

JEWISH EDUCATION AND THE ARTS: CURRENT REALITIES, FUTURE POSSIBILITIES

Arts in Jewish Education: Mapping the Landscape



Contents

- I. Introduction
- II. Overview: Arts and Jewish Education Landscape Today
 - Utilization of Existing Cultural Resources
 - Engagement and Interact with Artists
 - Integration of Arts and Curriculum
 - Arts as an Educational Organizing Principle
- III. Interview Data
 - Gaps in the Current Activity
 - New Ideas/Recommendations for Arts in Jewish Ed.
- IV. Conclusion
- V. Appendices
 - People Interviewed
 - Existing Programs
 - Bibliography

introduction

The arts have been an integral part of the Jewish experience since Bezalel put his talents to work building the Mishkan in the wilderness. Nonetheless, when it comes to Jewish education today, there is a widespread consensus that we have failed to take full advantage of the power and potential of the arts as both a gateway to and component of Jewish learning and teaching. The case for expanding the role of the arts in contemporary Jewish education is compelling: the arts engage learners on multiple levels; they open up new dimensions of understanding of text and tradition; and they encourage creative expression of our deepest spiritual and ethical impulses. A picture, a play, a song, story, or sculpture – each of these, whether created, performed, or merely appreciated, can evoke reflection, conversation, and emotion that expand and enrich learning in ways that few other experiences can.

So, why are the arts underutilized in mainstream Jewish educational settings, and what can we do to change this situation? These are the questions that Avoda Arts, the Foundation for Jewish Culture, and JESNA's Lippman Kanfer Institute set

out to answer with the encouragement and generous support of the Lippman Kanfer Family Foundation. In this paper and the companion literature review, we have tried to map in broad strokes how the arts and Jewish education, in grades K-12, are intersecting today and identify some of the conceptual frameworks, needs, and proposed strategies that can help guide the development of new initiatives to expand and enhance the role and impact of the arts on Jewish learning and teaching. The material that follows is based primarily on interviews with more than two dozen individuals active in the arenas of Jewish education and the arts. They bring a range of experiences and perspectives and represent a broad cross-section of the field of Jewish education and a variety of artistic media and approaches. Their knowledge and insights were supplemented by research on the web and using other sources to identify examples of different types of programs currently in operation that connect Jewish learning and the arts. The examples cited are far from exhaustive, but they do provide a general picture of the types of activity underway. A number of these programs could, we are confident, serve also as models for further activity in the field.

The remainder of this paper is divided into three sections. The first

provides an overview of current activity. The second outlines what our informants see as important gaps and needs in the field and their suggestions for how to fill some of these. The final section presents overall conclusions and recommendations.

overview

Educational theory and research have consistently demonstrated that integrating the arts into teaching and learning yields numerous benefits. This lesson has not been lost on the Jewish community. The Jewish educational landscape today includes a broad range of programs that seek to use the arts to enhance the experience of learners. Although observers often bemoan the fact that the arts are not employed *more* prominently and in a more coordinated fashion in Jewish education, the programs that do exist provide both a base on which to build and insights into the variety of ways in which the arts and Jewish education can be brought together effectively.

This section provides a brief overview of some of the arts-oriented programs that currently exist within the Jewish educational landscape. The information was gathered from key

actors in the field who identified various organizations, initiatives, and individuals dedicated to expanding and enhancing the role of the arts in Jewish education. The program categories and specific examples presented below are far from exhaustive. But, they do constitute a representative sample of the kinds of programs that exist today and that can serve as a basis for further development.

There are a variety of types of arts-based educational programs, with some fluidity and overlap among them (i.e., a specific program may fall into more than one category). In addition, many institutions employ several different types of programs, adding to the overlap. Nonetheless, for analytic purposes, we can look at the various programs in four categories:

1. **Utilization of Existing Cultural Resources:** connects learners to the arts by linking them with Jewish cultural institutions. Educational settings work with existing cultural institutions, such as museums, musical groups, dance and theater companies to expose students to examples of Jewish artistic and cultural production.
2. **Engagement and Interaction with Artists:** provides students with long or short term engagement with a professional artist (or small

- ensemble) who brings a hands-on approach to a particular discipline and involves learners with that discipline as well as creating personal relationships with the learners.
3. **Integration of Arts in the Curriculum:** uses arts to help teach a specific Jewish educational curriculum that is either designed by outside experts or is developed by teachers who participate in appropriate professional development activities.
 4. **Arts as an Educational Organizing Principle:** represents institutions whose commitment to the arts is articulated throughout their vision and mission. These establishments use arts as a master lens through which all (or a substantial portion) of their educational activity is refracted.

