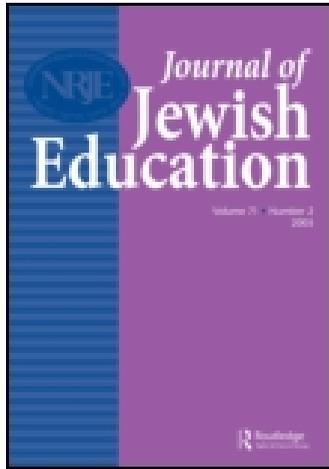


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### Reinventing Jewish Education for the 21st Century

Jonathan Woocher

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## *Starting a Journal conversation . . .*

# **Reinventing Jewish Education for the 21st Century**

JONATHAN WOOCHEER

*A century ago a group of educators led an effort to transform American Jewish education to enable it to operate successfully in the 20th century. Today, with American Jews living under very different conditions, a similar effort is needed to reinvent Jewish education for the 21st century. Changes and new initiatives already taking place on the educational landscape point the way toward a set of paradigm shifts that will make Jewish education more learner-centered, relationship-infused, and life-relevant. These changes at the level of educational practice need to be accompanied by a redesign of the educational system itself to make it better able to accommodate learners as “prosumers,” helping to create their own educational experiences, and to guide them on lifelong learning journeys. By maximizing the impact of ongoing innovations, by employing “design thinking,” and by forging stronger networks and collective impact initiatives across domains and settings, the Jewish educational system can be reinvented to meet the needs and aspirations of 21st century Jewish learners.*

Almost exactly a century ago, a small group of Jewish educators, rabbis, and lay leaders launched an effort to transform Jewish education. This endeavor, extending over several decades and involving several generations of change-makers, largely set the course for American Jewish education in the 20th

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Dr. Jonathan Woocher is Chief Ideas Officer at JESNA and directs its Lippman Kanfer Institute, an action-oriented think tank for innovation in Jewish learning and engagement. E-mail: [jwoocher@jesna.org](mailto:jwoocher@jesna.org)

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century. Its twists and turns, triumphs and failures, have now been masterfully chronicled in Jonathan Krasner's recent book, *The Benderly Boys and American Jewish Education* (2011). The impact of the ideas that animated (and sometimes divided) this group of men and women is still evident in the Jewish educational system that we see today. The ensemble of schools (supplementary and day), camps, informal programs, and support agencies that form the backbone of American Jewish education as we know it were, if not always their direct creation, products of their vision of a Jewish educational system that would be modern, professional, widely accessible, and effective in inculcating a strong dual identity of Jewishness and Americanness.

In language they might not have used, the "Benderly boys" created a paradigm for Jewish education—a philosophical and theoretical framework and "mental model" defining what "Jewish education" should and could be, how it should be organized, and what its central contents and methods should consist of. Central to that paradigm were a number of key assumptions and assertions:

- that it is possible and desirable for Jews to affirm a dual identity as both Jews and Americans;
- that the primary goal of Jewish education is to ensure Jewish cultural survival;
- that communal solidarity (*clal yisrael*) and an emerging national culture, rather than denominational ideologies and religiosity, should serve as the basis for a broadly-shared Jewish curriculum;
- that American public schooling and progressive educational ideas provided the best model for organizing Jewish education;
- that Jewish education should be a communal responsibility;
- that formal schooling should be supplemented by educational and cultural programming and physical activity in informal settings like camps and centers.

Over time, it became clear that some elements of their paradigm needed to be modified, but many others persisted, and when Benderly's disciples left the stage of Jewish education in the decades following World War II, they left behind not just a set of institutions, but a way of understanding and doing Jewish education that has lasted into the 21st century (Krasner, 2011).

## A CHANGING WORLD

Now, however, a century later, significant "cracks" have developed in the system that Benderly and the educators who came after him (whether disciples or not) created. Jewish education is being challenged today by new

demographic, social, cultural, geopolitical, economic, and technological realities. The scope and pace of these changes rivals and perhaps exceeds those at the beginning of the 20th century. It is not surprising, therefore, that Jewish education should find itself scrambling to keep up.

American Jewry in 2012 is living in dramatically different conditions than it did just three decades ago. The changes are a compound of developments internal to Jewish life and ones taking place in the wider society and world in which American Jews are by and large fully embedded. Indeed, this thoroughgoing “embeddedness”—full assimilation into American life *without the concomitant disappearance of Jewishness*—is itself one of the major developments over this time span. American Jews are by and large full and happy participants in American society and culture, helped no doubt by the fact that this may be the most philo-semitic society in which Jews have ever resided. Even those Jews who choose to live apart from the American mainstream take advantage of the very tolerance and plethora of options for lifestyle choices that the American polity is pledged to provide.

This degree of assimilation alarms some, especially those who see the high (but now apparently stabilized) rate of intermarriage as posing a demographic and cultural threat. Yet, Jewish life in America continues with apparently unabated vigor, albeit in different modes than in the past. At a minimum, theorists of “straight line assimilation” (Gordon, 1964), some of whom predicted the rapid demise of American Jewry five decades ago (viz. the now famous *Look Magazine* cover story in May 1964; Morgan, 1964) have yet to see their predictions fulfilled. And optimists, who should never be unduly self-confident, nonetheless have reasons to believe that the wager their forbears made a century ago that assimilation without disappearance was possible has paid off.

Benderly and his successors sought to design Jewish education that would facilitate the process of assimilation without the loss of Jewish identity. They succeeded—but what this means is that this is no longer the challenge facing Jewish education today. The key question for 20th century Jewish education was: *How can we keep Jews Jewish as they go through the process of embracing American life?* But, the conditions that prevailed during the decades when Jewish education was struggling with this question are no longer the conditions under which American Jews live today. Instead, Jewish education faces a new set of realities that poses new questions. Consider these trends and developments that have come to the fore over the past two decades:

1. *Growing diversity and awareness of diversity in the Jewish population.* America as a whole has grown far more diverse and more aware of our diversity over the past several decades, and so too has the Jewish population that lives in it. The neat image of a Jewish population made up

overwhelmingly of white, middle-class descendants of Yiddish-speaking Eastern European Jewish immigrants from the turn of the 20th century, with a few strands of German or Sephardic Jewry mixed in, and divided into a few main denominational groupings, has been shattered. We know now that “American Jewry” includes Jews of color; descendants of Holocaust survivors; immigrants and their children from the former Soviet Union, Israel, and other parts of the world; numerous individuals neither born nor raised Jewish (whether formally converted or not); Jews of various sexual identities; and an astonishingly broad spectrum of beliefs and practices.

2. *The rise of the “sovereign self.”* In their widely read book, *The Jew Within* (2000), Steven M. Cohen and Arnold Eisen described the extent to which American Jews joined their non-Jewish fellow Americans in adopting a highly personalized approach to religion emphasizing the primacy of individual choice and the decline of traditional religious and communal authority. The implications of this movement have been debated, but its reality and influence are uncontested. Whether or not it is true that, as the popular saying goes, “all Jews today are Jews by choice,” it is undoubtedly true that the vast majority of American Jews choose how to be Jewish—what their Jewishness means to them and how (if it all) it will be expressed in their lives—and resist efforts from without to prescribe what kind of Jew they should be.
3. *Hybrid identities and multiple communities.* Jewishness has not disappeared from the self-consciousness and self-definition of most American Jews. But, it exists as one identity strand among many, woven together with others in complex fabrics in which the colors of the diverse strands occasionally stand out, but often blend together to form new hues. Sylvia Barack Fishman (2000) has written about the “coalescence” of Jewish and American identities and values, the disappearance of the “hyphen” that once separated Jewishness and Americanness into distinct spheres. Today, it is not just two identities that co-mingle, but many—identities that reflect gender, lifestage, political and cultural preferences, professional and familial roles, and spiritual sensibilities. The result is that Jewishness itself takes on multiple colorations within these hybrids, its meaning in individual lives inextricably bound up with other strands of identity. Hybrid identities also mean that we live in and move among multiple communities. We can feel connected to different groups for different purposes at different times. These connections may be powerful in and for the moment (e.g., the connection a Birthright Israel participant feels to the Jewish people), but they do not exclude feeling connected to other communities as well. For many, the ability to identify with and move comfortably among different communities is itself a defining feature of their identity.

4. *Patch dynamics.* One result of these developments—growing diversity, the rise of the sovereign self, and hybrid identities—is what systems theorists call “patch dynamics” (Pickett & White, 1985). One of the characteristics of complex systems is that, exposed to the same forces, different agents in the system will respond differently (theorists would likely suggest that this is because of sensitive dependence on initial conditions—the famous “butterfly effect”—that makes systems behave unpredictably). In simpler language, this means that it is not only possible, but likely that different and even contradictory things will be taking place simultaneously among different groups of individuals, i.e., in different regions (“patches”) of the system. Generalizations about the direction of American Jewish life (“Jews are growing more spiritual”; “Jews are growing more secular”; “young Jews are becoming alienated from Israel”; “young Jews are becoming more attached to Israel”; etc.) are almost invariably both true and false because they are pointing to dynamics taking place among different subsets of the overall population. Metaphors like “polarization” also capture only part of the truth. The reality is far more complex, especially since the patches are connected to and influence one another. Many things are going on at once today in American Jewish life, and statistically valid snapshots (which is what most studies give us), while useful, tend to obscure the dynamic reinforcing, countervailing, and balancing forces that are at work.
5. *Prosumerism.* Individuals today increasingly wish to exercise their right of choice by being active co-creators of the products they consume and the experiences they undertake. This phenomenon has come to be called “prosumerism.” Prosumers are simultaneously producers and consumers (hence the neologism).<sup>1</sup> In the commercial world, prosumerism has fed the phenomenon of “mass customization” (think Dell enabling us to select the features of the computers we purchase, or Apple giving us control over our own playlists). But, prosumerism is not limited to the commercial sphere. Rather, it has emerged as a fundamental attitude of individuals and groups toward the role they should play in designing their own experiences. In the religious and social sphere, prosumerists want to cocreate, not merely participate in, their own learning, worship, and activism, and they often want to join together with like-minded individuals to do so.
6. *The decline of institutions, and the rise of networks.* Unsurprisingly, traditional institutions have not fared well in the emerging world of diversity,

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<sup>1</sup>The term “prosumer” actually has taken on several different meanings since it was originally coined by Alvin Toffler (1980). Originally, it designated someone who had the characteristics of a “near professional” among otherwise “amateur” users of a particular product or service. It also has been used to describe unusually active consumers who are “early adopters,” advocates, or otherwise influence other consumers. However, the term is increasingly used as it is here to refer to individuals who are simultaneously producers and consumers of their own experiences.

choice, hybrid identities, and empowerment. Adding to his work in *Bowling Alone* (2000) on the general decline in organizational and civic participation, Robert Putnam, together with co-author David Campbell (2010), has more recently reported on how the practice of denominational “switching” has increased dramatically over the past several decades. Underlying both phenomena is a decrease in institutional loyalty. People are simply less likely to join or support organizations because that’s what’s always been done or out of a generalized sense of obligation to do so. Rather, individuals seek value from their affiliations and are prepared to seek out new ones when that value is not evident. In philanthropy, this has been coupled with a greater desire to “follow one’s money” and be able to see the direct impact of one’s financial support. This does not mean that individuals are inherently less social than in the past. Rather, it reflects both their readiness to be mobile in finding meaningful social connections and the emergence of new ways of connecting. Institutions are no longer as necessary as in the past to mediate either social relationships or activity (including learning). Networks and other forms of looser, informal, and often more temporary connection now fill many of the roles that institutions once did (Shirky, 2008; Scarce, n.d.).

