INSTRUCTIONS FROM AUTHOR TO LIBRARY FOR THESES AND PRIZE ESSAYS

AUTHOR _Jessica Locketz_

TITLE _Toward an Effective Jewish Education for the Middle School Child_

TYPE OF THESIS: Ph.D. [ ]   D.H.L. [ ]   Rabbinic [X]

Master's [ ]   Prize Essay [ ]

1. May circulate [X]   ) Not necessary
) for Ph.D.
2. Is restricted [ ] for ___ years.   ) thesis

   Note: The Library shall respect restrictions placed on theses
          or prize essays for a period of no more than ten years.

   I understand that the Library may make a photocopy of my thesis
   for security purposes.

3. The Library may sell photocopies of my thesis. ___   X
                                                   yes   no

_3/1/99_   _Jessica E. Locketz_
Date   Signature of Author

Toward an Effective Jewish Education for the Middle School Child

Jessica Locketz

Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for Ordination

Hebrew Union College - Jewish Institute of Religion

1999

Referee, Rabbi Samuel K. Joseph

DIGEST

The Jewish supplementary school is an institution that all too often fails to teach its students what they need to know about Judaism. Add to that the fact that the middle school child is the most difficult to teach in the supplementary school setting, and one can see why the supplementary middle school needs to be improved.

This thesis explores ways in which Jewish educators can bring innovation that works to the religious school classrooms. There are two approaches to be looked at here: the first involves a better understanding of the developmental needs of the students, and the second embraces the success found within the general, full-time school in working with this particular age group.

However, improving the students' experiences within the supplementary school is only part of the goal. In bringing true innovation to the classroom, educators can also enhance the bar/bat mitzvah experience so that it has meaning for both students and their families, and instill within middle schoolers the Jewish concept of lifelong learning, of continuing one's Jewish education beyond the formal religious school years.

Chapter one provides an overview of six developmental theorists and their theories as they apply to the early adolescent. Chapter two looks at the institution of the middle school, how it emerged from the junior high school and what benefit it offers to its students. Chapter three explores what entitles a middle school to be considered 'good.' It looks at innovations that have been

successfully implemented into the general, full-time school. Chapter four deals with the supplementary school itself: its history, its problems, and its purpose. Chapter five attempts to tie everything together, to demonstrate how developmental theory used in conjunction with the best that the general, full-time school has to offer, translates into the supplementary school.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PREFACE: A WORD ABOUT THE MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENT

Who is the middle school student?

It is a child who is an early adolescent, an individual living in that border between childhood and full fledged adolescence. Aged from eleven to fourteen years old, the middle school student is bombarded by change - faced with sudden cognitive, affective and physical growth.

Adolescence, as a life span stage, is a relatively new stage in our life cycle of existence. Until recently, it was a time not recognized in one's development. Knowing its history is equally important as identifying its characteristics in understanding why adolescence is a subject to be considered in school reform. A brief historical overview of the development of the stage, followed by a listing of the basic tenets of adolescence, will help the reader to understand with whom this thesis deals.

Life's Newest Stage

At the turn of the last century, G. Stanley Hall coined the phrase "adolescence." Because of his monumental work also titled *Adolescence*, published in 1904, he is referred to as the "father of the scientific study of adolescence".[1] He is credited with not only the restructuring of society's thinking about adolescents, but also with the voicing of the idea that the psychology of adolescence should be considered when planning for their educational needs.[2]

---

[1] John W. Santrock, *Adolescence*, 7th ed., (New York: McGraw Hill, 1997) 11.
[2] The reorganization movement was helped tremendously by the publication of Hall's

What prompted Hall to observe teenagers? He saw around him a changing society at a loss with what to do with a group of people no longer needed in the work force. Young people, who had previously worked from a very early age, suddenly found themselves with an overabundance of free time before they had to enter into the 'real world.' As the increasing prosperity of the industrial age hit the nation, youth lasted longer, and adulthood came later. Young people seemed to need this period of time between their exit from the days of childhood and their entrance into the responsibilities and duties of adulthood.[3]

How was this time to be used? It was meant to provide the young person, the adolescent, with the time needed to learn the particulars of the various social roles, and the opportunity to master the skills necessary to function, as independent adults.[4] The problem was, however, the fact that this period of adolescence covered not only a wide range of abilities, but also a range of ages. What Hall and others like him discovered was that within the span of adolescence itself there existed subsets of development, mini-phases within the all encompassing stage. One term could not adequately describe the many aspects of adolescence.