In addition to these different types of programs, there is one other distinction that is important to note at the outset: between programs in which students experience the arts as “consumers” – attending performances, watching films, listening to music, viewing paintings – and those in which they participate as “producers,” making their own art, sometimes under the guidance of artists, and sometimes not. Again, some programs incorporate both of

these dimensions, while others focus on one or the other.

What follows is a brief overview of some of the programs operating today that illustrate these various modalities for bringing the arts and Jewish education into relationship with one another.

Utilization of Existing Cultural Resources

Museums, musical ensembles, and theater and dance companies are examples of existing cultural institutions that often interact with Jewish educational institutions seeking to integrate the arts into the education they offer. These frameworks provide educational and artistic support in several ways, both on- and off-site: by enabling students to visit exhibitions or attend performances, by operating special educational programs connected to these, by providing educational resources that schools and other institutions can use (e.g., web sites or DVDs), by offering professional development, and by coming into institutions to work directly with learners.

Interviewees identified a number of Jewish cultural centers that help students and teachers integrate the arts and Jewish learning. The Skirball Cultural Center and Zimmer Museum in California, Yad Vashem in Israel, and the Museum of Jewish

Heritage in New York are examples of institutions that offer workshops/professional development for teachers, tours for Jewish schools, teaching alternatives and online resources for teachers. Students get the opportunity to participate in gallery programs and performing arts programs that explore Jewish history and identity as well as embracing cultural diversity through the exploration of shared values. These interactions may take place in physical time and space or virtually.

The range of educational topics that can be addressed via museum-based or assisted programs is broad, including Jewish identity, history, rituals and traditions. Thanks to the Internet, for example, students can explore *The Shrine of the Book* and the Judaica collection of the Israel Museum, including a virtual exploration of a model of Jerusalem in the Late Second Temple Period. In *The Cultural Exchange: Jewish and Muslim Connections* program for 9-12th graders, The Jewish Museum in New York provides students with an opportunity to use objects and artifacts from the Museum's permanent collection to learn about the dynamic cultural exchange that occurred between Jews and Muslims in medieval Spain. Students recognize the possibility of working toward creating a community of tolerance and understanding in contemporary times. Prints, drawings, archeology, and

radio and television programs are all elements of interactive approaches to the teaching and learning process being employed by museums and shared with other institutions. For example, the Mizel Museum in Denver provides portable exhibits to schools and teaches participants through an interactive presentation of themes and rituals of Jewish identity and multiculturalism.

Cultural resources operate in a variety of ways. Some are well established institutions (i.e., museums) with large budgets, many programs, exhibits and a supply of resources. Other cultural resources are designed as organizations that provide performances and exhibits but have not attained institutional status. Educational institutions seek out these organizations to enrich their educational programs. Cultural organizations such as music, dance and theater groups offer programs and performances that link Jewish art, culture, history and text while stimulating interest and motivating learning in students. Storahelling, a NYC-based organization, makes ancient stories and traditions accessible for new generations by offering theatrical performances and teacher training programs targeting supplementary school Jewish educators. This innovative approach aims to reinvigorate the weekly synagogue Torah service, B'nai Mitzvah experiences, holiday

observances, and Biblical narratives generally through music, storytelling and interactive liturgy. The Girls Theater Project uses the transformative medium of theater to support girls, aged 11-16 in exploring themes of independence, self empowerment and personal insights into what being a Jewish girl means today. The Liz Lerman Dance Exchange is a professional company of dance artists that creates, performs, teaches, and engages people in making art. For example, a member of the Liz Lerman Dance Co. is teaching in the Hebrew school of a synagogue in the Washington, DC area. This type of exposure to dancers, musicians and artists, especially when it involves the students becoming performers themselves, allows educators to apply a number of educational theories. Howard Gardner's multiple intelligences theory is one method that expands curricula to include opportunities for students to develop and utilize a range of bodily-kinesthetic, aural, visual-spatial and intrapersonal skills.

