

# **Teachable Moments in Jewish Education: An Informal Approach in a Reform Summer Camp**

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## **Abstract:**

Utilizing 'teachable moments' within daily situations to impart knowledge and transmit values is a type of informal education. In a structured camp environment, such teachable moments may be integrated into the educational curriculum. 'Jewish teachable moments' may be used to address Judaism and Jewish Peoplehood holistically, as the educators and counselors guide the campers through the Jewish summer camp environment. This article examines the Jewish Teachable Moments method through a case study conducted at a Reform movement affiliated camp in Texas. Theoretical and pedagogical implications of the Jewish Teachable Moments method are discussed.

## **INTRODUCTION**

### ***Organized Camping and the Jewish Summer Camp movement***

Every summer, millions of children and young adolescents attend sleep-away summer camps. The camps offer participants opportunities for discovery and growth in many areas. Although primarily recreational, many summer camps are affiliated with religious or other ideological movements and have explicit goals related to value transmission (Zola 2006). Teaching traditional, spiritual and group-oriented values is seen as an anecdote to trends of excessive individualism, materialism, secularization, and social isolation in contemporary American society (see Howe and Strauss 2000; Putnam 2000; Smith 2001). Organized camping fits well within a growing trend towards structured, supervised extra-curricular activities (Howe and Strauss 2000). Research in the United States has shown that campers and their parents find the camp experience positively impacts the campers' personal growth, social skills, independence and sense of achievement (Henderson et al. 2005, 2007a, 2007b; Marsh 1999; Powell 2003).

### ***Jewish Summer Camps***

The Jewish summer camp movement in the Diaspora has the added mission of socializing young Jews into "Jewish Peoplehood" (Sales and Saxe 2004). This applies primarily to participants, but also to counselors and even senior staff. Immersion in an all-Jewish environment is one of the most important aspects of the Jewish camp experience (Karesh and Hurvitz 2006). This total immersion creates a temporary 'total institution', in which all daily activities are coordinated, have an explicit goal, and take place with the group (Goffman 1961). Although many summer camp participants also attend Jewish day schools, a significant percentage, particularly at non-Orthodox camps do not. For such participants, the weeks at summer camp may be the only time of year when they are in a predominantly Jewish environment. For youth who live outside the major Jewish population centers, camp may be virtually the only opportunity to meet Jewish peers and be in a Jewish milieu.

Jewish summer camps have repeatedly been found to help enhance Jewish identity at a critical time of personal and social development (Aron, Zeldin and Lee 2005; Cohen and Kotler-Berkowitz 2004; Keysar and Kosmin 2004; Kosmin and Keysar

2000; Lorge and Zola 2006; Sales and Saxe 2004), largely by creating "memories of a Jewishly positive adolescence" (Cohen, S. 1998, 28). In fact, the success of the Jewish summer camp movement has been recognized by a number of non-Jewish populations as a model to be emulated (Goldman 1992; Charry and Charry 1999; Goodstein 1998).

The impact of the camp experience is enhanced by the yearly return of many participants. Specific camps combine their own camp traditions and rituals (such as camp songs) with Jewish tradition and ritual (Sales and Saxe 2004; Zeldin 2006). Camp alumni may become counselors at their own or another camp, assume leadership positions in Jewish campus or community organizations, and eventually may go on to become lay and professional leaders in the Jewish community at large (Arian 2003; Keysar and Kosmin, 2004; Cohen, B. 2005). The emerging phenomenon of camp alumni sending their children to a Jewish summer camp further reinforces and expands the longitudinal impact of Jewish camping (Cohen, S. 1998).

The broad mission of socialization into Jewish Peoplehood encompasses a number of widely shared goals, including: instilling a sense of identification with and pride in being part of the Jewish people; encouraging familiarity with and/or practice of Jewish traditions and holidays; fostering attachment to Israel; creating Jewish leaders (here the counselors become a primary target population) and development of friendships with other Jews, which is hoped to encourage subsequent endogamous dating and marriage (Keysar and Kosmin 2004). Depending on their ideological basis, various camps emphasize these goals to differing degrees.