In light of this realization, half a century after Hall's work was published, Donald H. Eichorn termed the phrase 'transescence'. By it he meant to further pinpoint the group of students often labeled as 'early adolescents.' Finding that

---

Adolescence, in 1904.
[3] Erik H. Erikson, *Childhood and Society*, 3rd ed. (W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1963), 20.
[4] Raphael Arzt, "Jewish Education: A Perspective on Strategies and Tactics," *Studies in Jewish Education* (1983), 139.

the term failed to adequately describe the uniqueness of the age group, Eichorn

felt that another demarcation was needed. His alternative 'transescence', can be

defined as "the stage of development which begins prior to the onset of puberty

and extends through the early stages of adolescence."[5] The early adolescent,

the transescent, the middle school student, all name the age group that many

educators have found to be the most difficult with which to work.

The Hardships of Adolescence

Much has been written in an attempt to explain the adolescent

phenomenon. For adolescence is not an easy time. Much change occurs in the

body, and not all of it is a pleasant experience. Biologically, the early years of

adolescence is a period of tremendous growth. At no other time during a

person's life, after infancy, does an individual grow at such a fast rate. There are

many side effects to this rapid growth. Students will have an increased appetite,

and therefore may be hungry when it is not convenient for them to eat. Many will

experience growing pains and periods of extreme fatigue making it difficult for

middle school students to stay awake.

Oftentimes the parts of the body grow at different rates, causing one to

feel self conscious of the awkwardness involved in having feet that are too big,

ears that stick out, or breasts that have developed earlier than those of

---

[5] Donald H. Eichhorn, *The Middle School* (New York: Center for Applied Research in Education), 1966.

classmates and friends. As a result, for many adolescents, adolescence is a time of embarrassment and painful feelings of self consciousness.[6]

Peer pressure becomes a tremendous burden during these years. To be different is difficult. Adolescents want to fit in, they do not want to stand out as possible objects of ridicule. For it is a time when unfortunately, students do not always treat each other well. They push limits, act out, and act indifferently toward adult authority. What Berla, Henderson and Kewersky call the 'nerd instinct' is strong. It is important to belong to the right group.[7] The groups, however, change often. It is quite common for this age group to change friends frequently. This can create feelings of exclusion as relationships change and someone is invariably left out of the loop.

Early adolescents also have difficulty controlling their emotions. They are prone to emotive outbursts without warning, and overly emotional concerns about body changes, school work and peer relationships. At this age students tend to have a lot of anxiety, concern over how they act and are perceived for their actions. They often get upset, and are easily angered if things do not go the way they expect.

In essence, adolescence is a time of confusion. Adolescents act inconsistently, in often inexplicable ways. Berla, Henderson and Kewersky provide some examples which I have adapted for use here:

adolescents often fluctuate between bipolar like behavior, they

---

[6] Joan Lipsitz, *Successful Schools for Young Adolescents,* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books, 1984). 9.

[7] Nancy Berla, Anne T. Henderson and William Kewersky, *The Middle School Years: A Parent's Handbook.* (The National Committee for Citizens in Education, 1989.1989), 8.

experience high levels of emotional and physical energy combined with long periods of 'hanging out' and doing nothing productive by adult standards; they feel physically immortal, they indulge in risk-taking behavior yet having feelings that are easily hurt; they desire to be more independent from their families, yet need to be nurtured and protected; they tend to be self-absorbed and crave privacy but are greatly concerned about being accepted by the group; and finally, they demand privileges but avoid responsibility, yet they develop a deep concern for social issues and others.[8]

Such behavior is hardly surprising when we look at the mixed messages that society gives. We label adolescence as the 'useless age'. We don't rely on them to help in homes, stores, or within our community. They can't legally work and yet we want them to be productive. Instead of providing clear expectations, society's view of adolescents only adds to the general confusion of those going through it.

The Challenge

Today, children are entering adolescence earlier than ever before. Writes Lipsitz:

> Records indicate that the onset of puberty has occurred four months earlier every decade since 1840. [Even if, as it now appears, this trend has stopped and the age of menarche (first menstrual period) remains approximately twelve and a half,] young adolescents are biologically more than four years older than adolescents in the mid-nineteenth century, for whom the average age of menarche was seventeen. Biologically, today's young adolescents are approximately two years in advance of the young people for whom the first junior high schools in America were established...

However, as noted above, there remains a contradiction between the physically maturity of today's teenagers and the way we as a society treat them.

---

[8] *Ibid.,* 6.

They are capable of reproduction at what to many adults seems a shockingly early age. Socially, however, we consider them younger than their grandparents and give them fewer outlets for responsible social behavior... They are at once socially younger and biologically older.[9]

Adolescents look older; they are more physically mature than teenagers once were. Yet, they still act like teenagers. How then are we to treat them?

