?

People argue that certain things have changed, but really a lot hasn't changed at all. We hear a lot about the affordability crisis in Jewish day school education today. I believe the issues of affordability, not just in Jewish day school but in Jewish life, have been around for decades: synagogue dues, camp tuition, the cost of Kosher. True, the costs may have gone up, but proportionally the issues are the same.

One significant positive change in Jewish day school education has been that it's become much more professionalized over the past 15 years. That's because of foundations and organizations like the Partnership for Excellence in Jewish Education or the AVI CHAI Foundation in New York. We've taken the best practices in private school education and brought them into Jewish education.

Do Jewish people still value Jewish education?

It's one of those things people say, that, in the good old days, Jewish education was of top importance. Even though I didn't live in the good old days, I know that 50 years ago there were other things that competed.

When Jewish immigrants first came to America they wanted to fit into the culture and one gateway to that was the public school system. That's where they learned English and math, but they also learned baseball and apple pie. So American culture was competing with sacred traditional values and Jews were abandoning Judaism in search of how to be a better American.

Now the question is no longer how do I become a good American, but how do I become a good Jew. People are trying to understand how to be a more committed and passionate Jew and how that makes you a better citizen of the world around you.

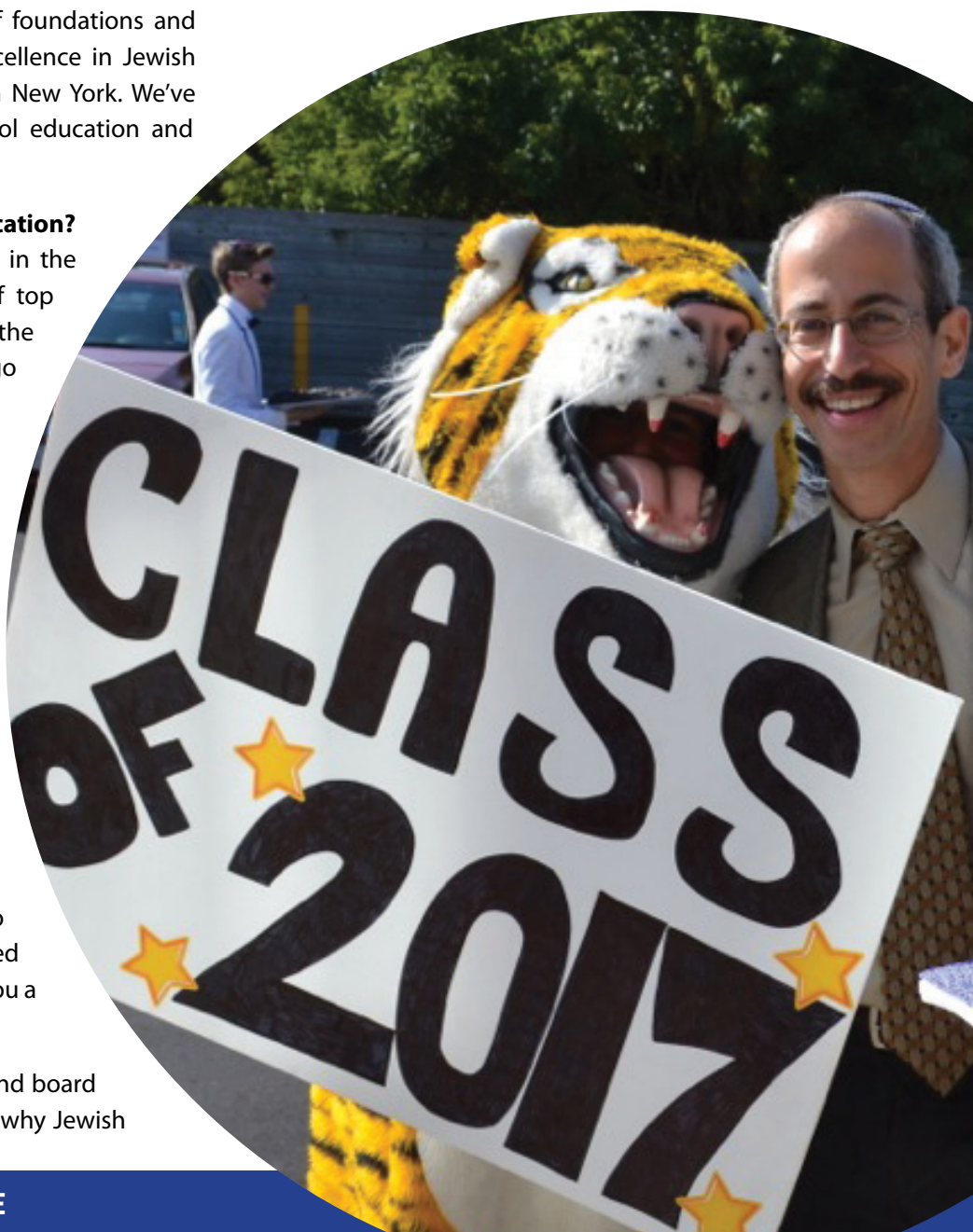
We still need administrators and leaders and board members to continue making the case of why Jewish