Although formal learning is incorporated into some camp programs, Jewish education at camp is primarily informal (Bar-Shalom 1997; Karesh and Hurvitz 2006). Recently, a number of Jewish summer camps have adopted an innovative informal educational approach in which the senior staff and counselors are trained to recognize and utilize "Jewish Teachable Moments",<sup>1</sup> daily events that may be used to illustrate Jewish ideas or call into play Jewish values (on 'teachable moments' in general educational theory see for example Alexander, Anderson and Gallegos, 2005; Collins and O'Brien 2003; Rossman and Schlatter 2000). Virtually every moment at camp can be an educational opportunity (Chazan 2002).

### **The case study: The Greene Family Camp in Texas<sup>2</sup>**

In order to explore the impact of this approach, we look at the case of the Greene Family Camp for Living Judaism, located in Bruceville, Texas. The Greene Family Camp is one of approximately 120 non-profit Jewish overnight camps in North America. Each summer over 60,000 children between the ages of 8-16 attend Jewish summer camps in North America (Cohen, S, 2006).<sup>3</sup>

There are camps affiliated with every branch of contemporary Jewish life: Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, various Zionist movements and non-denominational camps. This diversity in the Jewish summer camp movement stands in stark contrast to

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<sup>1</sup> Foundation for Jewish Camping, "Jewish Teachable Moments", [http://www.jewishcamps.org/fjc/grants/jewish\\_teachable\\_moments.asp](http://www.jewishcamps.org/fjc/grants/jewish_teachable_moments.asp) (accessed March 30, 2008).

<sup>2</sup> Official permission was granted by the organizational leadership of the Greene Family Camp to use for publication the findings of the study conducted at the camp and the names of the staff members quoted.

<sup>3</sup> Estimates for the percentage of camp-aged Jewish children in North America who attend a Jewish summer camp each summer range between 7% (Arian 2002) and 13% (Kotler-Berkowitz 2005). An estimated 30% of North American Jewish young adults attended a Jewish summer camp sometime during their life (Cohen, S. 2004).

the Jewish day school system in the USA, which is overwhelmingly Orthodox (Schick 2004). The Greene Family Camp is associated with the Union of Reform Judaism.

In the summer session of 2006, the camp's formal educational component known as the *Shiur* (Hebrew for 'lesson') program was discontinued. The *Shiur* program had consisted of hour-long lectures and classes on topics related to religion, philosophy, history and Israel. Beginning in summer 2006, the camp instituted a program in which the learning sessions were incorporated into different camp activities using an integrated Jewish Teachable Moments approach. Short periods of time (usually between 10-20 minutes) during other planned activities were taken to discuss relevant issues of Jewish content and values.

This method had previously been adopted at a number of other Reform summer camps and was being advocated by the Foundation for Jewish Camping, which offers a training program for counselors and staff. The training program is called *Aseh Lecha Rav*, a phrase from the classic Hebrew text *Ethics of the Fathers*, translatable as "make for yourself a teacher". The pilot two-day workshop, in 2002, included 60 counselors (FJC 2002). The degree to which formal educational units continue to be included in the curricula of camps using the Teachable Moments method varies from camp to camp.

The replacement of the formal *Shiur* program with the integrated Jewish Teachable Moments approach represents a systemic change in the camp curriculum and the design of the educational program at the Greene Family Camp and other camps adopting this approach. As of 2004, the Jewish Teachable Moments method was being used in six Jewish summer camps. It should be stressed that this is not a particular curriculum or program, but an approach to informal Jewish education which is being implemented—and in fact developed in the field—at a number of Jewish summer camps in the USA, particularly those associated with the Reform movement.