That is the pressing question. The problem is further complicated by the fact that adolescents mature at vastly different rates. This creates a tension in the educational endeavor, especially within schools designed for young adolescents. Schools are called upon to establish programs that will fulfill the needs of all students based on their levels of social and physical development. It is a nearly impossible task however, because of the varying levels of the students.

The high variability in age of attainment of formal operations, then, indicates that we cannot equate a cognitive stage with a definite age period. Puberty... and the transition from childhood to adult status are all components of adolescence variable in time and in their relations to one another...[10]

The challenge then, lies in creating programs that engage all students, regardless of their place on the developmental scale.

As educators, we struggle to design schools and implement programs that will fulfill the needs of all our students. The challenge to succeed is ours.

---

[9] Lipsitz, 6.

[10] Ralph L. Mosher, ed., *Adolescents Development and Education: A Janus Knot.* (Berkeley, CA: McCutehan Publishing Corp., 1979), 80.

INTRODUCTION

In 1966, Richard Wynn wrote of Donald H. Eichhorn that "he prefers the word *improvement* because this concept, unlike *innovation* embraces not mere change *for the better.*"[1] Today, Jewish educators and rabbis throughout this country echo Eichhorn's words. The Jewish supplementary school as an institution is badly in need of not only innovation, but true improvement.

The middle school child is the most difficult to teach in the Jewish supplementary school setting. The reasons are many and complex. Some of them have to do with the nature of the student. It is indeed a difficult age. Eichhorn terms it 'the stage of Transescence,' the stage of development which begins prior to puberty and extends through the early stages of adolescence. Jean Piaget refers to this time in a child's life as the beginning of the 'formal operational' stage. It is the time when abstract thinking skills develop along with concerns over identity and social belonging. Erik Erikson presents this stage of early adolescence as the time in a student's psychosocial development that includes the sorting out of one's individual identity versus the expected role in the community. This tension can cause much confusion within the student and often surfaces as behaviors that are trying within the confines of the classroom.

However, understanding the developmental issues with which the middle school student is confronted is only half the solution. Once we know why our students act as they do, how can we educate them successfully within the

---

[1] Donald H. Eichhorn, *The Middle School* (New York: The Center for Applied Research in Education, Inc., 1966), v.

supplementary religious school? We do have a model to follow, for the general, full-time school has found some semblance of success with this age group. Much has been done to figure out how to make middle level schools places where learning supersedes disciplinary measures. Much has been implemented to make the middle school classroom a true learning environment.

Unfortunately, for the most part, the supplementary school has not followed the example set by the general, full-time school. Instead, the supplementary school as an institution has continued to struggle, to try new tactics and measures while remaining uncertain of success. The truth is that our Jewish middle level religious school programs all too often fail to hold students' interest, and to meet educators' expectations.

How can we as Jewish educators meet the challenge? How can we make the Jewish supplementary school experience a meaningful one? How can we enhance the bar/bat mitzvah experience so that it has meaning for both students and their families? How do we make our schools places where students want to continue to attend after they become bar or bat mitzvah? Finally, how do we instill within middle schooler the Jewish concept of lifelong learning, of continuing one's Jewish education beyond the formal religious school years?

These are the questions I hope to answer.

CHAPTER ONE: Developmental Theorists and Their Theories: What They
Have to Say About the Middle School Student

Anita Woolfolk defines developmentally appropriate education as "educational programs and activities designed to meet the cognitive, emotional, social, and physical needs of students."[1] We as educators have to meet students at their level. We have to teach what they are capable of learning. A closer look at some of the main developmental theorists and their theories will present guidelines as to the nature of the material and the methods for transmitting it.

Jean Piaget

We begin with Jean Piaget, the man credited with pioneering the study of developmental learning. He was primarily concerned with learning how we process information. He wanted to know how we think, focusing on how individuals digest data. He concentrated on understanding how facts enter the mind, how such information is stored and transformed, and how it is retrieved to perform complex activities such as problem solving and reasoning.[2] From his work, Piaget concluded that the acquisition of knowledge comes through different cognitive modalities at different age levels.[3] In short, individuals at each level learn differently. Age and stage of life helps to dictate one's method of

---

[1] Anita Woolfolk, *Educational Psychology,* 7th ed. (Prentice Hall, 1997).
[2] Santrock, *Adolescence,* 7th ed. (New York: McGraw Hill, 1997), 1.
[3] Irving E. Sigel, "The Piagetian System and the World of Education," *Studies in Cognitive Development: Essays in Honor of Jean Piaget,* eds. David Elkind and John H. Flavell. (New York: Oxford University Press, Inc., 1969), 468.

learning and capability for understanding.