7. *The increase in the volume of activity and the velocity of change.* For many people, life seems busier and faster paced than ever before. The sheer volume of stimuli in our environment; the number and diversity of experiences available to us; the demands for instant responses and multi-tasking; the high levels of expectation individuals face whether as students, parents, or workers; and the volatility of the world in which we live—all add up to a more pressured existence. Keeping up with the pace of living and of change (how soon will whatever you bought today be rendered obsolete or outdated by the next “new thing”?) is literally a full-time job, which makes opportunities to step back, slow down, reflect, and redirect more alluring, but also more challenging to embrace.
8. *Technology as disruptor and accelerant.* All of the changes above are taking place at the same time as a technological revolution. New communications technologies are not the cause of the societal and cultural changes we are experiencing, but are thoroughly intertwined with them, probably in ways we still do not fully understand. Everything we do today—how we work, how we play, how we communicate, how we travel, how we make friends (and find life partners), how we relax, and how we learn—has been dramatically transformed by digital technology. In Clayton Christensen’s (1997) terms, this is a “disruptive innovation,” likely to have effects as far-reaching as the invention of the printing press. Thirty years ago, only a handful of Americans had computers, cell phones, cable or satellite television, or even imagined the Internet. Today, we cannot imagine living without them and the dozens of life-altering products and processes they have spawned. If choice and empowerment are the

watchwords of today's culture, technology turns them from noble aspirations to taken-for-granted realities. Each of the changes cited above receives additional impetus and support from technology, and there is every prospect that this will continue in an ever-accelerating spiral of change as new needs and desires drive technological innovation, and technical innovation uncovers new possibilities for human endeavor.

Other societal and cultural changes are also helping to shape a more volatile environment for Jewish education today. The altered place of Israel on the world stage and in the collective consciousness of American Jews has removed what was once an unquestioned and uniformly positive unifying force in Jewish life and thrown many educators into confusion on how to incorporate Israel into Jewish education. A widening split in American religious life generally and Jewish life specifically between traditionalists and modernizers, a split accentuated by the fact that religious and political cleavages now align more closely than in the past (Putnam & Campbell, 2010), raises questions about the ability of Jewish education to continue to operate comfortably under the banner of "unity in diversity," as it has for most of the past century. And, perhaps most significant, the dramatically expanded role of women and the continuing efforts to erase the vestiges of gender discrimination, are redrawing the landscape of Jewish religious and communal life in all sectors in ways whose ultimate outcomes and implications for Jewish education are not yet fully visible.

### OLD QUESTS AND A RENEWED QUESTION

It is the combination of all of these developments that places the enterprise of Jewish education in a radically different situation than it was during the formative years of today's Jewish educational system. This does not mean, of course, that everything has changed, that there is no continuity between past, present, and future. One key area where we can be reasonably confident that there have *not* been dramatic changes is with respect to the fundamental motivating factors operating in most humans (Pink, 2009). In at least three important ways, human nature itself has not changed. First, humans want to be able to make sense of their lives. The constancy of man's search for meaning—to quote the title of a classic work by psychologist and Holocaust-survivor Viktor Frankl (2006)—is evidenced by millennia of myth-making and philosophizing. People look to a variety of sources to give their lives meaning and do so with greater or lesser self-awareness, but only a hardy few are prepared to conclude that life is senseless and purposeless. Not only do humans seek meaning in the abstract, they want their own lives to count for something. Most of us want to make a difference, have an

impact, leave the world better than we found it, whether in large ways or in small. Second, human beings seek connection and relationship with others. Again, with the exception of some rare individuals, most of us do not want to live our lives alone. It is natural to want not only intimate one-on-one relationships, but to be part of groups. Indeed, a powerful argument can be made that our connection with others precedes both chronologically and ontologically our own individuality. Meaning and connectedness often go together. One way to find meaning is to connect ourselves to something larger than ourselves, to a cause and to a community pledged to that cause. Third, humans seek a sense of efficacy, a sense that we are competent and able to accomplish the purposes that matter to us. We can tolerate failure, but the plethora of stories that position failure as merely a bump on the road to ultimate success remind us that a permanent state of inefficacy kills the spirit. Recent research by Carol Dweck (2006) and others on the importance of a “growth mindset” to achievement reinforces the idea that seeing ourselves as having the potential to succeed is critical to actual success (Sims, 2011). Achieving mastery in any area of life requires time and hard work. But the reward is great, not just in ego satisfaction, but in the sense that we are fully alive.

These fundamental human characteristics are as much a part of the backdrop for contemporary Jewish education as are the changes we noted above. Indeed, they are central to understanding what is being asked of Jewish education today. We can postulate that in the past, Jewish life played a significant role for most Jews in satisfying the desire for meaning, connection, and efficacy. With the onset of modernity, other sources for meeting these aspirations became available to many Jews. And, for American Jewry today, it is a real question as to whether Jewish life and learning are central to this process. For some, the answer is clearly yes. For many others, though, meaning, connections, and efficacy are found largely elsewhere, with Jewish life playing perhaps a delimited secondary role that comes to the forefront only in specific moments, usually connected to the lifecycle and the calendar of the year. These are hardly insignificant, but neither do they position Jewishness/Judaism as a consistent source of meaning, a focal point for relationships, or a powerful contributor to a sense of self-worth.

This sets the new challenge to Jewish education, the new question it must answer: *How can we help Jews find in their Jewishness resources that will help them live more meaningful, purposeful, and fulfilling human lives?* This is a subtly, but decisively, different question than the one that animated much of the effort that went into building the Jewish education system of the 20th century.<sup>2</sup> It asks not how to *stay* Jewish, but how to *be* Jewish,

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<sup>2</sup>One can rightfully argue that the issue of meaning has always been central to Jewish education. However, what makes the urgency of this question for American Jewish education different today than in the recent past is the context in which it is being asked. For most of the second half of the 20th century,

how to make our Jewishness something of value, something that Jews will not only acknowledge (which the vast majority do), but actively embrace as one among their many salient identities, perhaps even as the core “operating system” for their lives as they proceed to open the multiple “windows” that fill the screen of their daily living.

This is a formidable challenge under the conditions of contemporary life. My thesis is simple and straightforward: If Jewish education is indeed to provide persuasive answers to this question for 21st century Jews, it will have to operate differently than 20th century Jewish education did. To paraphrase business consultant Marshall Goldsmith (2007), what got us here, won’t get us there. We need to reinvent Jewish education for the 21st century.

### A SCORECARD ON JEWISH EDUCATION TODAY

In talking about reinventing Jewish education, we do not mean that nothing of the past will remain. Indeed, the core processes of what we think of as “education” have not only changed little in a century—they have changed little in several millennia! According to *midrash*, Moses may have felt lost in Akiva’s classroom, but the odds are that we would not. Fundamental categories like “teacher,” “student,” “text,” “question and answer,” “debate and discussion,” “problem solving,” “argument,” “investigation,” and “conclusion” have been part of learning (whether Judaic or Greek) for centuries. The concept of education has basic structures attached to it. Many of these will endure, and some should.

But, not all. What has been called the “grammar of schooling” (Tyack & Cuban, 1995) as we came to understand it in the 20th century, a “grammar” that has been predominant is Jewish education as well, is not and should not be immutable. Many details of how we do education, including Jewish education, are assailable and under assault today, even as ideas from earlier eras are rediscovered and recast to be part of emerging approaches. Some of those doing and writing about education today argue that the technological and cultural transformations taking place both demand and offer radical alternatives to education as we have known it. They contend that the transition to a digital age and all that goes with it will and must transform education in the same far-reaching ways that the transition from oral tradition to written text, and then from written to printed text once did (Christensen,

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large numbers of American Jews found almost self-evident meaning in a story of “sacred survival” that was playing out dramatically on the stage of history (Woocher, 1986). Jewish education readily embraced this story, which supported its survivalist mission. However, this story has been losing much of its power as a source of meaning over the past two decades, and as the search for Jewish meaning has turned increasingly from the collective-tribal to the personal-universal realm, Jewish education is being asked to provide a new set of answers to what is admittedly an old question.

Horn, & Johnson, 2008; Chen, 2010; Davidson, 2011). Others believe that evolution, not revolution, is appropriate, that we can adapt to changing times without tearing down existing structures. This debate is being played out in the general world of education, and it is beginning to find echoes in Jewish education as well.

To resolve this debate (if it is indeed resolvable—values, not just “facts” are at play here), it would be helpful to assess the state of Jewish education itself. How well is Jewish education performing today? Undertaking this assessment is made more difficult by the lack of any agreed set of goals or measures for what constitutes “success” for Jewish education and a paucity of empirical research on the outputs and outcomes of Jewish education. At best, we can compile an album of snapshots, some admittedly based only on anecdotal or impressionistic evidence, to get a sense of how Jewish education is faring today.

First and perhaps foremost, American Jewish education is certainly not a failure. In large measure, 20th century Jewish education achieved what it set out to do: preserve Jewish community and culture in an era of rapid assimilation. When we remember that Jewish education is an entirely voluntary endeavor, its current achievements in terms of the number of participants engaged, the institutional infrastructure that has been created and maintained, the diversity of learning settings that exist, the sophistication of content and curricula that are available, the resources being expended, and the longevity of the enterprise itself are quite remarkable. Where it counts most, in affecting how people live their lives, there is ample evidence that Jewish education does have an impact, and the more one has of it, the more impact there is (Cohen, 1995; Waxman, 2003; Cohen & Kotler-Berkowitz, 2004; Cohen, 2006). In fact, Jewish education works very well for a not insignificant portion of the Jewish population. They embrace it with enthusiasm, and it helps to shape their life course in substantial ways.

On the other hand, we know that for many Jews, Jewish education is not a particularly satisfying experience, much less a transformative force in their lives. Because longitudinal statistics are sparse and attitudinal surveys almost non-existent, it’s difficult to document and interpret trends in Jewish educational participation. However, anecdotal evidence suggests that enrollment in what has been the backbone of the American Jewish educational system, the supplementary school, is declining (cf., Wertheimer, 2008), and that enrollment among non-Orthodox students in day schools has peaked (Schick, 2005, 2009). Teens continue to drop out of Jewish education in large numbers in the years following Bar and Bat Mitzvah. And, there is evidence that a growing number of families, some, but not all, coming from the ranks of the intermarried, recent immigrants from the FSU, and Israelis, are not enrolling their children at all in mainstream Jewish educational institutions. Some of these families—and others, even among the most Jewishly committed—are seeking out or creating alternatives for themselves and their

children, but many remain outside the system altogether. We also have anecdotal evidence that some of those who continue to participate in mainstream settings do so without enthusiasm (because they perceive that they have no real alternatives) or a high estimation of the value of what they are receiving (hence the pressure for reduced hours). In a word, they are “settling.”

There are two questions of importance here: The first is whether the gap that seems to exist between what is being offered in Jewish education today and the value that (some) learners and families are seeking and deriving from it is related to the broad social and cultural changes cited above. The second is whether that gap is likely to grow unless substantial changes are made. I believe the answer to both questions is “yes.” Jewish education today is by and large ill-designed for a world of diversity and prosumerism. It is often perceived (rightly or wrongly) as being narrow and instrumental in focus, inflexible, tied to institutions that set barriers to participation (including monetary), unaligned with how students are learning in general education, and still very much in the “immigrant” stage when it comes to the use of technology. Even for many who participate in it, it is not a compelling experience, not a major source of meaning or a sense of accomplishment, not a focal point for attention or a high priority in their lives. Jewish education does not yet face a crisis in participation—happily, the pull to have one’s child educated Jewishly, even if only minimally, remains strong (tied in no small measure to the enduring popularity of Bar and Bat Mitzvah). But, neither can it afford to be complacent. Signs of erosion exist, erosion that will almost certainly continue if nothing changes.