This article presents some examples of Jewish Teachable Moments, the impressions of a variety of involved staff members and organizers regarding this approach, an evaluation of the approach, and an assessment of its possible implications for the Greene Family Camp, other Jewish summer camps, and for informal Jewish education in general. Since the approach could be adapted to non-Jewish summer camps and informal educational settings, broader implications of the approach are considered.

## METHOD

The data presented here, qualitative in nature, was obtained through ethnographic observations during the last two weeks of the second session of Greene Family Camp (from the middle to the end of July 2006) and personal interviews conducted with senior staff and summer camp organizers. Although the focus of the article is on the case of the Greene Family Camp, the observations and analyses of the interviewees reflect wide knowledge of the field of contemporary Jewish education. In planning, implementing and revising the new camp program, they collected information about the Jewish Teachable Moments approach at other camps and during the early stages of implementation at the Greene Family Camp. The Teachable Moments method is presented during the Greene Family Camp's staff orientation, which includes role-playing and small group discussions. In weekly staff meetings and at staff meals, they analyze the successes and limitations of the new approach, in order to improve it in subsequent years. The theoretical conclusions are induced from the information obtained in the interviews with the educators at the camp in the context of previous research in the fields of Jewish and informal education.

## RESULTS

The first 'Jewish teachable moment' observed in the research at the Greene Family Camp occurred during a climbing activity on July 20, 2006. In the middle of the activity a senior staff member sat the participants in a circle and facilitated a discussion about how the climbing activity related to the 12<sup>th</sup> century Jewish philosopher Maimonides' concept of "sanctity of the body", a theme which was being stressed in the camp that summer. In his field journal, the researcher noted, "The kids seemed to be into it. It was the first time I saw a combined action/Jewish reflection activity done at camp so clearly since the Kibbutz-at-Camp years in the mid-90's."<sup>4</sup>

Through observations of activities utilizing this approach and interviews with staff and organizers, a number of themes emerged which have bearing on the field of Jewish informal education, as well as the larger field of general informal education in organized camping programs. These are: a holistic approach to Jewish education; increased informality of the educational program; and the inter-related roles of the teachers (senior staff and counselors), the participants, the curriculum and the social context of the camp (reflecting Schwab's 1973 'four common places of education'). Within each of these thematic concepts the benefits of the approach, its limitations, its pedagogical implications and areas for improvement are considered.

### *Holistic Jewish Education*

Almost all of the interviewees mentioned the importance of the Jewish Teachable Moments approach in weaving Jewish content throughout the daily activities of the camp. Senior staff member Sharon Ross said "I think it's wonderful to have the kids say, 'Anything that I'm doing, it's a Jewish thing to be doing' ...and I think this is a great role model for the counselors. If there is a potential troubleshooting situation, then they can say,... How can we use our Judaism to solve this problem?' That's a great message to send to our [senior] staff as well."

Similarly, Matt Michaels, Senior Rabbi and faculty member at the Greene Family Camp, said the approach "... makes Judaism relevant, and that is what [the campers] are missing. Generally their lives and their Judaism are two separate entities." Educator Abby Zemel,<sup>5</sup> said, "I like the new approach because it integrates life at camp with Jewish themes--Jewish living every moment."

Through the holistic approach, one theme may be re-visited during multiple activities, and one activity may serve as a springboard for discussion of multiple topics. For example, as mentioned, in 2006 the Greene Family Camp program was emphasizing the theme of 'sanctity of the body' (*kdushat ha-guf* in Hebrew). In addition to the discussion during the climbing activity described above, this theme was explored during activities such a bike ride around the camp, brushing teeth, cleaning the cabins, meals, swimming lessons, and discussions with the older campers about choices regarding sexual relations. These lesson-discussions diverged into diverse related subjects such as the requirement in Jewish law that parents teach their children to swim,

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<sup>4</sup> The Kibbutz-at-camp was part of the Greene Family Camp itinerary in the early to mid-1990s. This program for 15 year olds was run on the model of an Israeli Kibbutz, with camper-run committees and meetings, providing campers with a significant level of autonomy and self- authority. The program represented a serious attempt to frame the entirety of communal life at camp along Jewish values.