Piaget developed a systematic approach to the process of intellectual growth. He divided our cognitive development into four stages. The first two, the sensorimotor and pre-operational stages are of little importance to this thesis. However the last two stages, the concrete and formal stages, are integral to understanding the cognitive development of the middle school student. These final stages encapsulate the intellectual capabilities and growth of the early adolescent.

Going Through the Stages

Before we take a look at the two stages having to do with early adolescence, we will first explore the general qualities of Piaget's stages. Said differently, there are "invariant functions", non-changing characteristics, that the stages have in common. There are two things that happen regardless of the stage or level of the child: organization and adaptation.[4] The first principle, organization, has to do with the way we organize our thoughts. They tend to fall into psychological structures known as *schema* or *schemata.* These become the building blocks of our thinking, the pieces that fall together into complete ideas and concepts.

The second rudiment, adaptation, involves the surrounding environment and how we acclimate ourselves to its intellectual stimuli. There are two ways in which we adapt - through either assimilation or accommodation.[5] Through

---

[4] Woolfolk, 28.
[5] *Ibid.*, 29.

2

assimilation, one uses existing schemata to make sense of the world, trying to understand something new by fitting it into what we already know. An example of this is a young child who sees a skunk and immediately assumes that it is a cat. Why is this the case? The child is incapable of understanding that since it does not quite look like a cat, it is not a cat. Instead, because it slightly resembles an animal which one can readily identify, it makes sense to the child that it indeed is the same animal. Accommodation occurs when a person must exchange existing schemata for new ones in order to respond to a new situation. In other words, the individual is adjusting their thinking in order to make it fit the information just received. At each stage we organize new information in an attempt to adapt to our environment. These processes never end. They begin anew with each stage we encounter.

Piaget's stages are not merely systematic, they are invariant as well. Each person passes through the stages in approximately the same way. There is a hierarchy, each stage is more complex and sophisticated than the one before it. Furthermore, a person must proceed through the stages in sequential order.[6]

Therefore, it would seem that all people go through the four stages in exactly the same way, as part of a continuous process. And yet, the individual's achievement may be rather discontinuous, subject to spurts and plateaus of both frustration and success.[7] For individuals may go through long periods of transition between the stages - a person may show characteristics of one stage

---

[6] V. P. Varma and P. Williams, *Piaget: Psychology And Education.* (London: Hodden & Stoughton, 1976), 15.

[7] Sigel, 468.

in one situation but characteristics of a lower or higher stage in other situations. The result? Knowing an individual's age is no guarantee of knowing that person's level of cognitive development.

From One Stage to the Next...

How exactly does one move from one stage to another? Piaget identified four factors that interact to influence changes in thinking that necessitate the moving from one stage to the next. He writes of the interaction between biological maturation, activity, social experiences, and equilibrium.[8] What does he mean by these terms? The first needs no explanation, since its title is precisely what is meant. The second factor, that of activity, is closely related to the first. Piaget notes that with physical maturation comes an increased ability to interact with one's environment. He provides an example of the seesaw. As a child grows, he or she learns to balance on one end of the seesaw, a skill that comes only with increased awareness of oneself - both physically and cognitively. The third factor, social experiences, suggests that there is much to learn from our social encounters. Our culture too, has much to transmit and contribute to our growth.[9] And finally, the fourth, equilibrium, implies a resolution, a triumphing over the conflict between one's known organization of thought and new information which does not fit along with it. It is the achievement of balance between our thought and the environment around us.[10]

---

[8] Woolfolk, 27.
[9] *Ibid.*, 28. Piaget is quick to remind us that the amount we can learn through our social encounters is indeed limited by our cognitive development. Those at a higher stage will receive more than those at a lower level.
[10]Woolfolk, 29.

4

These factors move us from one stage to the next. Each contributes to the resolution of the conflict or tension at hand. But what exactly is the conflict to be resolved? What is the nature of that tension that causes disequalibrium within us? Essentially, tension arises when new information challenges the current thinking modes and capabilities of the student. The student then, must work out a new way to process the information. The student must look beyond the methods available to seek different types of understanding. This process of 'stretching the mind' is necessary for developmental growth:

> All students need to... test their thinking, to be challenged, to receive feedback, and to watch how others work out problems. Disequilibrium is often set in motion quite naturally when the teacher or another student suggests a new way of thinking about something.[11]

Disequilibrium, then, is what is needed to push the student into a higher mode of learning. Without this tension in need of resolution, a student may become stuck at a level far below his cognitive capabilities.