### A CHANGING EDUCATIONAL LANDSCAPE

However, Jewish education *is* changing. In fact, perhaps the most compelling evidence of the need for change in the current Jewish educational system is the acceleration of efforts to make those changes. Critiques of American Jewish education are not new. There have been withering portraits drawn nearly every decade since the Benderly boys began their work (Dushkin & Engelman, 1959; Ackerman, 1969; Schoem, 1989; Board of Jewish Education, 1988; Commission on Jewish Education in North America, 1990). Nor have efforts to reform American Jewish education been lacking. The last several decades have seen a plethora of such efforts, beginning as early as the 1960s, accelerating with a spate of local, national, and international commissions and task forces in the late 1980s and 1990s, gathering momentum as philanthropic dollars flowed into the field and major foundations began to embrace specific arenas for investment, seed new programs, and suggest new directions, and most recently being driven by a new generation of Jewish educational entrepreneurs creating innovative approaches to Jewish learning and teaching. These efforts represent a judgment shared among a

wide spectrum of activists at every level that the Jewish educational system as they have encountered it is simply not good enough. They reveal a reservoir of discontent with what has been and a conviction that things could be much better than they are.

The roster of new initiatives and change endeavors in Jewish education today is impressive both in its length and breadth. They encompass programs and in some cases entire new organizations focused on every age group from infants to adults, the full range of traditional settings (synagogues, day schools, camps, JCCs), and a host of other arenas for educational activity both old and new (arts, service learning and social justice, nature, food and the environment, inclusion and special needs, Israel, family education, outreach and engagement, and online learning). (A partial listing of these initiatives can be found in the Appendix.) The vast majority of these efforts to enhance or transform some aspect of Jewish education by introducing new content or pedagogies, or by reaching new populations, have been launched in just the past 20 years. They testify that entrepreneurship is alive and well in Jewish education, including in many well established organizations and institutions. These endeavors are receiving substantial financial investment, most notably from a group of Jewish foundations (Jim Joseph, AVI CHAI, Schusterman, Grinspoon, Covenant, Samuel Bronfman, Steinhardt, Righteous Persons) and from philanthropic partnerships (PEJE, PELIE, the Foundation for Jewish Camp). In many cases, the funders themselves have become the initiators of innovation, seeing gaps and acting directly to try to fill them.

These new initiatives are not all of a piece. Some are massive in scope, involving millions of dollars and thousands of participants (e.g., Birthright Israel or PJ Library). Others are small, experimental ventures touching only a few individuals and families (e.g., alternative after school programs like Yerusha or Edah). Some are aimed at reforming existing practices and institutions (e.g., efforts to change congregational education). Others are creating entirely new forms of educational activity (e.g., environmental bike rides). Some innovations are —to use Clayton Christensen's (1997) terminology— "sustaining," serving to extend, refine, and improve existing forms. Others, e.g., online learning, are potentially "disruptive," i.e., able to make learning available to hitherto unserved or underserved populations at a significantly reduced cost, and therefore change the existing balance of forces in the field. Despite, or perhaps because of, this diversity in scope, focus, and approach, the sum total of innovative activity in North American Jewish education today may be greater than at any time in its history.

## TOWARD A NEW PARADIGM

The central question is what all of this activity is likely to produce. Do these innovations and change initiatives respond effectively to the challenges that

Jewish education faces in the 21st century? Can they enable Jewish education to successfully engage and inspire youth and adults living in a dramatically altered environment and carrying attitudes and aspirations different from those for whom 20th century Jewish education was designed? To answer these questions we need to look beyond the innovations and change efforts themselves to try to understand the underlying principles and values they must embody if they are in fact to yield Jewish education that will excite enthusiastic participation from larger numbers of learners and families and help them to lead more fulfilling and purposeful lives.

Put simply, what is needed today is innovation and change that embodies and advances a new paradigm for Jewish education, one appropriate for 21st century Jewish learners living in a 21st century world. Paradigms change when they are no longer able to help us solve new challenges (or meet new opportunities) that the world throws our way (Barker, 1992). The paradigm that guided 20th century Jewish education is not entirely obsolete, but it is inadequate for the challenges facing Jewish education today. A new paradigm is needed that will shape not only educational *practice*, but how the Jewish educational *system* as a whole is organized and operates in order to support and spread the new practices that emerge.

William Gibson (1999), the noted science fiction writer who coined the term “cyberspace,” has been quoted as saying: “The future is already here; it’s just not very evenly distributed.” This is Jewish education’s situation today. Outlines of the new paradigm are already visible in many of the changes and innovations that are dotting Jewish education’s landscape today. In some ways, the new paradigm that is emerging may actually return us to some of the ideas that originally animated the reforms sought by Benderly and his colleagues. But, the new mindsets and guiding principles will also carry us into uncharted territory, generating hypotheses about how to make Jewish education more successful (and even how to define “success”) that will be tested and refined during the coming years. What is clear is that we have entered a period of change for American Jewish education that has the potential to produce an educational system that looks and operates quite differently than the one that many of today’s educators, institutional leaders, and parents grew up with.

## PARADIGM SHIFTS

The paradigm shift underlying many of the innovations and changes taking place today can perhaps most easily be seen as a set of interrelated shifts that affect different dimensions of educational practice and organization.

Table 1 lists two dozen of these shifts, contrasting “what was” with “what is emerging” in a variety of areas.<sup>3</sup>

### PLACING LEARNERS AT THE CENTER

These shifts encompass many different dimensions of Jewish educational practice and organization, and center on a few key themes. The first and foremost of these is the shift from a “provider-centered” to a “learner-centered” perspective. At least three important ideas flow from this paradigm shift:

1. Learners (and their families) should have an active role in shaping their own learning.
2. Learning should be relevant to learners’ lives, reflecting their life circumstances, the society we live in, and responding to their authentic needs, questions, and aspirations.
3. Learning should be designed to be readily accessible to learners and to encourage learners to move along personal trajectories of growth.

Jewish education has often *not* been designed or operated with these concepts at the forefront. Rather, programs and institutions have often implemented Jewish education that intentionally or unintentionally prioritized their ideas about what is important to learn and their needs and desires to “hold on” to learners. For a variety of understandable reasons, ranging from perceived lack of parental interest (or competence), to a sense of urgency about instilling Jewish commitment in students, to a valid, but misinterpreted, belief that education must be “vision-driven,” to sheer inertia, Jewish education has been largely a top-down, professionally driven enterprise. Even where learner-centered approaches have made their way into Jewish pedagogy at the programmatic level, the fundamental power relationship between providers and learners remained largely unaltered—the former set the terms for what Jewish education would be, the latter took what was offered (or didn’t).

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<sup>3</sup>Claiming that the changes taking place in Jewish education today represent a clear paradigm shift from “how we understood/did things then” to “how we understand/do things now” admittedly oversimplifies reality. Jewish education today is clearly a mix of “what was” and “what is emerging.” Further, not all of the innovations being made or proposed point in the same direction. Many things are going on simultaneously in Jewish education, animated by a wide range of concerns (“patch dynamics”). But, many of today’s innovative and change-oriented activities *do* share common themes and thrusts that differentiate them sufficiently from what has been customary practice to justify labeling them as exemplars of a paradigm shift. Ultimately, even more than the specific innovations themselves, it is the new paradigm—the new way of thinking about, implementing, and organizing Jewish education—that will drive future transformational efforts.

**TABLE 1.** Paradigm shifts.

	What was	What is emerging
	<i>Practice-level paradigm shifts (How Jewish education is practiced and delivered)</i>	
1	Education operates from a “provider- and program-centered” perspective	Education operates from a “learner- and consumer-centered” perspective
2	Learners and their families are recipients of educational experiences designed for them by educators	Learners and their families are co-producers of their learning experiences with educators
3	Jewish education is aimed at making individuals “more Jewish”	Jewish education is aimed at making individuals better Jewish human beings and fostering the empowerment that comes with knowledge and literacy
4	Jewish education is focused largely on transmission of content	Jewish education is focused largely on generating meaning and fostering relationships
5	Teaching involves conveying information and ensuring that students have mastered it	Teaching involves inspiring, facilitating, and guiding student learning
6	Jewish education concentrates on content that is specifically Jewish	Jewish education encompasses content that is both Jewish and broadly human and connects the two
7	Curricula emphasize learning facts and developing specific skills	Curricula emphasize achieving “enduring understandings” of “big ideas”
8	Curricula are organized around academic subjects	Curricula are organized around issues growing out of learners’ lives
9	Verbal-linguistic intelligence is of primary value and teaching is geared to it	Multiple intelligences are valued and utilized in teaching and learning
10	Technology (when used at all) is a tool to enrich traditional teaching and treated as a “sustaining” innovation	Technology is a vehicle for empowering learners and forging multidimensional relationships across time and space and recognized as a potentially “disruptive” innovation
11	“Formal” and “informal-experiential” Jewish education operate largely as separate domains	“Formal” and “informal-experiential” education are blended together in all domains

<p>12</p>	<p><i>System-level paradigm shifts (How Jewish education is conceptualized and organized)</i> There is a “siloeed” approach to delivering educational experiences across and within institutions</p>	<p>There is a “systemic” approach to delivering educational experiences—institutions coordinate and collaborate to achieve synergies and smooth handoffs Education is abundant, accessible, and learner-based (Seth Godin Business Model 2)</p>
<p>13</p>	<p>Education is scarce, expensive, and school-based—Seth Godin (2009), Business Model 1</p>	<p>Education is abundant, accessible, and learner-based (Seth Godin Business Model 2)</p>
<p>14</p>	<p>A limited number of educational options are typically available</p>	<p>Many and diverse educational options are available</p>
<p>15</p>	<p>Individuals and families are left largely on their own to find appropriate educational experiences</p>	<p>Individuals and families receive active support and guidance in finding appropriate educational experiences</p>
<p>16</p>	<p>Educational institutions understand themselves and behave as competitors—the focus is on the success of the individual organization or institution</p>	<p>Educational institutions understand themselves and behave as alternative and complementary gateways into Jewish learning—the focus is on the individual and on strengthening Jewish community</p>
<p>17</p>	<p>There is a narrow understanding of when, where, how, and for whom “Jewish education” takes place—education is confined to specific times and places</p>	<p>There is a broad understanding of when, where, how, and for whom “Jewish education” takes place—education is free from constraints of place and time</p>
<p>18</p>	<p>Jewish education is a domain largely separated from other dimensions of Jewish activity and life in general</p>	<p>Jewish education is thoroughly integrated with other aspects of living (Jewish and general)</p>
<p>19</p>	<p>Most Jewish learning takes place in the context of denominational frameworks</p>	<p>Much Jewish learning is pluralistic, transdenominational, and postdenominational</p>
<p>20</p>	<p>Professionals are the primary voices in shaping educational policies and practices</p>	<p>Professionals, volunteer leaders, and consumers work as partners in shaping educational policies and practices</p>
<p>21</p>	<p>Innovators are marginal figures working largely apart from mainstream institutions</p>	<p>Innovators are critical contributors to the development of new Jewish communal structures and the renewal of existing institutions</p>
<p>22</p>	<p>Change is something engineered from the top down according to a plan</p>	<p>Change emerges from a combination of bottom-up and top-down activity guided by a vision</p>
<p>23</p>	<p>Synagogues operate primarily as educational programmers and providers</p>	<p>Synagogues are “relationship managers” that help learners to access and encourage their participation in a diverse range of educational experiences</p>
<p>24</p>	<p>Central education bodies are service providers and system supports</p>	<p>Central education bodies are catalysts for and leaders of communal vision and change</p>

This is no longer feasible, nor is it educationally wise. We know today that adults and even children seek to be active choosers of where, when, how, what, and why they learn (Wertheimer, 2007), and that they thrive and learn more when they do so. For what is still a small number of families, this desire has led to actually setting up their own Jewish learning programs. Existing institutions, too, are beginning to incorporate more student and familial choice, even in the elementary years, with alternative options and multiple tracks increasingly common. What we are seeing is a fundamental shift in the relationship between Jewish education's "producers" and "consumers." One of the not-so-secret "secrets" of Jewish education has been the hostility of some educators toward parents, whose failure to prioritize Jewish education has been seen as a fundamental barrier to its success. A more accurate analysis, however, would acknowledge that institutions and educators have rarely engaged parents in serious conversation about their Jewish aspirations for their children (or engaged children in talking about their own aspirations).