Engagement and Interaction with Artists

In addition to making use of the resources offered by artistic and cultural groups and institutions, many Jewish educational institutions are now implementing programs that bring students into direct contact with

the artists themselves. Some of these are short-term encounters, often linked to performances, which give students the opportunity to interact with the writers, musicians, dancers, and artists and to experience their work and talents up close.

Longer-term encounters are also possible. Artist-in-residence (AIR) programs have become popular ways to bring artists and their practices to an educational setting. These programs allow visiting artists to work in schools, camps, and JCCs offering a hands-on approach to art. The goal is usually to afford children the opportunity to participate in art projects under the guidance of a serious artist based on what they are studying in the classroom - including Jewish studies. The goals of AIR projects are often both "educational" and "artistic": Many schools aim for the artist to integrate Jewish learning with the arts while helping both students and teachers use the processes and tools of the arts in a meaningful way. Park Avenue Synagogue in New York is an example of a Jewish institution that purposefully utilizes the arts by being the congregational home to a number of talented artists. Ellen Alt, Artist-in-Residence at P.A.S., expresses her imagination through multi-layered collage and mixed media works that have been exhibited internationally and are in the collection of the White House. She also creates art with

members of the congregation. For example, this year she is conducting a family art workshop for Passover, helping families create ritual objects.

Although AIR programs have become common in many educational settings, no two are alike. Some focus on only one discipline of the arts. Others are multi-disciplinary, including music, design, dance, and visual arts. Programs vary in duration and in the expectations they have for the artist and her role with the students and teachers. Some programs use artists to complement, reinforce and extend the learning that takes place in more conventional modes. Others see artists as naturally subversive. The LABA project at the 14th Street Y in New York City, for example, places artists in various institutional settings to help organizations “challenge conventional assumptions and advance new paradigms for Jewish life and contemporary culture.”

Most interviewees identified artists in residence as a valuable model of arts integration in Jewish education, but a number asserted the need for clearer standards and expectations to create the “right kinds” of artist in residence programs, ones that use artists effectively to transmit Jewish learning.

Integration of Arts in the Curriculum

Integration is a philosophy of teaching in which content is drawn from several subject areas to focus on a particular topic or theme. Rather than studying math or social studies in isolation, for example, a class might study a unit called The Sea, using math to calculate pressure at certain depths and social studies to understand why coastal and inland populations have different livelihoods (ASCD).

In arts integration, or “learning through the arts,” artistic media are used to teach specific subjects in the curriculum. While the art is certainly valued in its own right, the curricular goals are paramount as well. The Bible Raps Project, for example, is an innovative educational tool that provides a curriculum as well as live performances that use rap and hip hop to help students engage with and think more deeply about core Jewish texts.

Similarly, the Jewish Lens is a comprehensive curriculum for middle and high school students that uses the work of renowned photographer Zion Ozeri to stimulate exploration of Jewish values, identity, and tradition. With a comprehensive teacher training component, educators guide students in conducting research to learn more about the diverse Jewish communities reflected in Ozeri's photos. Students then focus on their

own communities - documenting their communal values on film and curating on-site exhibits of their work. The project culminates with an exhibition that ties together the work of students from all participating schools.

Another example of an arts-integration program in existence for ten years is the Reel Learning series developed by Avoda Arts. Reel Learning uses short films to spark meaningful connections to Jewish history, ethics and rituals; the companion study guides provide relevant extension activities and text studies, aimed at building critical thinking and media literacy skills. Part of Reel Learning's mission is to offer schools and community organizations the opportunity to work with Avoda Arts to bring a film-production workshop to students that will teach them the basics of film production (cinematography, editing, and screenwriting) all within a Jewish-learning context.