With that said, let us now examine the stages which our middle school student may encounter.

Concrete Operations

This is the third stage of Piaget's developmental program. It occurs primarily during the later elementary and middle school years. It is identifiable by a few basic characteristics. These include the recognition of the logical stability of the physical world, an understanding of the concept of conservation[12], and the

---

[11] *Ibid.*, 41.
[12] Defined on page 7.

realization that elements can be changed, and that those changes can be reversed. It is a stage made up of operations - mental actions that allow the child to do mentally what was done physically before.[13] Now what a child once did by hand can be mentally visualized. A good example is found in the area of simple mathematics. Whereas previously, children would use their fingers as counting tools, now they can find the answer without physically moving their fingers. Children at this stage can visualize the problem in their head, and solve it without physical aids. As this illustrates, this visualization is limited to thinking about the concrete situations and things of which the child is aware.[14]

This ability to engage in directed problem solving does not come without the assistance of certain schemata particular to this stage. These "building blocks" provide the student with the necessary tools for replacing intuitive reasoning with a newfound ability to reason logically.[15] An important operation mastered at this stage is that of classification.[16] It is a skill that highlights a student's ability to focus on a single characteristic of objects in a set and to then group the objects according to that characteristic. In other words, the student is able to identify what is in or out, what or who is a member, or not a member of a certain group or set.[17] Advanced mastery of this concept includes the ability to recognize that one class or set fits into another. An example of this is being able to recite one's complete address, in order from the specific street on up to the

---

[13]John W. Santrock, *Children*, 4th ed, (Dubuque, IA: Brown and Benchmark Publishers), 1995.
[14]Ralph L. Mosher, ed., *Adolescents Development and Education: A Janus Knot,* (Berkeley, CA: McCutehan Publishing Corp., 1979), 23.
[15]*Ibid.*, 22.
[16]Woolfolk, 35.
[17]Mosher, 23.

more general state or country. Here then, the student can understand that there is more than one way to classify an object. He or she can pull an object from one set and place it in another based on a different characteristic.

A second operation mastered at this stage is that of conservation. This involves an understanding of the idea that an amount stays the same regardless of how its container changes. An example of this is found with an amount of clay that is shown to a child. One time, its mass is in the shape of a circle. The second time it has been rolled into a long thin shape. The child at this stage will recognize that both times, the same amount of clay is present.

Both of these tools help the student to develop a complete and logical system of thinking, one based on concrete situations that can be organized, classified or manipulated. However, it is important to remember that the system is still tied to physical reality. The student at this point cannot yet reason about hypothetical abstract problems that would involve the coordination of many factors at once.

A good example may be the task of rearranging the furniture of a certain room. A child at this stage can visualize the changes, the possibilities for the arrangement of the room. However, he or she would be unable to incorporate a new piece of furniture, one not presently located in the room, into the vision. The child would not be able to imagine how another piece would fit into the picture. That ability does not develop until the next stage, the advent of formal operations.

Formal Operations

This is the last and most important stage of cognitive development in Piaget's theory. It is a stage attained by adolescents at approximately ages 11-15 years. This stage differs significantly from those that proceed it. In the earlier stages, full development is the rule; one must fully obtain the skills of each stage before progressing to the next one. But here, complete development is the exception. Failure to fully develop one's formal operations is a commonplace occurrence, many adults have yet to complete their logical development. Despite this, Piaget stresses that the ideal situation is one in which all adolescents attain formal operational thinking; in his eyes, it is a vital part of one's adolescent growth towards adulthood.[18]

What exactly does this stage entail? It differs from the stage that proceeds it because:

> concrete operations relate only to objects or to perceptive events, and they proceed step by step without being able to become independent of the concrete and... without being able to detach the form of reasoning from its material substance... on the contrary, formal operations... consist in the capability of reasoning on pure hypothesis, that is, on the basis of propositions... deriving all possible consequences... and then checked by comparison to the facts.[19]

It is during this stage that the adolescent moves beyond the world of actual, concrete physicality toward an ability to think in more abstract and logical terms. A student at this level can conceive of all the logical possibilities of a problem. In other words, the focus of thinking shifts from what *is*, to what *might be*.[20]

[18]Mosher, 35.
[19]Jean Piaget, "The Intellectual Development of the Adolescent." *Adolescence: Psycho-Social Perspectives*, eds. Gerald Caplan and Serge Lebovici. (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1969), 23.
[20]My emphasis.