Even among parents whose own Jewish educational experience was less than stellar, resignation that this is the way it must always be is beginning to give way to a growing desire for better options and an awareness that such options exist. Providing greater choice increases the opportunity to fine tune education more closely so that it will engage learners' and parents' enthusiasm. At its best, the prosumer revolution promises the possibility of educational co-creation: not replacing institutions and professionals with auto-didacts run wild, but inviting students and families in as full partners in designing their learning.<sup>4</sup> In this paradigm, learners are not only enabled and encouraged to be active, but empowered and trusted to be responsible.

The barriers to building an educational system in which parents and learners are co-creators are formidable. Some parents are still seeking the minimum education that will allow them to feel they are fulfilling their obligation to "pass on the Jewish heritage" to their children, and are happy to hand over responsibility for providing this to an institution. Offering an array of learner-driven choices is a logistical, financial, and pedagogic challenge for institutions that often struggle to provide a single high quality educational option (and worry, rightfully, about the potential dilution of community that individualized learning might bring). Nonetheless, in a society where consumer empowerment is increasingly taken for granted, and in an educational environment with a growing emphasis on differentiated instruction and individualized learning (abetted by technology), Jewish education will have to become more learner-centered and parent-engaging or be left in the dust.

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<sup>4</sup>Some writers draw a distinction between "co-creation"—having users actively engaged in the design of the services they receive—and "co-production," in which the users participate as well in the actual delivery of the service (Bason, 2010). Both phenomena are part of the paradigm shift taking place in Jewish education today. The latter asks more of learners and families, but is also even closer, perhaps, to the Jewish ideal.

## FROM LIFE TO TORAH—AND BACK

Taking this route means that the learning agenda itself will need to be shaped by students' needs, aspirations, and curiosity, dramatically increasing the likelihood that the learning will "make sense" for the learners. Nearly a century ago, Franz Rosenzweig (1955) called for a "new Jewish learning" that "no longer starts from the Torah and leads into life, but the other way round, from life, from a world that knows nothing of the Law, or pretends to know nothing, back to the Torah" (p. 85). In the contemporary Jewish educational context, taking this call seriously means re-envisioning the content and organization of Jewish learning to link it far more closely to the full range of concerns that occupy learners' lives.

The notion of focusing education on what learners need and seek, rather than what providers want them to have, is part of a larger movement affecting all domains of social production today, from business to public services (Bason, 2010). It is sometimes labeled "design thinking" (Brown, 2008) as pioneered by companies (like Apple) and design firms (like IDEO) that specialize in creating superb user experiences. The first principle of design thinking is to solve the problems people are facing by understanding these from their perspective. In many ways, the approach is similar to good ethnography. The idea is not simply to ask people what they want, which they often don't know or can't imagine—viz. Henry Ford's famous observation that if you had asked people early in the 20th century what improvements they wanted in transportation, they would have said, "a faster horse." Rather, true concern for "customers" involves looking deeply and attentively at their daily lives and seeking to understand how to make these better in fundamental ways with new (or improved) products and services (Joachimsthaler, 2007).

In the Jewish educational world, this is the kind of thinking that led to PJ Library, which took the simple observation that parents and children like to read together before bedtime and used it as a springboard for a now global initiative to infuse those special moments with Jewish content by distributing carefully selected children's books to participating families. From this starting point, institutions and communities have gone on to seek ways to address other real life needs and desires of families with young children—for connections to other such families, for family-friendly fun experiences, for guidance in how to celebrate Jewish holidays, etc. Learner-centeredness in this vein does not just mean "doing what students (or parents) want." It means, as Rosenzweig's (1955) formulation implies, constructing a careful meeting between "life" and "Torah" in which the former provides the impetus for seeking out and in turn benefits from the wisdom that the latter can provide. At its best, this kind of education encourages and equips learners to use Jewish teaching and values as ongoing resources as they map out and traverse their life journeys.

“Life-relevant” education also means helping learners develop the skills and dispositions they need to succeed in today’s world. Recent years have seen an expanding movement in education focused on the concept of 21st century learning (Jacobs, 2010). Advocates often speak about the “five C’s” that contemporary students will need: the abilities to create, connect, communicate, collaborate, and think critically. Developing these capacities in learners, and, especially, making use of technology as what Angela Maiers (2012) calls a “talent amplifier,” has to be part of Jewish education’s mission and mandate, whether that education is integrated with general learning (as it is in day school) or complementary to it. Students must feel that Jewish education is a place where they can become more competent in the skills that will help them to thrive in life. One way to do this, Maiers argues, is by ensuring that students do what “real people” do, and not artificially designed activities that do not reflect how adept adults think, work, and behave in the real world. For Jewish education, this means aligning what happens in the classroom and other settings with a realistic image of adult Jewish life (for which it certainly helps to have compelling models of adult Jewish living available).

This broad understanding of the content of Jewish education and of how it ought to originate in the life experiences of learners has not been typical of American Jewish education during much of the 20th century. The curriculum of most Jewish schools emphasized particular knowledge and skills—Jewish texts (Bible and some later texts), holidays, customs and rituals, Hebrew reading and translation, prayer, Jewish history, Israel—that emphasized and contributed to Jewish distinctiveness (which was perceived to be essential to Jewish education’s mission of ensuring Jewish continuity). Without deliberate intent, the effect was to foster in many students the image of a Judaism confined to particular times and places—a Judaism of Shabbat and holidays, life-cycle events, and time spent in synagogue or in Israel—and often pointing toward a single day (that of the Bar or Bat Mitzvah) as the crystallization of Jewish living. The largely futile effort to teach Hebrew, which generally fell well short of achieving proficiency, reinforced the message that Jewish learning was “other,” not connected to one’s daily life in any meaningful way. Ironically, the attempt, pioneered by the Benderly boys, to make Jewish education operate like public school, while perhaps giving “Hebrew School” and day school the feel of familiarity, also organized Jewish learning into pseudo-academic “subjects,” surely an odd way of structuring an organic tradition and practice.

Today, though elements of this paradigm certainly remain, there is a growing emphasis in Jewish education on holistic (or whole person) learning and what might be called “applied Judaism.” Holistic learning aims at addressing the “whole person,” not just the “Jewish part,” and can include a number of different dimensions: socio-emotional learning, moral development, spiritual development, real world problem solving, and engaging

multiple intelligences (Miller, n.d.; Kress, 2012). Each of these educational practices connects the content of Jewish learning to the learner's identity as a full human being striving to live and thrive in a complex world. Holistic learning often goes together with constructivist educational approaches that engage learners in active meaning-making and the creation of authentic "products" that they can use in their lives and share with others. An expanding number of Jewish educational institutions and programs in a range of arenas—day school, congregational education, programs for teens, Israel education—are adopting holistic or whole person approaches that, as one initiative describes it, "nurture the head (Knowledge acquisition), the hand (Doing/action), the heart (Beliefs and values), and the feet (Belonging, i.e., engage where and with whom we stand)" (Weissman, 2010).

The growing prominence of holistic learning is tied in part to an expanding landscape for Jewish learning. Schools, synagogues, and summer camps remain primary educational venues today. But serious Jewish learning is also taking place at and through concerts and museum exhibitions, bike rides and wilderness hikes, farms and law offices, trips to Washington, DC and New Orleans, as well as in a host of community settings—senior homes, soup kitchens, and city streets. Real life concerns of youth and adults—gender identity, parenting, environmental sustainability, personal and professional ethics—are generating curricula and programming that respond to these concerns directly. The recent explosion of interest in experiential education (which has succeeded "informal" education as the terminology of choice) is directly linked to the fact that it seems more capable than does traditional "formal" education of engaging learners in ways that connect their Jewishness to their lives. Whether experiential learning will (or should) entirely displace conventional forms of school-style learning in Jewish education is not clear today, but that the pendulum is swinging in this direction seems evident.

The key shift here, though, is not simply methodological. It is part of the larger movement from Jewish education that is "continuity-focused" to Jewish learning that is "meaning-focused." "Jewish continuity" as we have thought of it—maintaining an active Jewish community to which Jews feel connected and in whose life they participate—can, ironically, be achieved as an outcome only when it is no longer Jewish education's goal. A sharper focus on addressing the interests and concerns of learners is also a way of drawing to the fore dimensions of Judaism and Jewish experience that were often neglected and suppressed in the process of Jewish "modernization" and that are often invisible in conventional curricula. As learners provoke us to rediscover just how multifarious Jewish tradition really is—its rootedness in nature, its intense spirituality, its insights into the minutiae of daily living—Jewish education becomes not only more relevant to the diverse population of today's learners, but a richer and fuller expression of Judaism itself.

## STEWARDSHIP AND RELATIONSHIPS

The third-key dimension of learner-centered Jewish education flows from the confluence of several realities:

1. For many Jews today, Jewish identity is a “journey,” not a fixed state of being, that takes them along both well-trodden and unpredictable pathways (Horowitz, 2000).
2. The impact of Jewish education is exponential (cf. Chertok, Phillips, & Saxe, 2008; Fishman & Fisher, 2011). The more experiences, and the more connected they are, the greater the impact.<sup>5</sup>
3. Making one’s way through the educational options available to learners and families today is challenging. The desire to choose comes up against the need to understand what one is choosing and the real accessibility of those options.

Taken together, these facts point to the need to actively “steward” learners’ journeys. On the practice level, the idea of stewarding learners is connected to the redefinition underway in the role of educators, popularly characterized as moving from the “sage on the stage” to the “guide on the side” (or, some prefer, the “mentor in the center”). Teachers, counselors, and program leaders no longer can position themselves simply or even primarily as transmitters of content (the content is too widely available elsewhere, and learners are too ready to go out and seek it themselves). Rather, they facilitate meaning-making for learners as they encounter and try to make sense of content emanating from a variety of sources, some teacher-mediated and some learner-discovered. Helping learners move along rewarding educational pathways is a delicate task, both in an immediate learning context (as teaching moves from doing to learners, to doing with learners, to doing by learners) and in the longer time frame as learners develop greater autonomy, self-awareness, sophistication, and fluency. But, defining the educator’s role in this fashion seems inevitable in a truly learner-centered endeavor.