education is important, but that is something that people have needed to do throughout Jewish history.

What do you plan to do at TanenbaumCHAT?

My challenge for the next six months is to really get to know the TanenbaumCHAT family and learn, through their eyes, about norms and culture and the history of CHAT. I have to learn its strengths and challenges. With what I learn from people's hopes and dreams, I'll be able to formulate some shared goals and shared plans; that will really be the way I can take CHAT to the next level.

Bryan Borzykowski is a Toronto-based journalist and Toronto Heschel School parent. He's written for the BBC, *The New York Times*, and *The Globe and Mail*, among other publications.



NEW FRIENDS, *Old Friends*

THE BENEFITS OF INTERGENERATIONAL LEARNING

BY LISA RICHLER

When a group of Baycrest residents entered the halls of The Toronto Heschel School last fall, one might have guessed they had come to watch a play, hear the choir, or see an art exhibit. The truth is that the group of seniors, ranging in age from 86 to 99, had come to school to be students. The visit was part of an Intergenerational Learning Project that was piloted throughout the year by Heschel and Baycrest.

Members of the Baycrest team first approached Heschel because they were interested in the school's expertise in learning through the arts. Baycrest scientists like Dr. Sylvain Moreno, who are leaders in cognitive neuroscience research, have been investigating the brain's plasticity and how arts-based contexts can improve brain function. According to Bianca Stern, Baycrest's Director of Arts, Culture, and Innovation, "what Toronto Heschel was doing with kids, we wanted to push forward with the elders."

Gail Baker, Head and Co-Founder of Toronto Heschel, explains her interest in the partnership, "We are always looking for new ways to meaningfully enhance students cognitive and social growth; to challenge our students with unfamiliar activities that will increase their ability to sustain attention and persevere through a task." The Heschel team developed a pilot project in which a group of Baycrest seniors would pair up with Grade 6 students, and over the course of the year they would work together on three separate units of study: Poetry, the Eco-Seder, and Life Before the War.

Intergenerational learning takes some getting used to. When the sixth graders and seniors met for the first time last fall, Heschel teacher Lesley Cohen recalls that "the kids were a bit awkward, and the seniors were a bit nervous." Everyone was coming to lessons "from different entry points." The seniors obviously had vast life experience to draw upon, but it had been a long time since any of them had been asked to complete a school assignment. At the outset, many felt they were in over their heads. That initial meeting took place at the greenhouse in the Baycrest Terraces, where Cohen led a poetry lesson. Each sixth grader was paired up with a Baycrest resident, and the

partners were instructed to choose a plant in the greenhouse, study its properties, and compose a poem about it. Despite the participants' initial discomfort, Cohen believes that writing poetry "really broke the ice" between the students and their Baycrest partners. "Poetry is such a great place to start, because it's so free. You don't feel constricted by various grammatical structures and punctuation ... There are so few rules."