Commitment to Teacher Training and Professional Development

Effective curricular integration of the arts depends heavily on the knowledge and skills of the teachers involved. In practice, this means that professional development for teachers is critical, since few are naturally skilled in weaving together the

multiple content and pedagogical strands required to integrate the arts into their teaching in creative and sophisticated ways. In Jewish education, unfortunately, such professional development opportunities are not widespread. What is available is shared among a variety of institutions:

- museums, some of which reach out to schools to provide training in the arts;
- institutions of higher Jewish learning, such as HUC-JIR, Hebrew College and the Jewish Theological Seminary, which offers a class on “Exegesis Through the Arts”; and
- a diverse array of other organizations, such as StorahTelling, as noted above; ARTurn, founded by Presentense Fellow Ariel Doochin, whose primary purpose is to provide academic teachers in elementary, middle and Sunday schools affordable on-line art lessons to teach a valuable complementary art curriculum when funds are not available for a formal art teacher and program; and Avoda Arts, which together with StorahTelling, is currently serving as an educational resource provider to the New York Coalition of Innovating Congregations

"LOMED" program, which helps area congregations launch new models of Jewish education.

In addition, some Jewish educators have turned to secular institutions such as the Lincoln Center Institute in New York, which offers summer sessions and advanced level workshops that train teachers in aesthetic education, as well as preparing artists to work with classroom teachers to develop thematic units.

Project Zero, a research group at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, is another example of an institution that has investigated the development of learning processes in children, adults, and organizations since 1967. Project Zero's mission is to understand and enhance learning, thinking, and creativity in the arts, as well as humanistic and scientific disciplines, at the individual and institutional levels.

The good news today is the evident growing interest in using the arts in a serious and sustained way to enhance curriculum and teaching. The bad news is that there is still a long way to go in both curricular and professional development for the promise of this approach to be fully realized.

Arts as an Educational Organizing Principle

While many Jewish educational institutions today seek to expose students to the arts or to make use of them in a variety of ways to motivate and enrich the learning process, there are only a relative handful whose vision and mission include a commitment to utilizing the arts in all aspects of their curriculum, emphasizing artistic expression, developing aesthetic appreciation while deepening Jewish knowledge through this medium. For these institutions, the arts are a core educational organizing principle. Gann Academy, a pluralistic day high school in the Boston area, is one of these institutions. Its dedication to the arts is reflected in a well-developed Arts department that includes a required number of academic courses, clubs and performing organizations. Another Boston area day school for younger students, the Jewish Community Day School, offers a full dance, music and visual arts program. Toronto's Heschel Day School is perhaps the model of a day school committed to arts integration in all aspects of its curriculum, a commitment that also affects the staff it hires, who must have the ability to teach in this fashion.

Informal Jewish education also serves as an arena for a number of

programs built around the arts at their core. BIMA at Brandeis University, founded by Rabbi Daniel Lehmann who served also as the first head of the Gann Academy, is a summer arts institute for high school students that focuses on film, music, theater, visual arts and writing. Its mission is “to guide students as they develop their imaginative and artistic faculties and explore the relevance of Jewish tradition to their lives.” The JCC Association followed up on its highly successful JCC Maccabi Youth Games (an athletic competition) with a multi-day ArtsFest that brought together Jewish teen artists in a variety of disciplines. Other programs focus on specific media, such as the San Francisco Jewish Film Festival’s New Jewish Filmmaking Project, in which a diverse group of Jewish teens, closely guided by a team of professional filmmakers, present their own resonant visions of American Jewish life. Since 2002, the New Jewish Filmmaking Project films have reached hundreds of thousands of viewers through public television broadcasts and film festival and educational screenings.

Institutions and programs like these, though perhaps not large in number, provide dramatic evidence that the arts are indeed far more than a frill or an add-on, but rather can serve as a powerful vehicle for Jewish self-discovery, self-expression, and growth.

The Role of Foundations and Other Support Frameworks

The extent to which educational institutions take advantage of the opportunities that exist to use the arts as part of their learning and teaching depends on a number of factors including the institution’s mission, time constraints, the accessibility of artists and artistic product, its understanding of and commitment to the role of arts in education, the sentiments of its constituencies, and, of course, financial resources. What this means is that any strategy to enhance the role of the arts in Jewish education must include tactics for increasing community and financial support for this goal.