8

In this stage too, there are building blocks that help the child further develop their logical capabilities. A key characteristic of a student with formal operations capabilities is the tendency to be idealistic. They may compare things and people in their lives to ideal standards they have established. This can become apparent in the way they view parents, themselves, and possibilities for the future. Thus idealism becomes a necessary schema for growth because it provides the student with futuristic possibilities for himself and for those around him. As a result, students at this level often become interested in science fiction, in realms where anything is possible.[21] For the abstract nature of adolescent thought opens up a world of potentials for the teenager to consider.

A second schema important to adolescent cognitive development is called hypothetical-deductive reasoning. This concept assumes that:

> adolescents have the cognitive ability to develop hypotheses, or best guesses, about ways to solve problems, such as an algebraic equation. Then they systematically conclude which is the best path to follow in solving the equation.[22]

In essence, the students' abilities to reason in a deductive fashion are sharpening. Not only are they capable of thinking more systematically, and developing hypotheses, but they are also able to set up mental experiments to test out the various possibilities, and to isolate or control variables in order to deduce their effectiveness and success. As the individual's reasoning faculties grow and develop, "what emerges is more comprehensive, logically exhaustive, systematic and abstract way of thinking that is demonstrated by the manner in

---

[21]Woolfolk, 37.
[22]Santrock, *Children,* 497.

which adolescents cope with scientific problems in general; and how they reason about events they observe in particular."[23] Adolescents apply their new found reasoning capabilities to the particulars of their own lives; they begin to deduce which of the many options available are right for them.[24]

Educational Implications

Given what we know about Piaget's exploration of the concrete and formal operational stages, how can we use that information in the middle school classroom? Piaget offers much insight as to how to manage classrooms so that they are appropriate to the cognitive levels of the students. This will be explored further in chapter five. As we shall see, Piaget's work provides a foundation that many others have built in the formulation of subsequent developmental theories.

Erik Erikson

Like his contemporary, Jean Piaget, Erik Erikson also saw development as passing through a series of stages, each with its particular goals, concerns, accomplishments and dangers.[25] Yet, whereas Piaget saw each stage as a separate entity, each serving as a unit to be completed before moving on to the next one, Erikson viewed his stages as being interdependent. He felt that the accomplishments at later stages ultimately depend on how conflicts are resolved in earlier years, during the initial stages of development.[26]

[23]Mosher, 18.
[24]Erik H. Erikson, *Youth: Change and Challenge*, (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1963), 11.
[25]Woolfolk, 66-67.
[26]Marlene M. Jardin and Henning G. Viljoen, "Fowler's Theory of Faith Development: An Evaluative Discussion," *Religious Education* 87, no. 1 (1992), 77.

How then does one progress from one stage to the next? Erikson emphasizes the relationship of the culture to the individual, recognizing society's involvement in and eventual impact on a person's developmental growth. According to Erikson, at each stage:

> the individual faces a developmental crisis... each crisis involves a conflict between a positive alternative and a potentially unhealthy alternative. The way in which the individual resolves each crisis will have a lasting effect on that person's self-image and view of society.[27]

Stated in a different way, at each stage, the individual encounters a crisis - a set of 'bipolar' pressures, the first being descriptive of positive internal needs and the second indicative of possibly negative propensities resulting from the demands of society.[28] It is a conflict which requires a decision to be made, and a new direction to be taken. Individuals must resolve the task of each crisis in order to proceed to the next stage of development. Erikson asserts that development can be successful only if the individual is able to resolve the key conflict which arises during each stage.

Erikson's stages correspond to what he perceives to be the different stages of the human life cycle. He recognized the fact that many of the conflicts we face are time appropriate, corresponding to events and life changes.[29] Of the eight stages, only two apply to middle school students. Stage four, known either as the 'School Age' or the 'Elementary and Middle School years' presents the conflict between feelings of industry and inferiority. Throughout this stage, as we shall see, students struggle with feelings of usefulness and uselessness. They

[27]Woolfolk, 67.
[28]Jardin and Viljoen, 77.
[29]Woolfolk, 67.

11

strive to find their place, to discover where they feel most needed and capable. Stage five, 'Adolescence' brings to the fore the crisis between identity and role confusion. Although just beginning for middle school students, even at that age, one can see how difficult it is for early adolescents to define themselves, to discover who they are in a world that lays out such clear expectations for them.