<sup>5</sup> Abby Zemel, youth director of the Rodeph Shalom congregation in New York City, spent half a dozen summers at the Greene Family Camp as a camper and a counselor.

caring for the environment, how to set goals during a challenging physical activity, Maimonides' teachings on giving charity, and more.

Some worried that the mini-lessons sprinkled throughout the day would not have the same impact as the more in-depth hour-long classes, or that the campers would miss the import of the lesson presented in the context of another activity. "The program comes in what the kids are used to, and that is sound bites," said Rabbi Matt Michaels, who expressed concern that the short lessons may be "...all surface and nothing profound." This same idea was put forth by Ross, who said, "Since they are all very short snippets, the information delivered is quite limited." Additionally, a number of educators mentioned that certain subjects, such as history, theology and issues related to Israel were difficult to integrate into the daily life of the camp. "...not every Jewish subject can be connected to a camp activity," said Ross. "The Soviet and Ethiopian Jews will never be a topic related to camp *nikaion* (clean-up), as much as we are creative and can sometimes stretch things." Thus the 'holistic' nature of the approach may limit both the depth and the breadth of the educational component of the camp.

As a way to address these concerns, several of the interviewed staff and organizers suggested that a combination of methods be used to achieve the educational goals. "...It may be important to keep parts of the *Shiur*... The ten - fifteen minutes segments should be for reinforcing the substance rather than being the substance," said Michaels. In order to address some of the issues which are more effectively taught in formal lessons without resorting to a lecture session, the Greene Family Camp introduced some short and intimate faculty-led lessons taught in the bunk-houses, rather than in a large classroom.

### ***Increased Informality***

The cancellation of the formal *Shiur* program and the integration of the learning sessions into other activities further increased the already informal nature of education at the camp. This was widely noted as a positive shift, despite the concerns expressed regarding the ability of the new approach to fulfill all of the camp's educational goals. According to observations on the last day of camp, the participants themselves liked the change. One boy was overheard telling his mother, "Camp was **GREAT** this summer! We didn't have a *Shiur* program!"

According to David Berkman, Associate Director of Camping for the Reform Movement, "The retention level with the shorter periods is so much higher than in an hour-long *shiur*.... it keeps kids excited about it and you have a bigger chance of more kids wanting to know more." Lauren Luskey, unit educator for the groups of campers ages 7 through 10 said, "With the old program, when we had one hour set for *Shiur*, the kids would get really bored, especially the boys. ... With this new approach...the kids don't really realize that it is happening." Similarly, Ken Alpert, a visiting Senior Educator at the Greene Family Camp said "The kids learn more, but I'm not sure they understand that they are learning." Judi Ratner, Regional Director for Youth and Informal Education for the Union of Reform Judaism's Southwest Council said, "The kids don't feel that they are learning and that's good. If they feel that they are at school we are failing. All in all, this is camp."

### ***The Role of the Staff and Counselors***

In its first year of implementation at Greene Family Camp, the senior staff and visiting educators planned and initiated the Jewish Teachable Moments. The counselors were involved with guiding the activities and follow-up. The staff found that the informal and apparently spontaneous nature of the lessons-within-activities does not

reduce the work of preparing ahead of time. As Ratner said, "It requires much more work and purposeful planning and writing [than] writing a one-hour *shiur*." Luskey noted the staff must know how to work effectively with open-ended program write-ups comprised primarily of general topics, ideas and questions to be addressed. They must be able to direct the counselors in helping to lead and follow-up the Jewish Teachable Moments. Additionally, being able to effectively utilize a teachable moment depends upon adequate prior knowledge of the staff and the counselors. Senior staff members and visiting staff, were integrated into counselor-led activities such as sports and arts, allowing them to assist in applying the Teachable Moments method during these units.