The role of foundations, which serve not only as funders but as signals of community interest, is central in this context. A number of Jewish foundations have made commitments to arts dissemination and education and fund some of the programs mentioned above. Foundations interested in enhancing informal Jewish education fund creative programming that integrates the Arts. One such example is The Foundation for Jewish Camp. The Foundation for Jewish Culture supports artists and scholars who explore the fabric of Jewish life, creating work that is both

contemporary and profound. An example of the collaborative approach among organizations is The Six Points Fellowship for Emerging Jewish Artists, an innovative strategic partnership of Avoda Arts, Foundation for Jewish Culture, and JDub Records, and is made possible with major funding from UJA-Federation of New York. It supports individual artists in the New York area who want to develop new projects with a Jewish focus, theme, or element. These artists can then be a potential teaching pool in Jewish educational institutions.

Israel Engagement Through the Arts

Israel educational programming consists of a major part of the Jewish experience for students in the Diaspora. However, modern day Israel has created a challenge for educators in finding new and creative ways to expose students to the complexities of Israel while simultaneously maintaining a connection to their Jewish counterparts in Israel. Foundations, federations, schools and camps have allocated funding to develop educational material, partnerships and travel experiences to strengthen, understand, and maintain this connection. The advent of technology has improved the ability to present Israel education in creative ways with

websites that offer curriculum, articles, and educational resources to help educators teach about modern day Israel. An example of this is Datajem, JAFI's online database of Jewish educational materials, includes listings of curriculum, books, videos etc. on Israeli and Arab-Israeli conflict. The Melitz Resource site also offers unique educational tools that can serve as a basis for educational programming on the Jewish experience and Israel. They are designed for use in the home as well as in schools, community centers, camps and other educational settings.

Among the new ways of approaching Israel education is the integration of arts and culture into curriculum. This approach allows educators to relate the importance of Israel and Jewish identity without resorting to a traditional history lesson. The respondents identified a number of programs and organizations that use this innovative approach that provides a rich, multi layered approach in teaching Israel education. One such example is The Kehillah Partnership of Northern New Jersey an innovative, community-wide effort to build a stronger and more engaged Jewish community across institutional and denominational lines. In 2007 The Kehillah Partnership created a unique educational program with exciting appeal for young students. Eight cultural arts specialists – mostly young and hip innovative

programmers who are uniquely appealing to sixth graders (the target group) - were hired to direct the program's cultural arts offerings (e.g. music, videography, cartooning, culinary arts, dance), all focused on the theme of *Israel at 60*.

Omanoot is a young non-profit organization, based in Tel Aviv, Israel formed to promote and teach about Israeli culture through classic and contemporary Israeli art in order to strengthen connections to Israel as well as Jewish identity. Omanoot offers access to Israeli art (film, music and visual arts), creates comprehensive educational materials based on Israeli artwork and designs and coordinates educational and arts and culture programming for organized groups coming to Israel.

Another example of collaborative effort between North America and Israel is Makom- the Israel Engagement Network. Since 2004 this network has involved 13 Federations and inspired new initiatives that have significantly advanced the field of Israel education, dedicating a place for Arts and culture. Creating dynamic new approaches and models for Israel education is on the agenda for many organizations and the Arts afford a creative way to present the diversity and complexity of Israeli society and its citizens.

One of the largest organized residency programs of Israeli artists ever to launch in the U.S., the

Schusterman Visiting Artist Program, begun in Fall 2008, offers an unprecedented opportunity for Americans to experience Israeli culture. The Charles and Lynn Schusterman Family Foundation supports the new Schusterman Visiting Artists Program to provide Israeli artists from various disciplines with time spent in North America. The goal of the new program is to engage American audiences with Israeli artists, musicians, filmmakers, writers, and choreographers. The program has a special focus on fostering high levels of interaction between the artists and the local communities where they are based.