School Age

For the young child, this stage most likely marks the first time that the child has ventured away from the safety of the primary care giver, it is when the child embarks on the adventure of school.[30] This creates a whole new set of challenges for the child to encounter. The difficulty of this stage then, lies in the challenge of being able to successfully balance the different worlds of home and school, the demands of relationships with parents, teachers and friends, and the requirements of home responsibilities, academic life, and group activities and obligations. Failing to juggle all of these can lead to a sense of inferiority, a feeling of inadequacy.[31]

The crisis to be resolved is between feelings of inferiority and a sense of industry, of self-worth and accomplishment. How do children develop the latter instead of the former? It would seem to be an easy task, for "...at no time is the child more ready to learn quickly and avidly, to become big in the sense of sharing obligation, discipline, and performance... also eager to make things

---

[30]*Ibid.*, 69.
[31]Erik H. Erikson, *Identity: Youth and Crisis* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1968), 124.

together, to share in constructing and planning."[32] Children at this stage are enthusiastic about learning; teachers have only to capitalize on that excitement in order to help their students develop feelings of competence and self worth.

Not only teachers but parents also play an integral role in the development of a school age child. For this is the age when all adults are respected, when they are seen as authority figures. Teachers then, can assert their prerogatives in the classroom for "children at this age do like to be mildly but firmly coerced into the adventure of finding out that one can learn to accomplish things which one would never have thought of by oneself..."[33] Parents too help in this learning process, for at home as well as in school, students need adult inspiration and supervision. They need motivation to learn new things, to stretch their minds and to use their newly acquired skills. They also need role models, for the adults in their lives to emulate the behavior and skills they are trying to master. The students tend to "attach themselves to teachers and to parents of other children, and they... watch and imitate..."[34] By observing and then repeating what they see, they learn what is expected from them.

But what exactly are they trying to learn? To answer that, we need to know what skills are generally learned and acquired during this stage. The most obvious is a sense of industry, of capability. A child who successfully resolves the crisis of this stage develops a sense of being able to make things well, even

---

[32] *Ibid.*, 122.
[33] *Ibid.*, 127.
[34] *Ibid.*, 122.

perfectly.[35] But there is more to a fully developed sense of industry. For mastery here involves doing things beside and along with others well – being able to do successfully one's share of the work. Group projects become important measurements of success. If such an enterprise succeeds, the students have learned to divide labor and use each other's skills in varying ways. Feeling industrious, or competent means being able to succeed in any learning situation, whether as an individual or as part of a group.

But there is a danger to identifying success only with work. The child who begins to view their success as measured only by achievement in school, may feel inferior when that sense of accomplishment is threatened. The child must realize that success and worthiness can be found outside of the academic world as well.

For the child who fails to feel secure and successful develops feelings of inferiority. These are feelings of incompetency and unproductivity, feelings that can damage the ego of any child.[36] Such a child needs to be reassured of individual capabilities and strengths, of the areas in which it is possible for one to succeed.

It is indeed a difficult time for children. They are expected to leave the comfort of home in order to venture into the big world of school and accountability. At school, they must prove themselves as worthy students. If all goes according to plan, the student who succeeds at resolving the crisis of the school age will emerge with a firm relationship to the world of skills and tools,

---

[35]*Ibid.*, 123.
[36]Santrock, *Children*, 40.

14

and to their teachers and parents who teach and share the knowledge necessary to know and understand certain things.[37]

Once a child has reached this point, childhood comes to an end. Puberty commences, and with it, the next stage, that of adolescence begins as well.

Adolescence

As the child enters the teenage years, the central focus of development is identity formation. The crisis facing the adolescent is one that fluctuates between building an identity that will provide a firm basis for adulthood and the experience of role confusion, of not understanding who one's inner self truly is.[38]

The adolescent years play a central role in defining one's identity. It is during this time that the child, now an adolescent, attempts to discover who they are. What is meant by identity? Erikson defines it as "the organization of the individual's drives, abilities, beliefs, and history into a consistent image of self. It involves deliberate choices and decisions, particularly about work, values, ideology, [as well as a] commitment to people and ideas."[39] How exactly does this work? Mosher writes that the adolescent:

> employs a process of simultaneous reflection and observation... by which the individual judges himself in the light of what he perceives to be the way others judge him; while he judges their way of judging him in the light of how he perceives himself in comparison to them...[40]

[37]Erikson, *Identity,* 127.
[38]Woolfolk, 70.
[39]*Ibid.*
[40]Mosher, 22.

15

The adolescent is preoccupied with how one is viewed by others. There is concern that how one appears in the eyes of peers will not match one's self image. The dilemma then is how to reconcile perceived roles and skills with those that truly are.[41] It would seem that the process of forming one's identity takes much time and effort. And yet, identity formation, for the most part, is unconscious.