The need to train counselors in the pedagogical skills and didactics necessary to transform a *teachable* moment into a moment in which something has been taught was stressed by Reimer (2007: 8), "Informal Jewish education is not what every counselor in a camp bunk or youth leader in a synagogue is doing. It is, rather, an educational approach that requires professional skill, imagination, and planning [necessitating] a more substantial investment in preparing professionals to learn how to become genuine informal Jewish educators."

The integrated lessons provide opportunities for the campers to discuss the topics raised with the staff, to ask questions and to offer their own ideas. "The kids get more one-on-one interaction with the faculty. It would not happen in a lesson with a huge group of people," said Luskey.

Given that "Questioning-asking has not only long been seen as a central component of Jewish educational practice but has also been thought to be part of a broader culture of Judaism," (Sigel, Kress and Elias, 2007: 51) this may be a particularly important aspect of the Teachable Moments, both for those asking and for those answering (especially in the case of the counselors).

The approach challenges the educators to find creative ways introduce Jewish content and themes without disrupting the flow of the activity. Ross cautioned that this approach had the danger of becoming "...very non-kinetic. You stop the activity and have a very frontal 15 minute session, ...and now some campers feel 'I just lost 15 minutes of my boating' .... When it was a one-hour *shiur*... the time frame was clearer."

In order to successfully bring out the underlying themes and concepts which tie the short lessons together, the staff and counselors must plan together and know what Teachable Moments and activities others have conducted. This is particularly challenging for new counselors and staff who may not be aware of the big picture of the camp. Encouraging retention of trained staff and counselors who may build upon their previous experience is one of the challenges facing Jewish education at large, as well as Jewish camping and the Jewish Teachable Moments method in particular (Arian 2003). Greene Family Camp recruits some new staff members from alumni of their counselor-in-training programs, thus hiring people already familiar with the camp philosophy and pedagogy, including the Teachable Moments approach. Continued training is offered to youth (including Israelis) who return to the camp for several years as counselors, as well as for first-year supervisors.

Overall, the staff members were satisfied with their role in the new approach. Senior Visiting Educator Steve Daum said, "It is much more exciting for me as an educator, rather than sitting for an hour, trying to maintain the focus of the children." Ross said one of the things she likes about the new approach is that "... it enhances the leadership of counselors and other staff members. My sense is that many of them feel a lot more included." She stressed that, "Keeping the faculty happy is more important

than most camp people want to think," because of their role in recruiting campers from their home communities during the school year.

There were repeated concerns expressed about a tendency at the camp in recent years to relegate the counselors to a supportive role, and hopes that the new approach may eventually help reverse this trend. Several of the interviewees advocated increasing the role of the counselor in the future. Since counselors are often viewed as 'advanced students' as well as staff-in-training (Wertheimer, 2005) they benefit from involvement in planning and carrying out the informal educational units. In this way they may simultaneously learn about Judaism and about informal Jewish education. The Foundation for Jewish Camping also stresses the involvement of the counselors. Debbie Massarano, the Greene Family Camp's educational director, suggested that counselors and senior staff who live in the same area could meet during the winter to plan the next summer's lessons.

## **DISCUSSION**

### ***Holistic Jewish Education as a Response to Fragmentation of Postmodern Identity***

In traditional Jewish communities, Jewish law and beliefs touch every aspect of a Jewish individual's life; not only prayer and study but eating, cooking, working, even sexual relations. In many places and times, non-religious Jewish individuals were also largely immersed in a Jewish environment, often because there was no choice. In contemporary Jewish-American society, Judaism has become compartmentalized and removed from many aspects of daily life. For a growing number of Jewish Americans, Judaism has been removed from *all* aspects of life (Dershowitz 1997). The informal education once provided in the home and neighborhood has been delegated to schools, synagogues, community centers and summer camps (Steinberg, 1984). Formal Jewish education has a tendency to reinforce this compartmentalization, particularly among young Jews whose families do not celebrate the holidays, practice the traditions or even share the beliefs learned about in religious school.