interview data

Gaps in the Current Activity

As we have seen, Jewish education already benefits from a variety of programs that integrate the arts into learning and teaching. Nonetheless, many areas in this domain remain underdeveloped. The exemplary programs that exist are scattered and often small, certainly in relation to the expanse of the field of Jewish education. The more than two

dozen educators and artists whom we interviewed were asked what they saw as the critical gaps and needs in the field. What would it take to make the arts a thriving and prominent dimension of Jewish educational activity? The respondents identified six major areas of need that must be addressed in order for the arts to fulfill their potential in enriching Jewish education:

1. increasing the value that the Jewish community places on the arts as a mode of learning,
2. more and better training for educators and artists,
3. focusing attention on particular critical age groups,
4. expanding the utilization of some specific art forms,
5. incorporating students' secular interests, and
6. heightening collaboration.

A number of the respondents shared the sentiment that the Jewish community does not place enough value on art. One artist said that she would like to have, "a welcoming relationship from the community to the most contemporary, provocative, fabulous, Jewish artists we have." Similarly, an educator noted that "People who are serious about art leave the Jewish community. It's just not a place to do it. If it's done in a way where they [the artists] feel like you [the community] have an agenda for their art, that's the death knell." Many respondents expressed the feeling

that in order for art to be a meaningful component of Jewish education, the community, parents, educators, and administrators all need to realize its intrinsic value.

The need for more training for both educators and artists was the most frequently mentioned gap affecting how the arts and Jewish education are linked today. Many respondents asserted that Jewish educators and artists need to better understand and appreciate one another, the work that each does, and the knowledge and skills required to be effective in blending the two domains. As one respondent said, "Artists need enough of a knowledge base of Jewish history and culture so that they can inject that into the work that they do with students." Similarly, some respondents pointed to a lack of educators who are not only Judaically knowledgeable, but also have a high degree of artistic accomplishment and capability. Beyond needing some level of expertise in the two specific arenas of Jewish learning and the arts, educators must also know how to combine their knowledge to make the best use of the arts in their teaching. Interviewees expressed a need for both expanded opportunities and higher quality in the training of these educators.

Respondents also emphasized the underutilization of the arts within particular age groups. The b'nai mitzvah years were

specifically highlighted as a period in the Jewish educational life span that needs to be strengthened, and several of the interviewees spoke about this life cycle event as a potential vehicle for personal and artistic exploration. As one respondent put it, speaking of the bar or bat mitzvah, "They are the storyteller for the day." Another respondent suggested that students personally create something as a supplement to bar and bat mitzvah training. Older teens were another age group that respondents identified as being underserved with respect to the arts. Older students who are grappling with more complicated texts need more sophisticated ways of bringing the arts to bear in their learning. Several interviewees also spoke about how the bar needs to be raised for students' own artistic efforts. The quality of the art must be appropriate to the age of the students. "There has to be a certain level of art. If the level of arts experience isn't developmentally appropriate for the kids, they won't take it seriously and the connection won't resonate with them," one respondent noted.

Several respondents suggested that specific art forms, especially theater, are being underutilized in Jewish education. One interviewee emphasized the concepts of reenactment and storytelling as being central to Judaism and Jewish education. She explained

When we look at how

we train teachers, we need to train them to create theater. Jewish education is in many ways the creation of theater, but we ask the audience to come on stage. We even create a cast of characters: the four sons, Pharaoh, Eliyahu. How do we help our educators and parents to create that theater and sense of drama with our children?

Beyond using reenactment as a mode of education, some respondents noted a specific need for new Jewish theatrical texts. "People put on the same two or three plays every year. Or they don't do plays or productions of Jewish content at all," one respondent noted. Another echoed this sentiment in saying that drama can be used to do more than simply "put on a show."

In addition to theater, technology was also cited as being underutilized in Jewish education. One respondent said that new media has been neglected and another spoke about a program that she implemented that involved creating a website to document the students' work. Film, humor, literature, calligraphy, and paper cutting were other arts that respondents mentioned as holding greater potential for use in Jewish education.

