


- 2) **Strong Leadership:** Critical to our success are the lay and professional leaders who are fully committed to achieving this vision and working toward it — with their heads, hands, hearts, and pocketbooks.
- 3) **Professional Development:** Similar to private, independent schools, Jewish day schools must have high quality development professionals, database systems, ongoing database management, alumni relations, marketing, and more — all geared to building sustainable support for the institution.
- 4) **A Culture of Generosity:** Private, independent schools have nurtured a culture in which many of those who are touched by the institution feel privileged to give back, and that support is carefully nurtured over generations within families and among individuals.

It is ironic that while Jewish schools teach *tzedekah*, most have not developed an institutional culture of giving in which families associated with the school appreciate the value of giving back to the very institution that transformed the family. In our community, the day schools — with federation support as well as a critical grant from

- the AVI CHAI Foundation — are building an essential alumni relations infrastructure that will help to transform the culture of the school communities today and for generations to come.
- 5) **Collaboration, but with an Individual Day School Focus:** In building a community-wide campaign, we have found that working through a central partner — the federation — is helpful. The three schools collaborate while still capitalizing on the strengths that exist within each unique day school community. Thus, we have established four sets of funds — one for each school and one “community day school fund” for all schools — and we continue to progress on all fronts.

We can achieve broadly affordable, high-quality, financially sustainable Jewish day school education. But communities must be committed to hard work and a long haul. Through a combination of vision, leadership, investment in professional development, and a changing culture — as well as a big dose of patience, persistence, and passion — it can be done. 

Educating ‘Prophets’

CHARLIE SCHWARTZ & RUSSEL NEISS

Wandering through the desert, the Israelites were tasked with building a mobile house of worship, a *mishkan*, in which God’s presence would dwell. In an intriguing narrative twist, it was not Moses, Aaron, or Miriam who were given the responsibility of crafting this proto-temple; rather, it was the artisan Betzalel. A previously unknown character, Betzalel the artist, a creator of material culture, was “filled with the Spirit of God,” which enabled him to envision and construct this holy work.

It is this model of prophecy, the prophecy that comes through cultural production, the prophecy of Betzalel, that provides an insightful metaphor for today’s Jewish educators. As we make our way through the 21st century, the way art, culture, and even ideas are produced and distributed has been radically changed. No longer is the ability to create and distribute cultural content limited to the elite, to figures like Moses, Aaron, or Miriam. It is now in the hands of anyone with a vision and a laptop. The role of the Jewish educator, then, must be to harness

the possibility of this revolution by helping Jews realize their potential to become the “Betzalels” of the digital age.

Oftentimes, the technological advances of this era are praised for how they have helped to democratize knowledge. But equally important has been the democratization of technology. Relatively inexpensive and free programs like iMovie, Audacity, and Garage Band allow their users to produce high quality music, video, podcasts, and more. Whereas ten years ago high school bands (ours included) were struggling to record demos with four track recorders to cassette tapes, today, with not much more than a MacBook, high school students can record near studio-quality tracks, remix them, and release them with ease.

Our students are already taking part in these forms of creative expressions unique to the 21st century. Many are shooting videos on flip video cameras and other high quality, inexpensive digital video cameras. Others are dabbling in blogging, photo sharing, and other innovative endeavors. Yet our students rarely


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utilize these means to integrate Judaism into the other diverse aspects of their identity. We need to help our students prepare to work, live, and contribute to the social and civic fabric of their communities, to teach them how to be Jewish in the modern world. We must inspire them to express themselves Jewishly through the multi-media of the information age.

So what might it look like to unlock this prophetic potential within our students? Jewish education that meets the needs of 21st-century learners will be defined by collaborative, problem-based learning that integrates the meaning, depth, and multivocal nuance of our tradition with the powerful digital tools of our age. In schools and educational institutions that embrace this vision, students might be asked to create and curate an online photo exhibit that

serves as commentary and midrash on a biblical narrative. Teams of students would create media-rich presentations for their classmates that explain key Jewish concepts, figures, or events. A class studying Hebrew could be tasked with working on the artistry of translation by adding talmudic, mishnaic, and biblical passages to the ever expanding offerings of wikitexts.

The Gemara says that Betzalel was only thirteen years old when he completed the building of the *mishkan* and its various accouterments. (Sanhedrin 69b) By facilitating and inspiring student learning and creativity through the design and development of digital-age learning experiences, we, too, can help our students actualize their gifts like Betzalel, not just for their own benefit, but for the entire community as well. 

Remixing Jewish Moral Education

JUDD KRUGER LEVINGSTON

Having served as a Jewish educator in an array of schools and settings, I am inspired by a new, four-pronged educational mission articulated by Russel Neiss and Charlie Schwartz. Their call to make learning meaningful, open, and focused on community building probably resonates already with progressive educators. Their call to “remix” our tradition could lead to significant changes that may unfold in the next few years. Some of these changes may feel threatening to teachers.

As a middle school and high school teacher, I work with adolescents in two realms: in the academic study of Jewish philosophy and Bible, and in the affective realm of moral education. Today, as we become aware of the dangers of information overload, the distraction of technological gadgets, the growth and terror of cyber-bullying, and the abundance of inappropriate material on the Internet, all of us who work with young people can play an important role in nurturing moral growth and character development by remixing ancient texts and practices with contemporary life.

Technology can be an important ally in this effort. Students with computers, phones, laptops, cameras, and other devices can (and already do!) remix the material they study in schools with photographs, songs, and conversations from outside of school. The formats and software may be new, but the practice isn't: The Talmud itself is filled with moments of remixing, as

when one generation of sages speaks to another or when an anecdote of some sort gets repurposed to serve a new argument or conclusion.

Teachers should aim to unleash the creative, moral spirit of their students, giving them the vocabulary of our tradition while encouraging them to find their own voices. Here are examples of projects that allow students to remix our texts, traditions, and moral values:

- Create a Facebook-like page for a rabbi of ancient times, identifying his rabbinic “friends,” favorite quotes, character traits, and interests. Use the *Encyclopedia Judaica* and one other source in your research. In your “status” (Facebook language for a combination of mood and school or job news), describe a moral issue the rabbi faces and the rabbi’s response.
- Create a skit based on this week’s biblical reading, using a laptop or camera to record the skit. Be sure to bring to life the narrative drama, the main character’s dilemma, one classical commentary, and a new interpretation of your own.
- Think of one behavior you would like to see change in your community; develop an advertising campaign and design and print a bumper sticker to promote your campaign based on an ethical saying of your choice from Chapters 1 or 2 of *Pirke Avot*, “The Sayings of the Rabbis.”

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