This situation may be seen as a manifestation of larger trends of alienation, fragmentation and the emergence of symbolic and optional ethno-religious identities in postmodern societies, in which homogenous ethnic communities and extended families have disintegrated and group identity has become a matter of individual choice rather than communal fate (Appadurai 1996; Berger 1979; Elazar 1999; Gans 1979).

MacCannell (1976, 1992) contends that the fragmentation of postmodern life impels individuals to search for holism through leisure travel. Sleep-away summer camps are a special case of youth leisure travel. At Jewish summer camps, the 'search for identity' MacCannell proposes as an implicit feature of tourism is made explicit. When Jewish content is integrated throughout daily activities, the camp can offer participants a more holistic Jewish experience.

### ***Jewish Teachable Moments in the Four 'Common Places' of Education***

All of the four 'common places' (Schwab 1973) in the field of education must be considered in evaluating and understanding the impact and implications of the Teachable Moments method: the teacher, the student, the curriculum and the societal context. Their roles are inter-related.

*The teacher.* As in other forms of informal education, the role of the camp counselors and staff is of primary importance (Sales and Saxe 2004; Henderson et al. 2007b). In addition to imparting information, informal educators serve as role models for participants. This is a key role of the counselors, who are often not much older than the campers (Kahane 1997; Cohen, Ifergan and Cohen 2002). An approach utilizing

Jewish Teachable Moments as an integrated part of the curriculum offers expanded opportunities for the counselors and senior staff members to function as role models.

As mentioned, summer camps are a specific type of youth tourism. Thus, the educators, and especially the counselors, may be likened to tour guides. They interpret the environment to participant-visitors, for instance by drawing attention to a certain situation and explaining its import. Like modern tour guides, the counselors act as mentors and animators, intimately concerned with the social aspects of the group they are leading (Cohen, E. 1985). At the Jewish summer camp, the staff and counselors guide the participants through the Jewish environment of the camp.

The Jewish Teachable Moments method requires skill and sensitivity on the part of the educators and counselors. The camp may need to offer training or to hire staff trained in this method. Staff and counselors need sufficient knowledge to be able to answer questions quickly and concisely yet not superficially. Ongoing in-service training for staff and counselors is beneficial in allowing them to evaluate Teachable Moments they led or attended, and to discuss ways in which to incorporate the method into upcoming activities. Further research could investigate what characteristics in terms of background and educational approach enable staff and counselors to most successfully impart knowledge via this method.

*The student.* The campers will not be given specific training in the Jewish Teachable Moments methods, but they may receive 'structural preparation' through their previous Jewish educational experiences (Cohen, E.H. 1999). The success of the short, integrated lessons depends in part on an assumption that at least some of the basic concepts addressed had previously been learned in Hebrew or Sunday school. As Ratner commented, "The idea is to bring the religious school knowledge to camp, after they have learnt it." While most of the campers do have some Jewish educational background, a minority does not, and may miss key aspects of the discussions during activities. Camp educators should be aware of the previous background of their participants and gauge to what extent concepts referred to but not taught in depth during the Teachable Moments will be familiar to and understood by campers. Camps affiliated with the Reform, Conservative and Orthodox streams of Judaism and non-denominational camps must assume different structural preparation of campers in terms of previous education and home environment.

Counselors at summer camps are simultaneously students as well as teachers. The impact of being a counselor on Jewish identity has been recognized as an additional and important way camps affect the Jewish community as a whole. The counselors' training in this method and their role in implementing the Jewish Teachable Moments may enhance their experience as 'advanced students' in the camp's educational environment. Ongoing in-service training sessions with the senior staff may enhance counselors' understanding of the method and their ability to utilize it effectively.