Incorporating students' secular artistic interests into their Jewish education is another area that was suggested as being underdeveloped. Taking a student's preexisting interests into account could be a useful way of melding his or her passion with Jewish learning, and may be especially important when Jewish education is seen as competing for attention with other activities. A talent and passion for dance, one respondent suggested, could be incorporated into the bar or bat mitzvah, instead of the student having to sacrifice one interest for the sake of the other. As this respondent said of students, "They are forced to choose between their art and Jewish studies, and they shouldn't have to do that." Another respondent noted, "Bringing the arts into a supplementary program would benefit it because it could reinforce activities that kids are already interested in. If kids are already going to dance or art class, if that can be incorporated in what they are learning, they would look forward more to Hebrew school."

Many of the gaps that were identified were seen as reflecting a lack of collaboration and sharing of ideas within the field. One respondent spoke about the need for a basic body of knowledge on the arts in Jewish education. There are people studying and writing in this field, she said, but no specific articulation of their work for high school students and

educators to use as a reference. Many of the interviewees bemoaned the lack of visibility and networking within the field. Several interviewees cited the questions, "How do I get my work out there?" and "How do I connect with other teachers, artists, and communities?" as coming up repeatedly. The use of technology not just as a tool in the classroom but also as a resource for educators was mentioned several times.

Collaborating through the sharing of ideas and resources is a recurring theme in these interviews, and there is a need for a mechanism to initiate relationships and foster partnerships.

New Ideas/Recommendations for Arts in Jewish Education

In addition to identifying gaps and areas where additional attention is needed in order to maximize the role and impact of the arts in Jewish education, interviewees were asked to suggest concrete strategies for augmenting this role and impact. Many specific suggestions were elicited, most falling into five major categories:

1. advocacy,
2. networking,
3. connecting and educating artists and educators,
4. increasing awareness of art as an alternative mode of learning, and

5. proposals for new programs and institutions.

Perhaps the most fundamental of the respondents' suggestions was the need for advocacy for the arts in Jewish education. As one interviewee stated, "The arts are basic to the basic." Another respondent said, "To be honest, it wouldn't hurt to have more of the intellectually capable philosophers in the world to talk about the value of artistic practice." In a similar vein, two respondents noted that the people working in this field need supporters and funders to think of enhancing arts in Jewish education as a long-term investment and to understand that any change will take many years. If the arts are going to be used to their full potential, the entire community must embrace them as a priority in Jewish education.

A nearly ubiquitous theme in these interviews was to improve networking and collaboration. The need for a centralized place for the sharing of ideas and new developments in the field was repeatedly emphasized. Respondents suggested databases, conferences, retreats, listservs, and websites to be used as resources for artists and educators as ways to address this need. One respondent suggested having a "point person" for the arts in a number of cities across the country, not just in New York and Los Angeles. Another suggested a third party to facilitate the relationship between a

Jewish community and himself as an artist. Even a mailing list of synagogues who are interested in the programs he could offer, this respondent suggested, would be a starting place for forging these relationships. As a parallel to this suggestion, an educator said that a directory of artists who would like to work in an educational setting would be a useful resource. One respondent proposed taking a survey of congregations to find communities that are interested and willing to participate in artistic programming.

In addition to facilitating connections, many respondents said that they would like to see new ways of sharing ideas and fostering more cooperative activity. There is a lot happening, they noted, but not enough exchange of important information. Creating a coalition of organizations that are obligated to distribute each other's work was one idea of how to facilitate collaboration. Many respondents noted that if a program works, it should be made replicable so that other organizations can use it in their own programming. One respondent commented, "It's hard to get institutions to share their wealth. If we want to make systemic change, we have to find a way to demystify how these programs work." Creating manuals or guides was suggested as one way to make programs accessible to more communities. Having someone write about what is

happening in the field, documenting the “techniques, methodologies, and processes” was another idea that could aid in filling the gap in communication and collaboration.

To address the need for more training, several interviewees suggested education programs and professional development for artists and partnerships between artists and educators. One person suggested a regional or national training workshop on using the arts in Jewish education. Other similar ideas included fellowship programs, regular summer institutes, artists in residence, paid internships for artists, and having artists and education graduate students meet before they enter the field. Extending training to the university and graduate level was another suggestion. This respondent proposed having graduate schools of education offer a track in partnership with art schools to expand arts training for educators. One respondent noted that at her institution, they always have an art teacher available to other educators to assist them in lesson planning. These suggestions point to forging partnerships between artists and educators as a way to enhance teachers’ capabilities in this area.