The concept of stewardship highlights the primacy of the relational dimension of education. While we generally identify education as the acquisition of knowledge, skills, and attitudes, in fact our most powerful educational memories are often about people, not content. This is not surprising given the powerful human urge to be connected to others, to be

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<sup>5</sup>There are probably two reasons for this nonlinear impact. The first is the creation of a positive feedback loop: The more one learns and experiences Jewishly, the easier and more meaningful subsequent Jewish engagement becomes, which inspires more learning, etc. (Saxe, 2011). The second is a likely step effect: As in other areas of learning, there is a threshold beyond which the pace of acquiring new knowledge and understanding can increase greatly. Many Jewish learners never reach that threshold, but for those who do, the impact of additional Jewish learning can be substantial.

part of a group, a community. Teachers, counselors, and program leaders often serve as role models—they “are” Torah, as the Hasidic saying has it. Even from the perspective of Jewish continuity as a desired outcome, relationships are critical, since sociological research tells us that these connections are often more determinative of how Jews attach themselves to the Jewish collective than what is being taught (Cohen, 2006). It is no accident that educational programs that place an emphasis on and provide fertile settings for developing strong relationships between learners and educators and among learners themselves—programs like summer camp, travel experiences to Israel and elsewhere, and youth activities—are among the most impactful. This is the case not only because of the immediate effect of the experience, but because these programs create social networks among participants that often endure and establish a new context within which individuals carry forward their subsequent life journeys (including who they are likely to marry).

In the last few years, leading thinkers like Ron Wolfson (2006, forthcoming) and Larry Hoffman (2006) have championed what they call “relational Judaism.” In their view, synagogues (and, we would suggest, other Jewish institutions) should understand themselves first and foremost as relationship-building institutions, with programming—usually thought of as the primary activity—growing out of and advancing the work of building strong mutual relationships, rather than vice versa. Hillel has adopted a similar strategy for its campus work. There is, therefore, good reason to believe that in the emerging Jewish educational paradigm, relationships, and the practices that effectively foster these, will assume even greater prominence.

## REDESIGNING THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

Effective stewardship of learning journeys is, however, more than a matter of educational practice. Here we come to the second great theme of the paradigm shift taking place in Jewish education today: the redesign of the educational system itself to make possible genuinely learner-centered education. Redesigning the educational system involves changing both structure—the organization of the components of the system, the roles these components play, and how they relate to one another—and culture—the fundamental assumptions, mindsets, and norms that guide the behavior of institutions and individuals. Change at the level of practice is easier to make, and its immediate impact is more apparent. Changes in the organizing system for Jewish education are more difficult to make, which is why they generally take place more slowly. Yet, these changes at the system level create the context in which new approaches to learning and teaching can thrive and reach their full potential.

In order for Jewish education to be truly learner-centered, the educational system must change from one that is “siloeed”—i.e., that operates in largely separate and self-contained domains divided by institution, ideology, methodology, and age—to one that is connected and collaborative (Wertheimer, 2005, 2007). The familiar landscape of Jewish education, with pre-schools, synagogues, day schools, informal programs, etc., offers a diversity of educational opportunities. However, as it is currently organized and operates, Jewish education not only fails to encourage, but actually *inhibits* learners from taking advantage of the full range of opportunities potentially available to them to undertake compelling lifelong learning journeys. The current system does this by:

- failing to create smooth pathways and handoffs from one setting to another (e.g., early childhood to elementary education, or adolescent education to Jewish learning opportunities in college);
- not connecting learners’ experiences (and the content of learning) in different settings or even in different programs in the same institution (e.g., in school and informal youth programs, or in camp and synagogue);
- encouraging institutions to compete with one another to “capture” and hold on to learners and families, and to offer duplicative, rather than diverse, options;
- keeping entrepreneurial program innovators at the margins of mainstream educational institutions, thereby inhibiting the flow and spread of worthwhile innovations;
- failing to provide learners and families with trusted guides who can help them find the right educational opportunities and negotiate the often bewildering alphabet soup of Jewish organizational life;
- failing to incentivize participation in multiple educational experiences.

The result is an educational “system” that hardly deserves the name, one that operates, as Susan Shevitz (1991) has argued, like an “organized anarchy,” with multiple players pursuing different goals and often playing by different rules. Ironically, the injection in recent years of substantial new resources into Jewish education by foundations may actually have exacerbated the field’s siloization because much of this funding has been sharply focused on building specific sectors such as day school, summer camp, or trips to Israel, generally without reference to other domains or populations. Little (at least until very recently) has gone into fostering cross-domain synergies and collaborations. Even the support going to educational innovators has largely been aimed at helping them develop their own programs and organizations (an entirely worthwhile objective), but with little thought or resources devoted to how their efforts fit into a larger framework of coordinated educational opportunities. The persistence of siloization, coupled with an

economically and ideologically based reluctance on the part of institutions to encourage learners to pursue a broad range of options, is a significant practical barrier to realizing the potential gains that a truly learner-centered educational system could bring.

Small-scale efforts to redesign the educational system and change its operating culture have appeared in recent years:

- community “concierges” to help families find programs that work for them and foster connections (Los Angeles and St. Louis);
- synagogues and JCCs cooperating to enrich and expand educational options (Kehillah Partnership in Northern New Jersey and Jewish Journey Project in New York);
- educational summer camps collaborating with local institutions to place talented young staff in year-round settings (Ramah, URJ, and other camps);
- community-wide coalitions working together to redesign supplementary education for children and teens in order to engage under- and un-served segments of the community (Columbus, Minneapolis, Toronto, Montreal, Southern New Jersey);
- a regional collaboration among several dozen synagogues and an anchor institution that serves and convenes them (Institute for Southern Jewish Life education project);
- central agencies for Jewish education that have explicitly identified the community’s learners as their clients and work to advance their interests (MetroWest, NJ);
- communities that are using sophisticated data and customer relations management systems to “track” and guide individuals’ Jewish journeys (Los Angeles, Kansas City, and Columbus and Rhode Island—two pilot communities for a project called Grapevine: The Jewish Journey Connector).

At present, these endeavors are only harbingers of much greater changes that are needed. Given the structural and cultural barriers to collaboration in Jewish organizational life, these large-scale changes will be difficult to implement. But, it is encouraging that two of the major religious movements—Reform and Conservative—are now both launching movement-wide learner-centric initiatives to better coordinate the work of their various arms and thereby engage more learners and families with greater impact (a process already underway in the much smaller Reconstructionist movement).

All educational institutions today face a new reality: Much that once could be done only within the framework of formal organizations now can be done extra-institutionally, either online or through more informal groupings. This does not presage a wholesale abandonment of institutions for educational purposes (though, clearly, rates of formal affiliation with

synagogues are declining). Rather, it raises the expectations placed on institutions, in terms of quality, in terms of flexibility in accommodating learners and families' needs and lifestyles, in terms of openness to new pedagogies and learning approaches that are seen as engaging and enjoyable, and in terms of helping learners lead more fulfilling lives. These expectations challenge institutions that are already often under-resourced and scrambling to sustain themselves financially. For some institutions, technology (the very vehicle that empowers learners to chart their own educational course) may be an instrument to resolve some of the tension between what they can offer and what learners seek. Slowly but surely, propelled by both a growing supply of worthwhile tools and resources and a need to adapt current delivery models to contemporary culture and financial pressures, technology is making its way into the mainstream of Jewish education opening up possibilities for greater diversity of options and personalization of learning within institutional frameworks—and beyond them. The range of these projects is impressive—from animated highlights of the weekly Torah portions (G-dcast) and rap videos on Jewish texts (Bible Raps) to full-fledged online learning platforms (Behrman House) and Jewish-themed mobile games (Converjent). This is an area that is sure to grow, and its transformational potential is just beginning to be understood.

Real change for institutions, however, is likely to involve two other terms borrowed from the world of computers: “platforms” and “networks.” Increasingly, institutions will need to see themselves not as exclusive providers of Jewish education, but as platforms for bringing meaningful and engaging learning experiences to their participants and for guiding participants to such experiences elsewhere. An experiment undertaken by the Jewish Education Project in New York seeks to connect synagogues with entrepreneurial “educational resource providers” (ERPs), organizations (of which there are a growing number) that offer highly specialized educational programming in areas like the arts, environmentalism, the study of history, and new forms of ritual. These are areas of learning that learners and families are eager to access, but that synagogues (and many day schools and summer camps) are rarely able to provide on their own at a comparable level of quality. This project, though not without its challenges for both providers and beneficiaries, points the way toward a model of cooperation that can ultimately strengthen the synagogue, even as it somewhat recasts its role. Ultimately, the shift that is needed and that is just beginning to take root is one of mindset: Educational institutions must see themselves as part of a large network of allied institutions, each offering unique strengths, working together to create a web of inter-linked educational experiences that provide a multitude of pathways for individuals and groups to travel along on lifelong learning journeys.

This is not a romantic vision. It is a practical necessity if Jewish education is to thrive in the 21st century. It need not undermine the attachment

that individuals feel to “their” synagogue, day school, or camp. But, it will ensure that this attachment does not become a constraint at a time when the vast majority of Jews’ lives are more fluid and mobile than ever before. A truly learner-centered educational system must be a networked one. Practice-level changes and system-level changes must go hand in hand. These changes have begun, but the great question is how far and how quickly they will proceed. How can we move from scattered innovations to a reinvented Jewish educational system for the 21st century?

### MAKING THE CHANGE

In theory, the move from today’s landscape of innovations and change initiatives to a transformed system that firmly embodies the paradigm shift taking place around us should be straightforward. If we can multiply the examples of new practice and new organization, it should be possible gradually to displace the old. One day, we will look around and see that Jewish education has been transformed: “everyone” is operating under the new paradigm, thinking differently, acting differently. (It’s possible that Benderly and his colleagues may have imagined the same process unfolding a century ago as they advocated for their new paradigm.) This strategy of change by replacement has been advocated for general education by some of those who despair of reforming schools as they currently exist (Christensen et al., 2008).

In reality, change is never so simple. Even in the absence of overt resistance—of which there will undoubtedly be some as the voices calling for change grow louder and more numerous—achieving enduring change in any individual setting is a challenge, and changing systems is a task that typically requires years of effort. Merely proclaiming a new paradigm, or even cheering on the innovators bringing that paradigm to life, will not in fact transform Jewish education. We will need a strategy, one attuned to what we know about innovation and systems change and one that can work in the diffuse, loosely coupled world of Jewish education.

It is important to reiterate that the shifts needed are not unique to *Jewish* education. This is neither surprising nor unprecedented. Just as the Benderly boys sought to adapt the best educational thinking and practice of their era, so too are today’s change makers deeply influenced by ideas and developments emanating from the wider environment in which they operate. This could hardly be otherwise, given the forces impinging on and shaping Jewish education, since almost none of these forces is unique to contemporary Jewish experience.