Additionally, many Jewish summer camps in the US hire Israeli counselors. Under a philosophy of "New Zionism", the Israeli counselors are not only representatives and teachers, but integrated partners whose identity may also be enhanced through interaction with Diaspora Jews (Bekerman, 1986; Ezrachi, 1994; Kopelowitz 2003; Wolf and Kopelowitz 2003). Since the Israeli counselors are outside of their own familiar daily routines, their role in leading the Teachable Moments is likely to differ from that of the American counselors, and they may be in a special position to learn about how Judaism is differentially integrated into daily life in the USA as opposed to in Israel.

*The curriculum.* Even if the content to be taught is the same, the curricular framework of the Jewish Teachable Moments has different parameters than the



traditional *Shiur* lectures. Although each short lesson contains essentially the same elements of any teaching session, the knowledge to be imparted to campers must be delivered in small portions and be connected to situations within the daily life of camp. This raises questions regarding how this reorganization influences the knowledge itself, such as whether concepts are being treated in sufficient depth and the extent to which they are understood by the campers in the situational context. Additionally, they must fit naturally into the daily activities, even if they are consciously designed. Counselors and staff must be prepared to take advantage of spontaneously arising teachable moments as well as anticipated ones, and they must be flexible enough to allow for campers' interaction and participation. As the program is developed and implemented over the next years, these issues may be tracked.

*The social context.* The environment of the sleep-away Jewish summer camp shapes the program, offering and creating the daily events which will serve as the springboard for the Jewish Teachable Moments. General characteristics of a Jewish summer camp, such as the temporary immersion in an all-Jewish environment, separation from family and community, and the close relationship within the group provide the framework within which the daily events forming the raw material for the method arise. Specific characteristics of a given camp such as location, facilities, camp affiliation, camp rituals, programs, use of Hebrew, and level of observance of Jewish tradition also affect the daily routine and the events from which the Teachable Moments will arise. These conditions reflect conscious decisions of the camp organizers, and therefore must be considered in planning the program.

The Teachable Moments method may be used in other Jewish informal educational settings such as day camps, youth group activities or group tours to Israel. Even if the other factors are the same, that is, the same population of students/participants and teachers/counselors dealing with the same curricular subject, the setting itself will impact the situations which arise.

### ***Increased Informality***

This method emphasizes a classic type of 'informal education'; learning in daily life (Coombs and Ahmed 1974), even if the daily routine is structured and planned, as in the camp environment. According to sociologist Reuven Kahane (1997) in his longitudinal study of informal education and youth movements, informal education is particularly important in equipping today's youth with the skills they will need to navigate in a rapidly changing world. Many of the 'components of informality' as defined by Kahane are expressed in the Jewish summer camp environment. The component modularity, "eclectic construction of activity sets according to changing interest and circumstances," (ibid, 26) seems particularly relevant to the current discussion. Kahane writes that this aspect of informal education helps participants and teachers develop their leadership skills, as they take advantage of situational opportunities and the shifting needs and interests of the group. The method may also be combined or interspersed with formal educational units, expanding the types of learning to which participants are exposed.

## **CONCLUSION**

Instilling a sense of group identification among Jews, as other ethnic and religious groups, is increasingly becoming the mandate of educational settings outside the home and neighborhood. The disintegration of ethnically homogenous neighborhoods, the demise of extended family networks, the break-up of many nuclear family units, exogamy and a decline of religious observance in the home all contribute to this

phenomenon. Establishing or strengthening the connection of individual Jews to the Jewish People has become a primary concern in the world of Jewish education, and part of the 'New Zionism' in which the Jewish People, rather than Israel, is the center (Kopelowitz 2003).