The students returned to Baycrest several times to revise, edit, and extend their work with their partners. The unit culminated in a Poetry Café at the school, where both generations of students recited their poems and socialized over hot chocolate, tea, and cookies. A few Baycrest residents read poems that they had written as early as their own adolescence.

Baker remembers, "I don't think there was a person watching who was not profoundly moved by the interactions." Both Baycrest and Heschel staff participants could see that the experience was drawing the children and the seniors closer, allowing them to understand one another.

Cohen points out, "We often acknowledge seniors' ability to recall their own youth when interacting with young people. However, we don't often think about how children can see that same thing – they now saw an 85-year-old woman as a 13-year-old girl, and developed more empathy for the senior in the process. They didn't just see them as a Bubbie or Zaida but as a young girl or boy much like themselves." Baker adds that, for the Grade 6 students, "working with elders was a means to develop respect for them. Our students could see the insights they can offer. This breaks down stereotypes that distance the generations from each other."

In the winter, the Baycrest residents came to Heschel to create ceramic Seder plates for the Eco-Seder, an integrated Grade 6 program that combines Passover themes with studies in environmental issues, math, science, and the arts. Judith Leitner, Director of Arts and Co-Founder of Heschel, recalls that a few Baycrest residents were insecure about connecting

themes and ideas across different disciplines. “Our kids are hip to integration,” explains Leitner. “They are used to making connections and thinking through various layers of art – the math, the science. The challenge was teaching people in their 80s and 90s how to think this way.”

What was interesting, is that sometimes the children would mentor the seniors, and sometimes the seniors would mentor the children; but the switch happened naturally.

Leitner believes that one of the greatest benefits for the children was that they had the chance to play the role of teacher for their partners. “The kids had to reach inside themselves and explain a concept, and they gained a much deeper understanding of what they were learning by having to teach it.”

“What was interesting,” says Baker, “is that sometimes the children would mentor the seniors and sometimes the seniors would mentor the children; but the switch happened naturally. All participants, young and elder, would teach what they knew and learn from their partners. The result was visible cooperation and partnership. For the children, it was an awakening to new avenues for gathering information.”

The intergenerational classroom levelled the playing field. Sure, some students were older and some were younger, but everyone saw themselves and the others as able and intelligent participants in a lifelong learning continuum. As Baker suggests, “Sometimes, younger people are afraid of elders, particularly in our society that doesn’t always allow for natural interactions. The intergenerational classroom allows for a more normative relationship.”

The Intergenerational Learning Project ended with the unit Life Before the War, an inquiry into the Jewish experience before the Second World War. The sixth graders and seniors

studied the work and lives of artists Marc Chagall and Mayer Kirshenblatt and explored what life was like for European Jews before the Holocaust. The seniors had personal stories to tell: some shared memories of growing up in shtetls in Poland; others, born in North America, remembered their families’ experiences in Europe and the “transplanted shtetls” in which they had grown up in Toronto, Montreal, and New York. The seniors’ personal stories stuck with the sixth graders, and often surfaced in later class discussions. According to Cohen, the seniors’ remembrances colourfully supplemented her students’ “academic knowledge” and rendered the learning of history relevant and real.

Baker is pleased with the benefits that intergenerational learning brought to her students:

The pilot project was experiential, which is the most authentic way to learn; all of the modules had a hands-on and face-to-face component. It fostered students’ interpersonal skills as they interacted in new ways with new people on new topics; to understand one another the seniors and youngsters had to talk to one another and then talk more. The inevitable awkwardness of new relationships and the struggling through to make their ideas understood was great both for (the students’) social and academic skills. They had to produce high-quality work in a new environment.

The project proved to the students that in life the learning process never ends and that all ages can anticipate trying new things and absorbing new knowledge. Leitner describes the atmosphere during the collaboration as “joyful and optimistic ... the sky is the limit.” Toronto Heschel and Baycrest are pursuing a second Intergenerational Learning Project this year.

Lisa Richler, M.A., earned a Master of Arts in Humanities at the University of Chicago and worked as a writer and teacher before having kids. She now volunteers in various roles at The Toronto Heschel School and The Lola Stein Institute.



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