Public discourse on American education today is dominated by a focus on raising achievement, standards, accountability, testing, and teacher

performance. Yet, in parallel with this rather sterile conversation, there is another taking place that is more visionary and expansive, focused on how to create learning that matters to both students and society, how to empower all students to be passionate lifelong learners, how to create a culture of innovation in education, and how to use the new tools of digital technology to extend, enrich, and personalize learning (Berger; 2003; Christensen et al., 2008; Chen, 2010; Jacobs, 2010; Davidson, 2011; Thomas & Brown, 2011). This conversation takes a variety of forms with varying emphases: 21st century skills, holistic and humanistic learning, constructivist pedagogy, alternatives to conventional schooling. But, many of the themes that are central to the paradigm shift taking place in Jewish education are central here as well: putting learners at the center of our thinking; enabling and trusting learners to be co-creators of their learning experiences; connecting learning authentically to life concerns and real world issues; making room for new modes of learning and new methods of teaching; fostering collaboration rather than competition in learning; organizing structures around student needs, rather than vice versa.<sup>6</sup>

These parallel developments in the general education world are important for several reasons: First, this is the world most of our learners and educators live in. Their thinking about Jewish education will inevitably be influenced by what they see happening around them in general education, for good or for ill. Second, these developments provide a rich storehouse of ideas, concepts, research, and experience that change makers in Jewish education can draw upon as they seek to find more appropriate and effective ways of engaging this generation of students in meaningful and impactful Jewish learning. Jewish education is a small field. Being able to see how themes and approaches that seem promising are playing out elsewhere enriches the knowledge base for Jewish educational change. Third, the process of change, especially change that seeks to alter fundamental paradigms, is challenging (to say the least). The attempts underway to move American education in a direction quite different from that envisioned in legislation like No Child Left Behind face formidable obstacles, ones perhaps even greater than individuals and groups seeking to shift paradigms in Jewish education face. Identifying strategies that can effectively promote change in the absence of hierarchical authority (the reality in Jewish education) is critical if the paradigm shifts underway are to become normative. Change efforts not just in education, but in other domains such as environmentalism, health care, and social welfare, that are both visionary and grounded in notions of

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<sup>6</sup>To sample this conversation, one can go to a growing list of websites: [edutopia.org](http://edutopia.org); [educationevolving.org](http://educationevolving.org); [knowledgeworks.org](http://knowledgeworks.org); [reinventingeducation.org](http://reinventingeducation.org); [ted21c.ning.com](http://ted21c.ning.com) (Transforming Education for the 21st Century); [21stcenturyschools.com](http://21stcenturyschools.com); [curriculum21.ning.com](http://curriculum21.ning.com); [futureofeducation.com](http://futureofeducation.com); [futureofed.org](http://futureofed.org); [education.ted.com](http://education.ted.com); [pathsoflearning.net](http://pathsoflearning.net); and a host of others.

empowerment and collaboration can provide at least reference points, even if not recipes, for attempting similar changes in Jewish education.<sup>7</sup>

## INNOVATION AND BEYOND

So, how will a new paradigm for 21st century Jewish education, with new practices, new structures, and a new operating culture, become normative? Ongoing innovation of the type that is already underway is the starting point, but two additional elements are needed as well: (a) more robust mechanisms for the diffusion of innovation; and (b) adoption of a “collective impact” approach to recast how the educational system operates.

The role of innovation in producing better outcomes for learners and for the Jewish community as a whole from its Jewish educational endeavors ought, in a sense, to be obvious. Equally obvious, however, is the fact that not all innovations (even those directed toward the “right” objectives) *do* produce better outcomes. Innovation is not a science, but neither is it an entirely haphazard process. Each stage in the innovation process—generating an initial idea, developing it, testing it, modifying it, implementing it, and assessing the value it produces—is itself complex, involving multiple considerations and potential approaches. Not surprisingly, a vast literature and no small number of “experts” have emerged in recent years purporting to help people and organizations innovate more successfully (Christensen, 1997; Hargadon, 2003; Westley, Zimmerman, & Patton, 2006; Hagel, Brown, & Davison, 2010; Shirky, 2010; Dyer, Gregersen, & Christensen, 2011). What we can take from all this for Jewish education are a few key ideas:

1. *Innovation is a social process.* The image of the lone genius working in a garage somewhere and coming up with a brilliant new product or process is largely a myth. Nearly all innovations grow out of earlier ideas, often recombined in original ways. Further, most innovations are the products of collective wisdom and effort (Hargadon, 2003). Innovation benefits from diversity, from bringing together people and ideas from different fields with different ways of seeing the world.

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<sup>7</sup>Maya Bernstein, an outstanding Jewish educator working at innovation incubator Upstart Bay Area, has suggested that there is even greater value in connecting with others working on comparable change beyond the Jewish community: “We could do a lot more than just observe and try to replicate secular models. There is tremendous opportunity, especially if your design is to have the ‘path’ mimic the ‘goal,’ to think about working closely with other minority/diversity/culture groups to think about how they’re transmitting their values in today’s global world, to share Judaism’s richness with other cultures, to share best practices and challenges, etc. I think that in order for this to be successful, Jewish education innovators need to model collaboration outside the Jewish world, since their goal is to say—this has something to contribute to living a meaningful life, in general—they have to show that it is in ongoing relationship with the realm beyond itself” (M. Bernstein, Personal communication, 2012).

In fact, one of the newest approaches to generating innovative ideas (what is sometimes called the “fuzzy front end”) is open innovation and crowdsourcing: seeking ideas from broad populations, and not always even experts (Chesbrough, 2003; Howe, 2008). Major corporations are now using private online communities to engage panels of customers in ongoing three-way conversations—company to customer, customer to company, and customer to customer—to build co-creation into the entire process of product innovation, development, and refinement (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004). The social nature of innovation is evidenced by the prominence of innovation hubs—geographic localities like Silicon Valley where innovators tend to gather and to feed off one another and off an infrastructure that grows up to support innovative activity (venture capitalists, academic institutions, support frameworks like incubators, meeting places, a regular flow of conferences and symposia).

In the Jewish world, we have seen the beginnings of an “innovation ecosystem” (Avedon & Landres, 2009): incubators/support frameworks like Bikkurim, Joshua Venture, Upstart Bay Area, Jumpstart, PresenTense, ROI, and the iCenter; a handful of funders who have made support for “start-up” and early stage ventures central to their funding (Natan, the Samuel Bronfman Foundation, the Andrea and Charles Bronfman Philanthropies, the Covenant Foundation, UJA-Federation of NY, the Community Foundation and Venture Philanthropy Fund in Los Angeles); and recognition vehicles like Slingshot and the Covenant Awards. But, systematic support for innovation activity remains small in proportion to the total financial investment and organizational infra-structure of Jewish communal life. There is ample room to do more to connect would-be innovators to one another and to involve a wider circle of individuals—especially the intended beneficiaries—in the innovation process.

2. *Innovation is an iterative process.* Few new ideas are “right from the start.” Virtually every innovative program, process, or product needs to be modified once it is brought out and tested in the real world. For this reason, early prototyping and “lean” innovation have grown increasingly popular as ways to minimize expensive mistakes and get feedback on new ventures as quickly as possible (Ries, 2011). The more ambitious the initiative and the more complex the environment in which it is being introduced or the challenge it is designed to address, the more likely it is that the innovation will need to be modified not once, but multiple times, until a stable model suitable for scaling and replication is arrived at. For some innovations, stability will never be achieved, since the landscape is changing constantly. Developmental evaluation, a distinct approach to helping new initiatives achieve their full potential that stands alongside more traditional formative and summative evaluation, can be a valuable tool for both innovators and those who seek to capitalize on innovation to produce broad-scale change (Patton, 2011).

Jewish education could benefit greatly from greater use of the tools and approaches to iterative innovation that are becoming more common in other domains. Equally important, Jewish education needs a more patient approach to funding and implementing innovation that recognizes the complexities of the process and does not demand immediate “results” as the hallmark of success. If our ultimate goal is to remake the educational system in fundamental ways, we must be prepared to accept that this endeavor will involve multiple innovations over many years, some of which will fail and nearly all of which will need substantial nurturing and thoughtful development if they are to make significant and worthwhile contributions.

3. *Innovation may be disruptive.* Christensen’s (1997) distinction between “sustaining” innovations that improve upon and extend existing products or processes and “disruptive” innovations that reshape markets or industries by engaging new customers and providing alternative value propositions is an important one as we look at the landscape of Jewish educational innovation. He and a number of colleagues have applied the distinction directly to the field of general education (Christensen et al., 2008). Most innovation, most of the time is sustaining. It helps make existing educational institutions and processes more effective—by, e.g., introducing a new curriculum, educational resource, or pedagogical approach. But, if our goal is to engage new learners not being served by the current system and to have a substantially greater impact on the lives of all learners, then some disruptive innovation will be needed as well. Institutions are inherently conservative, even in their innovations. As Christensen (1997) notes, it is difficult for them to give up on patterns of behavior and products that are working at least reasonably well for existing constituencies (and that are producing revenues). It is also difficult to get outside our own mindsets and assumptions, the unarticulated paradigms that shape how we perceive reality. This is why innovation so often comes from the “edge,” from people and places not locked into existing mental models or value chains (Chen, 2010; Hagel et al., 2010). Implementing new models of Jewish learning that take place outside of conventional frameworks, reconfigured roles for institutions, and new cultural norms all require that conventional mindsets be altered. Without some disruptive innovation, this is unlikely to happen.

There are potentially disruptive innovations in Jewish education today: supplementary programs that differ from the norm in one or more of a number of fundamental ways (who the learners and teachers are; where they are held, when, and for how long; what content is taught with what methods; and who is ultimately “in charge”); day schools that rely heavily on technology for numerous courses; camps that focus intensively on specialty themes; community processes that bring non-traditional actors to the table and begin by seeking unaddressed populations and

needs; as well as a host of programs that don't fit into any conventional framework.

These innovations represent a challenge to established business models and the institutions that depend on these. Such disruptive innovation may well lead to discomfort, resistance, and even conflict (as has happened when a number of JCCs have recently sought to offer programs for children in the K-2 age group typically claimed by synagogues, recognizing that large numbers of these children are not (yet) enrolled in synagogue supplementary programs). But, without disruptive innovation the path to real transformation of the current system is likely to be longer and the pace of change slower, something that Jewish education cannot afford. Disruptive innovations, including those that will eventually fail, need to be encouraged and protected, not squelched, by those who control access to resources and power. They need to be sought out and invited in from the edges, even when this causes initial tension, because this is how systems change. This will not always be easy. But, alongside creating a supportive social context for innovation and allowing innovations to ripen iteratively, it is one of the strategies needed if the current wave of innovation in Jewish education is to gain further momentum.

#### DIFFUSING INNOVATION AND "GOING TO SCALE"

A high volume of innovation alone is not sufficient to ensure transformation. In addition, the most promising innovations must be adopted and adapted widely. While it is theoretically possible that this will occur through a process of displacement—new and superior approaches and models will simply “outcompete” existing ones in the market place and gradually replace them—it is more likely that this will happen through a combination of displacement and diffusion, in which new ideas spread through and are adopted by existing frameworks. The process of diffusion of innovations—how the new and exceptional becomes accepted and normative—has also been studied extensively. Everett Rogers' (2003) classic book, *Diffusion of Innovations*, continues to guide those seeking to maximize innovation's impact. Rogers identifies five factors that determine the likelihood that a particular innovation will be adopted widely (Table 2).

Rogers argues that individuals (or organizations) differ in their disposition to adopt innovations (the spectrum from innovators to early adopters to mainstream adopters to laggards who may never embrace the new approaches). However, it is also possible to accelerate the pace of adoption along this spectrum by framing and presenting innovations in ways that make them easier to embrace.

**TABLE 2.** Rogers' five factors that influence an individual's decision to adopt or reject an innovation.

Factor	Definition
Relative advantage	How improved an innovation is over the previous generation.
Compatibility	The level of compatibility that an innovation has to be assimilated into an individual's life.
Complexity or simplicity	If the innovation is too difficult to use an individual will not likely adopt it.
Trialability	How easily an innovation may be experimented with as it is being adopted. If a user has a hard time using and trying an innovation this individual will be less likely to adopt it.
Observability	The extent that an innovation is visible to others. An innovation that is more visible will drive communication among the individual's peers and personal networks and will in turn create more positive or negative reactions.