Jewish summer camps in the US are among the settings which the organizers and parents hope will be able to impart a sense of belonging to the Jewish People. Many Jewish educators are struggling with the question of how to effectively include the goal of instilling a sense of Jewish Peoplehood as part of a curriculum. The Jewish Teachable Moments method described here is one tactic being used to make Jewish education more holistic, relevant to daily life, flexible, and appealing to today's Jewish-American youth. The approach and its method are also pertinent to the counselors and staff.

Steve Cohen (2002) notes that challenges to the concepts of community and religion in contemporary American and American-Jewish society (increased individualism, secularism and permeable social boundaries), as well as changing attitudes towards Israel and towards the Jewish People (links to both becoming weaker among large segments of American Jewry) all have serious implications for Jewish education. It is within this context that the educators and counselors must identify and make meaningful Jewish Teachable Moments.

If the counselors are drawn from a pool of Jewish young adults who have little attachment to Israel or the Jewish People, little knowledge of Jewish texts and little involvement with Jewish religious practice, this will be reflected in their responses to situations and to campers' questions. The counselors must also be familiar enough with the campers' background to make their responses relevant. The same type of Teachable Moment (i.e. a lesson on health during a bike ride) may be couched in different terms in an Orthodox camp than in a Reform one.

Regardless of the campers' backgrounds in Judaism, they are all young adolescents away from home and therefore in a somewhat unfamiliar environment, through which they must be guided. Although repeated returns to the same camp diminishes this unfamiliarity, the camp presents the participants with scenarios in which they may experience disequilibrium (Piaget 1972) a disquieting but educationally useful psycho-social phenomenon which may open opportunities for consideration of new concepts or different ways of thinking. The informal environment of the camp permits and encourages adolescents to experiment with new ideas and behaviors (Sales and Saxe 2002); 'moratorium' in the terminology of Kahane's (1997) code of informality. Such moments of disequilibrium may become 'teachable moments' (Hansen 1998), but only if the teacher/counselor has the ability to deal with them sensitively (FJC 2002) and the relationship between the teacher and learner is warm and developed enough to allow for guidance through difficult situations (Zachary 2000).

Although most of the educators interviewed had generally positive reactions to this method, concerns were raised regarding the ability of the short lessons sprinkled throughout the day to convey complex concepts or a deep understanding of the issues touched upon. It may be said that each Jewish Teachable Moment is a microcosm of Jewish education, with all its challenges. The task of effectively conveying a lesson in such a short time may be even more complex than preparing a lengthy lecture.

The term 'teachable moments' is something of a buzzword in contemporary education, but the concept has been understood in Jewish tradition since ancient times. The Torah instructs one to teach their children 'while you sit in the home, while you walk on the way, when you retire and when you arise'—in other words, at all

times and in all places.<sup>6</sup> The Hagaddah read during the Passover *seder* (ritual meal) includes a section regarding how to teach four different archetypes of children: the 'wise', the 'wicked', the 'simple' and the 'one who doesn't know to ask'. A one-sentence response is offered for each type of child. These classic Teachable Moments have inspired generations of rich commentary, both written and spontaneously discussed during the *seder*. Similarly, when the first-century BCE Rabbi Hillel was requested to teach the Torah 'while standing on one foot' he was presented with a Jewish Teachable Moment. His famous response ("What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbor") was short, yet profound enough to speak to people centuries later. Hillel's ability to give such an answer was possible because of the depth and breadth of his knowledge. Offering training in the Jewish Teachable Moments pedagogy is only one aspect of the preparation necessary to effectively use the method in the field. In addition, the Jewish Teachable Moments are intended to inspire students as well as the counselors and the staff to continue to their Jewish education. Rabbi Hillel was also aware that his short answer was not sufficient, and ended his answer by admonishing the one who requested such a brief synopsis of the Torah, "Now, go and learn!" In the same spirit, it is hoped that this article provides a first contribution to the study of this emerging trend in Jewish education and that it will provide inspiration and direction for future studies of this important aspect of informal Jewish education.

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<sup>6</sup> These words are included in the *Shema* prayer, recited daily by observant Jews.

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