Several interviewees emphasized that the arts are an alternative mode of understanding and that recognizing this can set the stage for bringing art far more

centrally into the core learning process. As one respondent articulated, we need to “become more tactile in our approach. The Jewish community needs to become more sensitive to the different pathways that people have for connection.” One interviewee said that the Jewish community is not thinking of the arts as “an interpretive tool.” He explained, “We always ask ‘What does Rashi say?’ I’m looking forward to the day when we say, ‘What does the musician say?’ ‘How does the choreographer see the story of Jacob wrestling with angel?’” Another respondent shared an anecdotal example of using the arts in this manner: The teacher had a student who was struggling with writing a paper. The teacher knew that the student was talented in the visual arts and suggested that she create a sculpture relating to the assigned topic and explain it to the class. After the student successfully completed the assignment, the teacher told her to write down everything that she had just said to the class. The student easily wrote a ten page paper.

Another story involved a student who wrote rap songs as a way of doing a d’var Torah. Several respondents also noted the possibilities of using art in teaching prayer. Another explained that the arts can be used as a tool for deepening concentration. This respondent said that she once watched a teacher invite her students

to play with clay while they had a class discussion about a complex concept. This alternative use of the arts helped students who usually had trouble sitting still stay focused on the topic. These examples show the arts functioning as another point of access for students with different learning styles within the context of Jewish education.

The respondents also had many ideas of specific ways to build on the current uses of arts in Jewish education. Several of these ideas involve creating relationships between American and Israeli students. One suggestion was creating arts-based trips to Israel.¹ Another interviewee noted, "What better way would there be than to have a conversation through the arts about peace?"

Other ideas included the creation of new programs and institutions. A not for profit Jewish performing arts camp is one example. Another respondent said that there needs to be a place where serious Jewish study can take place with serious art. "There need to be venues," he said, "where kids feel that the Jewish community believes in them as artists, but they do not have to produce Jewish art." This respondent

suggested initiating a national arts competition for Jewish students in which a group of juried artists select artwork that would travel to Jewish communities, not necessarily because it has Jewish content, but because it is high quality art.

There is also a need for programs that serve specific age groups. An art competition could be administered at the college level in addition to high school. The idea of mentorship programs was also mentioned several times. Artists could mentor college students, and college students could mentor high school students. These relationships would be a way to inspire students and to give them an opportunity to learn from more experienced artists. Another specific new model that was suggested was having educators and artists in the classroom at the same time to expose students to interdisciplinary learning. This respondent recounted that in studying the Book of Jonah, he had students in the classroom with a rabbi, a writer, an actress who also served as a director, and a musician. The artists and students wrote a musical together based on the Book of Jonah.

¹ Such trips do currently exist, though they involve relatively small numbers of young people. The comment may illustrate both the fact that many programs in this arena remain small and that knowledge of individual programs may not be widespread.

conclusion

Two conclusions stand out based on the interviews we conducted with artists, educators, and observers as well as our brief scan of the current landscape for the arts and Jewish education:

The arts hold great potential for enriching Jewish education. The arts are an integral part of Jewish life and must therefore also be a significant component of Jewish education. If students are being taught how to live Jewish lives, their education will not be complete without the arts. As one respondent noted, "The extent to which we as Jews have both art and Jewish life has a great deal to do with being attuned to the sacred and the sublime." Art in Jewish education reaches beyond being another mode of transmitting knowledge. It also has a significant impact on Jewish identity development.

There is ample room for new initiatives to expand the role and impact of the arts. To realize this potential, the Jewish community as a whole must embrace the arts as a crucial component of Jewish education, and artists and educators need to establish long-term,

meaningful partnerships in this endeavor.

The programs that exist today, the talented educators and artists involved in them, and the small, but dedicated, group of advocates and supporters for the arts in Jewish education constitute a solid base upon which to build. The challenge now is to define an agenda for how to move forward and to secure the resources necessary to implement this agenda. The result, we can be confident, will be richer Jewish educational opportunities for learners of every age and in every setting.