Source: ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Diffusion\\_of\\_innovations](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Diffusion_of_innovations)).

The key takeaway is that the spread of innovations is not an automatic process, even if the innovation is superior to what currently exists. An effective framework for diffusion must address a number of challenges:

- making others aware that the innovation exists;
- demonstrating its value;
- getting the information necessary to adopt/adapt the innovation into the hands of those who are in a position to do so;
- ensuring that adopters/adapters have the skills, tools, and resources necessary to implement the innovation in their setting; and providing support and guidance through the inevitable difficulties that will emerge.

A key question is also *what* is being diffused—a concept, an approach, a model, a set of procedures? While there are those who argue strongly that successful diffusion requires as much fidelity as possible to the original innovation (how McDonalds opens new franchises), others argue that adopters must have the flexibility to tailor innovations to the circumstances in which they operate (“innovation is an iterative process”). In truth, there are probably a range of options that can be effective depending on the specifics of the innovation and the situation. But, issues of this type cannot be ignored if innovations are to “go to scale.”<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup>The concept of “going to scale,” i.e., achieving a size and scope that allows for significant impact, is itself a complex one. Going to scale is sometimes equated with the originator of the innovation growing larger. But this is only one way of achieving greater impact. If the goal of innovation is to help catalyze broad-scale change, then embedding the innovation in existing distribution or delivery systems may bring it to scale much more rapidly than seeking to grow a new organization from scratch (Woocher, 2011). The originating organization may remain small, or even disappear, while the idea behind it

The issue for Jewish education is that many innovations do *not* spread—at least not as rapidly or widely as desirable. There have certainly been successful instances of diffusion: the global network of Chabad Houses is one example; the spread of Melton Adult Mini-Schools and, more recently, Moishe Houses provides another. Nonetheless, many more innovations remain “one offs,” especially when there is no national (or international) sponsor or funder to provide resources and steer the diffusion process. Some innovations, perhaps many, do not merit diffusion. But, there are undoubtedly many worthy ideas and program models that remain limited in their impact because the mechanisms to make them visible, to demonstrate their value, and to provide others with the capabilities, resources, and incentives to adopt/adapt them are weak or lacking altogether. What exists in Jewish education today is a somewhat ragtag collection of publications, websites, networks, and under-resourced central bodies, inadequate singly and together to support systematic and efficient diffusion of worthwhile innovations. The result is a landscape dotted with promising models, but incapable of guaranteeing that every child, adult, and family will experience the best of what Jewish education has to offer.

Clearly, Jewish education would benefit from much better coordinated endeavors to diffuse innovation and to connect the efforts of those who are engaged in seeking to implement new approaches, embodying new paradigms and principles, in the diverse settings where Jewish learning is taking place today. Yet, the semi-anarchic nature of the educational system itself makes this type of coordination and collaboration difficult to achieve. Jewish education has no “czar,” no one who can line up all the players and tell them what to do. (Not even the mega-foundations, the most powerful forces in Jewish education today, are in this position.) Nor would we want such top-down control, since grass-roots entrepreneurship and innovation from the edges are vital to drive change.

So, Jewish education faces a challenge: Making the transformations needed to move toward a new paradigm requires both intensified innovation and entrepreneurship *and* greater coordination and collaboration—two characteristics that do not readily come together. Indeed, we can go further: Not only the change process, but the new Jewish educational system itself, will need to have exactly the same combination of characteristics. Its operating culture will need to maintain the same blend and balance of entrepreneurialism and collaboration that is needed to bring that operating culture into being. Many years ago, Martin Buber (1963) wrote that “if the goal to be reached is like the goal which was set, then the nature of the

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flagship innovation or the program model it has developed spreads. Both approaches to going to scale—“growth” versus “adoption”—have advantages and present challenges. What is important in the end is the impact of the innovation, not who originated it. If a particular educational practice becomes normative, the odds are that many individuals will have had a hand in shaping it (“innovation is a social process”).

way must be like the goal” (p. 238). In the case of Jewish education, this congruence of goal and way is vital.

## NETWORKS AND COLLECTIVE IMPACT

Fortunately, over the past few years ideas have emerged about how to construct change processes and organizational cultures that are both entrepreneurial and collaborative. One important set of ideas has emerged from exploration of how networks operate to generate change without centralized or hierarchical control. Networks are, in fact, central to both the generation of innovation and to its diffusion. Networks combine individual autonomy and initiative with coordinated, collaborative activity and mutual accountability. Networks can also operate at many different scales, from intimate to global. Perhaps the most striking example of how networked groups can produce breakthrough achievements is in the “open source” movement. Websites like Wikipedia and software like Linux or Mozilla’s Firefox are the product of the contributions of thousands of individuals, each providing a piece of the collective expertise needed to produce something that millions of users benefit from, some of whom in turn become contributors to the next iteration.

Open sourcing (seeking solutions to problems from anyone who can offer them and broadly inviting contributions to projects) is only one form of self-generated collaborative effort aimed at producing change. The principles of networking are being applied today in a wide range of settings where people and organizations seek to combine the talents, insights, and initiative of individuals to create collective value and drive social change. The power of networking to produce change is becoming increasingly evident as social media enable people to self-organize to advance causes ranging from support of specific charities to political revolution (Shirky, 2008). Communities of practice, networks of individuals who work in the same area and face similar challenges, are one of the fastest growing vehicles for promoting professional growth and collaborative problem solving (Wenger, 2006).

But, networks are also being seen increasingly as key elements in far more ambitious attempts to “change the world” at a time when top-down change seems increasingly improbable and unworkable. In his analysis of the emergence and growth of the global environmental-social justice movement, Paul Hawken describes how a multitude of loosely coordinated organizations, without a shared ideology, have nonetheless been able to create momentum behind a set of core principles for thinking about how we ought to relate to the earth and to one another that are an increasingly powerful counterweight to the capitalist ethos of competition and exploitation of natural resources (Hawken, 2007). In their book, *The Power of Pull*, Hagel and colleagues (2010) make a strong argument that in today’s dynamic world

it is by tapping into networks, and the flow of information and ideas that they make available, that we are able to draw out the best in individuals and guide institutions, and even whole societies, in productive new directions.

Networking disparate actors may appear to be too “loose,” too fluid a form of social organization to actually create significant change. And, indeed, a bottom-up organization, without clear centers of authority, where people can drop in and out, especially when connections lack the intimacy of face-to-face interaction, has limits in what it can achieve. Still, we should not underestimate what can be accomplished through voluntary, lateral collaboration. In contexts where authority is weak or altogether lacking (certainly the case in Jewish education), there may be no alternative to using networking as the primary organizing principle for collective action. The success of networks as vehicles for promoting change appears to rest on several pillars: broad-based, but disciplined, participation; some number of primary connectors who can galvanize and channel the flow of information and ideas (network “weavers”); a balance of openness and focus; and concentration on the collective goal, rather than individual aggrandizement.

Some of these same themes appear in recent articles by John Kania and Mark Kramer (2011; Hanleybrown, Kania, & Kramer, 2012) on the concept of “collective impact” initiatives. These are endeavors involving multiple actors facing a complex problem who coordinate their efforts in order to achieve outcomes that none could achieve on their own. Collective impact initiatives, they emphasize, are not simply ad hoc collaborations. Using Project Strive, a collaborative initiative to improve education in Cincinnati and Northern Kentucky as their primary case study, Kania and Kramer identify five specific conditions necessary for this type of broad-based endeavor (involving dozens of entities, public and private) to succeed: (a) a common agenda and shared vision for change; (b) a shared measurement system for tracking progress; (c) mutually reinforcing activities; (d) high levels of communication and trust; and (e) a backbone organization to coordinate efforts and keep everyone on track.

The success of a “collective impact” initiative, according to their analysis, does *not* depend on everyone doing the same thing or agreeing on every issue. Nor does it depend on strong centralized leadership. Indeed, the backbone organization must exercise “adaptive leadership” (Heifetz, Grashow, & Linsky, 2009) which allows the actors to develop their own solutions, while gently, yet firmly, both encouraging and challenging the group to make the changes in mindset and behavior necessary to reach their shared goal. Extensive, ongoing communication involving organizational leadership at the highest level is vital to the success of the collective impact initiative, and a key role of the backbone organization is ensuring that this communication takes place. In this role, the backbone organization is not unlike a “network weaver,” or the management team of an open source endeavor. The lesson in all of these instances is that operating in a way that blends and balances

entrepreneurship and individual initiative with coordination of efforts toward a shared goal is not a spontaneous process. It does require leadership, but a kind of leadership that is not authoritative and controlling, rather facilitative, guiding, and empowering. In this, it mimics the type of role we envision for educators themselves in a learner-centered, relationship-infused, life-relevant educational system.

Open sourcing, networking, and collective impact are now being discussed and implemented with increasing frequency in the world of social value (non-profit) organizations. Slowly, they are making their way into Jewish education as well. Recent years have seen growing use of social media (including Facebook groups, Nings, Twitter hashtags, and Webinars), communities of practice, and other types of networks, primarily to bring together professionals to address issues they, their institutions, and the field in general are facing (the involvement of lay leaders and especially learners and families in these endeavors is much rarer). Funders and some institutional leaders have begun to discuss the applicability of collective impact to Jewish education (not straightforward in a system that largely lacks a common agenda, shared measurement systems, extensive cross-domain communication, coordination of activities, and backbone organizations). Funding has been provided by the Jim Joseph Foundation to map virtual Jewish learning networks and to train a small group of online community of practice facilitators. Most recently, the Schusterman Foundation, building on its own work in convening groups of Jewish social innovators (ROI) and other Jewish professionals, has launched a major initiative designed to elevate networking to a primary role as a generator of change in Jewish life. Still, there is a long way to go before we can say that Jewish education is making full and effective use of networks, open source processes, or collective impact initiatives to generate the pace and volume of change called for today. In particular, the potential of these vehicles for broad-based co-creation of new forms and new solutions will remain limited as long as the participants in Jewish education—learners and their families—are not invited more fully into the co-creation process.

Not surprisingly, the new efforts to harness the power of networks and related frameworks to propel change have yet to produce transformational results. But, they clearly complement the other elements of what is emerging as a multi-pronged strategy to advance the new paradigm for 21st century Jewish education. Together, (a) promoting ongoing innovation (including disruptive innovation); (b) accelerating the diffusion of innovation throughout the educational system; and (c) creating frameworks (networks, open source, and collective impact initiatives) for collaborative exploration and implementation of new approaches, represent a promising pathway toward achieving—and maintaining—a Jewish educational system that can better meet the needs and aspirations of today's learners. In an age of rapid and unpredictable change, and one in which individuals are self-determining,

having the capacity to be self-renewing is vital for Jewish education if it is to remain relevant and effective.

### TOWARD THE NEXT PARADIGM

This lesson is, perhaps, the most important to take from this period of transition. We have argued that Jewish education in the 21st century needs a new paradigm (or set of paradigms) built around the idea of placing learners at the center of its thinking and asking how it can help these learners achieve a more meaningful, connected, and fulfilling life. If Jewish education can deploy the rich resources of Jewish tradition and contemporary Jewish life to help learners answer their authentic questions and experience the mix of joy, purposefulness, wonder, invigoration, and peacefulness that most humans seek, then it can thrive. This is a different task than American Jewish education was asked to undertake in the 20th century, for individuals and a community differently constituted and living in different circumstances. But the two tasks and the two paradigms do not contradict one another. They represent two stages in a much longer process of evolution and occasional revolution that began roughly three thousand years ago and that we may hope will continue for at least three thousand more.

The success of the enterprise that we today call “Jewish education” rests in large measure on its adaptability. Just as science has advanced through numerous paradigm shifts, and continues to develop even during periods when paradigms remain relatively stable, so too Jewish education is continuously evolving, continuously reinventing itself. The new paradigm we have proposed for 21st century Jewish education will surely not be the last. We cannot know what new circumstances will again reshape our understanding of Jewish education’s task and of how best to achieve this.

For the present, it is enough to say that we should welcome this change, these new circumstances and the opportunity to try to recast Jewish education to respond to them. For those who believe that Jewish tradition has something important to say to every era and to every human, it is a sacred opportunity. May we seize it with courage and enthusiasm, and create a Jewish education for ourselves and our children that will be a worthy link in an eternal chain of Torah.

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## APPENDIX

### A Sampling of New Programs, Initiatives, and Organizations

Consider just this sampling of efforts to innovate and improve important elements of educational practice and experience, organized by the various domains in which they are taking place or target populations they seek to reach:

#### *Early Childhood/Families with Young Children*

- PJ Library ([pjlibrary.org](http://pjlibrary.org))
- pre-schools based on Montessori or Reggio Emilia principles
- LaMazel Tov/Shalom Baby programs
- An Ethical Start ([jcca.org/an-ethical-start/](http://jcca.org/an-ethical-start/))
- Our Jewish Home ([jewishinstlouis.org/OurJewishHome.aspx](http://jewishinstlouis.org/OurJewishHome.aspx); St. Louis, MO)
- concierges and websites for families ([jkidla.org](http://jkidla.org); Los Angeles, CA)
- jkidphilly ([jkidphilly.org](http://jkidphilly.org); Philadelphia, PA)
- Mazel Tot ([mazelatot.org](http://mazelatot.org); Colorado)
- kveller.com

*Supplementary/Complementary Education*

- Experiment in Congregational Education ([eceanline.org](http://eceanline.org))
- NESS (Nurturing Excellence in Synagogue Schools; [bjesf.org/schools\\_ness.htm](http://bjesf.org/schools_ness.htm); Philadelphia, PA and San Francisco, CA)
- Institute for Southern Jewish Life Education Program ([isjl.org/education/index.html](http://isjl.org/education/index.html))
- community-based initiatives: La'atid ([hartfordct.ujcfedweb.org/local\\_includes/downloads/26890.pdf](http://hartfordct.ujcfedweb.org/local_includes/downloads/26890.pdf); Hartford, CT), LOMED ([lomed.wikispaces.com](http://lomed.wikispaces.com); New York, NY), CE21 ([pjll.org/content/our-work-congregations](http://pjll.org/content/our-work-congregations); Washington, DC), Sharsheret ([caje-miami.org/index.cfm?pageid=172](http://caje-miami.org/index.cfm?pageid=172); Miami, FL), WOW ([thewowproject.jesna.org](http://thewowproject.jesna.org); Columbus, OH)
- alternative programs: Yerusha ([yerusha.org](http://yerusha.org)), Jewish Kids Groups ([jewishkidsgroups.com](http://jewishkidsgroups.com); Atlanta), Keshet ([keshetweb.org](http://keshetweb.org); Cambridge, MA), Hebrew Wizards (<http://www.hebrewwizards.com>), Edah ([edhacommunity.org](http://edhacommunity.org)), Shalom Learning ([shalomlearning.com](http://shalomlearning.com))
- alternative tracks: Shabbaton ([betham.org/learning/youth/shabbaton](http://betham.org/learning/youth/shabbaton); Los Altos Hills, CA), Nisayon ([templejudea.com/learning/religious-school](http://templejudea.com/learning/religious-school); Tarzana, CA), Kesem ([templemanu-el.com/Public/RELIGIOUSCHOOL/KESEMConnection/index.cfm](http://templemanu-el.com/Public/RELIGIOUSCHOOL/KESEMConnection/index.cfm); Closter, NJ)
- Chai curriculum ([chai.urj.org](http://chai.urj.org))

*Day School*

- Day Schools for the 21st Century (HUC-JIR; [huc.edu/libcenters/jds21.shtml](http://huc.edu/libcenters/jds21.shtml))
- Pre-Collegiate Learning Center ([pclcnj.com](http://pclcnj.com); East Brunswick, NJ)
- Yeshivat Netivot Montessori ([netivotmontessori.com](http://netivotmontessori.com); Edison, NJ)
- DigitalJLearning (Jewish Education Project, JESNA, and Avi Chai; [digitaljlearning.org](http://digitaljlearning.org))
- American Hebrew Academy ([americanhebrewacademy.org](http://americanhebrewacademy.org); Greensboro, NC)
- 21st Century Learning Initiative (Martin J. Gottlieb Day School; [mjpgds.org/21stcenturylearning](http://mjpgds.org/21stcenturylearning); Jacksonville, FL)
- Moot Beit Din ([ravsak.org/programs/moot-beit-din](http://ravsak.org/programs/moot-beit-din))

*Teens*

- Jewish Student Union ([jsu.org](http://jsu.org))
- The Curriculum Initiative ([tcionline.org](http://tcionline.org))
- Moving Traditions ([movingtraditions.org](http://movingtraditions.org))

- Genesis and BIMA (Brandeis University; [brandeis.edu/highschool/index.html](http://brandeis.edu/highschool/index.html); Waltham, MA)
- J-Teen Leadership ([jteenleadership.org](http://jteenleadership.org))
- Campaign for Youth Engagement (Reform movement; [urj.org/teen](http://urj.org/teen))
- Yachad (Minneapolis, MN)
- Diller Teen Fellows ([jewishfed.org/community/page/diller-teen-fellows-program](http://jewishfed.org/community/page/diller-teen-fellows-program))

### *College and Young Adults*

- Birthright Israel ([birthrightisrael.com](http://birthrightisrael.com))
- Moishe Houses ([moishehouse.org/](http://moishehouse.org/))
- Hillel's Campus Entrepreneur Initiative ([campusinitiative.org/entrepreneurs](http://campusinitiative.org/entrepreneurs))
- Birthright Next ([birthrightisrael.com/next](http://birthrightisrael.com/next))
- Chabad on campus ([chabad.edu/](http://chabad.edu/))
- Yeshivat Hadar ([mechonhadar.org/yeshivat-hadar1](http://mechonhadar.org/yeshivat-hadar1); New York, NY)

### *Adult Learning*

- Melton Adult Mini-School ([fmams.org.il](http://fmams.org.il))
- Wexner Heritage Program ([wexnerfoundation.org/Default.aspx?tabid=127](http://wexnerfoundation.org/Default.aspx?tabid=127))
- Context ([jtsa.edu/x14768.xml](http://jtsa.edu/x14768.xml); New York, NY)
- Rohr Jewish Learning Institute ([myjli.com/index.html](http://myjli.com/index.html))
- Global Day of Jewish Learning ([theglobalday.com](http://theglobalday.com))

### *Summer Camp*

- specialty camps: Adamah Adventures, Eden Village Camp, 92Y Passport NYC, Ramah Outdoor Adventure, 6 Points Sports Academy ([jewishcamp.org/experience/specialty-camps](http://jewishcamp.org/experience/specialty-camps))
- Ramah Service Corps ([campramah.org/content/news/201101\\_ramahservicecorps.php](http://campramah.org/content/news/201101_ramahservicecorps.php))

### *Israel Education*

- Makom ([makomisrael.org](http://makomisrael.org))
- The iCenter ([theicenter.org](http://theicenter.org))
- The David Project ([thedavidproject.org](http://thedavidproject.org))

### *Special Needs*

- Matan ([matankids.org](http://matankids.org))

- Gateways ([jgateways.org](http://jgateways.org); Boston, MA)
- Hidden Sparks ([hiddensparks.org](http://hiddensparks.org))
- Tikvah (Ramah; [campramah.org/content/specialneeds.php](http://campramah.org/content/specialneeds.php))
- P'tach ([ptach.org](http://ptach.org))

### *Diversity and Inclusiveness*

- B'chol Lashon ([bchollashon.org](http://bchollashon.org))
- Keshet ([keshetonline.org](http://keshetonline.org))
- Jewish Outreach Institute ([joi.org](http://joi.org))
- Interfaithfamily.com

### *Service Learning and Social Justice*

- Repair the World ([werepair.org](http://werepair.org))
- AJWS ([ajws.org](http://ajws.org))
- Panim ([panim.bbyo.org](http://panim.bbyo.org))
- Tzedek Hillel ([hillel.org/tzedek/default](http://hillel.org/tzedek/default))
- Uri L'Tzedek ([utzedek.org](http://utzedek.org))

### *Arts*

- Avoda Arts ([avodaarts.org](http://avodaarts.org))
- Tifereth (Olin Sang Ruby Camp; [osrui.urjcamps.org/about/programs/tiferetaleph](http://osrui.urjcamps.org/about/programs/tiferetaleph))
- Kol Ha'ot ([kolhaot.com](http://kolhaot.com))

### *Environmentalism, Food, and Nature*

- Hazon ([hazon.org](http://hazon.org))
- Teva ([tevalearningcenter.org](http://tevalearningcenter.org))
- Jewish Farm School ([jewishfarmschool.org](http://jewishfarmschool.org))
- Kayam Farm ([kayamfarm.org](http://kayamfarm.org); Reistertown, MD)
- Adamah ([isabellafreedman.org/adamah](http://isabellafreedman.org/adamah); Falls Village, CA)
- Urban Adamah ([urbanadamah.org](http://urbanadamah.org); Berkeley, CA)
- Wilderness Torah ([wildernesstorah.org](http://wildernesstorah.org))
- Canfei Nesharim ([canfeinesharim.org](http://canfeinesharim.org))

### *Technology*

- MyJewishLearning.com
- G-dcast ([g-dcast.com](http://g-dcast.com))
- Media Midrash ([mediamidrash.behrmanhouse.com](http://mediamidrash.behrmanhouse.com))

- Sviva Israel ([svivaisrael.org](http://svivaisrael.org))
- WebYeshiva ([webyeshiva.org/jewish-learning-jewish-study-torah-learning](http://webyeshiva.org/jewish-learning-jewish-study-torah-learning))
- Converjent ([converjent.org](http://converjent.org))
- Jewish Interactive ([jewishinteractive.net](http://jewishinteractive.net))

*Professional Recruitment and Development*

- Wexner Fellows/Davidson Scholars ([wexnerfoundation.org](http://wexnerfoundation.org))
- DeLeT ([delet.org](http://delet.org))
- Jewish New Teacher Project ([jntp.org](http://jntp.org))
- Pardes Educators ([pardes.org.il/programs/educators/overview.php](http://pardes.org.il/programs/educators/overview.php))
- Lainer-MASA Fellows for Jewish Education ([jesna.org/our-work/lainer-masa-fellows](http://jesna.org/our-work/lainer-masa-fellows))
- Day School Leadership Training Institute ([jtsa.edu/The\\_Davidson\\_School\\_\(Jewish\\_Education\)/Day\\_School\\_Leadership\\_Training\\_Institute.xml](http://jtsa.edu/The_Davidson_School_(Jewish_Education)/Day_School_Leadership_Training_Institute.xml))
- Leadership Institute for Congregational School Educators ([leader-institute.org/](http://leader-institute.org/))
- Moreh L'Morim ([morehlmorim.org/](http://morehlmorim.org/))