How important is this process? If an adolescent fails to integrate all these aspects and choices, or is unable to choose between the many available options, confusion results. Indeed, the choice is not an easy one to make. Daily events and occurrences affect the adolescent and make the task of choosing tension filled and difficult. Writes Mosher, adolescence "as a stage... is one in which the individual is much closer to the events of the [historical] day then he is at earlier stages of childhood development." In other words, the egocentricism of childhood disappears, leaving adolescents aware of all that is happening around them, making them susceptible to impressionable fads, political movements, peer pressures and other societal influences. Adolescents tend to temporarily identify to the point of losing their sense of individuality - giving into cliques or clinging onto heroes as a means of avoiding difficult questions about their own identity.[42]

Oddly enough, such behavior can also assist an adolescent in masking important decisions about identity. By forming cliques, stereotyping themselves, and setting ideals for each other, they test their own capacity for sustaining

---

[41]Erikson, *Identity,* 9.
[42]*Ibid.*, 132.

loyalties in the midst of inevitable value conflicts.[43] In essence, adolescents give each other a temporary respite from the hard task of forming an identity, presenting a chance to practice what will become in the adult world, true choices and value judgments.

As hard as it may be, parents and teachers, alike, must stifle the urge to direct the seemingly directionless adolescent. As Santock writes, "adolescents need the chance to try out different roles and different paths within that role..."[44] An adolescent must make that choice alone. For if a particular identity is forced, the result will only be confusion later on when it is determined that the identity doesn't fit after all. How than can a concerned adult be part of the adolescent's world? One can only hope that the student allows that adult to be one of a few carefully choose meaningful individuals, representatives of the adult world allowed into the realm of the adolescent. Such individuals are picked by the student alone, and not by the parent or teacher.[45]

The question remains, how does this apply to the middle school student who is only on the verge of adolescence? It is probable that the early adolescent, too, will indeed be struggling with the beginnings of identity formation. The crisis at this point will be only beginning to brew. Canadian psychologist James Marcia analyzed Erikson's theory of identity development and came up with four status, or modes of resolution to the pending crisis. He suggests that the adolescent experiences at least one of the following during the

---

[43]Mosher, 133.
[44]Santock, *Children,* 544.
[45]Erik H. Erikson, *Youth,* 128.

17

search to define oneself: identity diffusion, identity foreclosure, a moratorium or delay in making a commitment to personal and occupational choices, or a sense of achievement when finally a particular identity is chosen.[46]

The middle school student, according to Marcia will most likely be in the stage of identity diffusion, a state wherein the student has neither yet encountered a crisis nor explored meaningful options. If a student has already experienced the beginnings of a crisis, then the moratorium or delay on making any set decisions is also a possibility. Nonetheless, it is within these two stages of Marcia's proposed steps to identity formation in which we will find the majority of the students of middle school age. The final decisions will come later.

Educational Implications

What does this mean for the classroom? Erikson's works offers explanations for some of the destructive behaviors in which our students may engage. Often it seems that the struggle within plays itself out on the exterior, to the detriment of the classroom community. It is important for educators to understand that such behavior may be a necessary defense against a sense of identity loss, and not merely acts of meanness or hatred.[47] Although undesirable, our students' behavior is to be expected.

---

[46]Woolfolk, 70-71.
[47]Mosher, 132.

Lawrence Kohlberg

Lawrence Kohlberg wrote his doctoral thesis based on Piaget's theories, formulating a life span theory of moral development out of Piaget's work. Kohlberg reworked Piaget's findings, adding his own research on the psychology of moral development, to investigate ways of constructing situations of moral dilemma and choice and of forming solutional approaches to them.[48] Piaget's work is at the heart of what Kohlberg offers us, his influence is apparent. Yet Kohlberg's work is his own. He is considered to be the inventor of this modern field of observing individual moral development and growth.

Stage and Sequence

We begin by defining moral development. In conjunction with Kohlberg's work, it can be defined as "not changing one's point of view on a particular issue, but transforming one's reasoning and expanding one's perspective to include criteria for judging that were not considered previously."[49] Moral growth then, involves not the evolution of viewpoint, but the maturation of one's ability to reason and to judge.

Moral growth is a lifelong process. Kohlberg describes six stages through which our moral reasoning progresses. Each stage has its own distinctive rules or criteria for decoding right from wrong. Each level has a 'correct' moral

---

[48]Lawrence Kohlberg and Carol Gilligan, "The Adolescent as a Philosopher: The Discovery of the Self in a Post Conventional World," *Daedalus* 100 (1971), 1051-1086; reprinted in *Adolescents Development and Education: A Janus Knot,* ed. Ralph L. Mosher (Berkeley, CA: McCutehan Publishing Corp., 1979), 20.
[49]*Ibid.*

response, and new criteria for judging associated with it.

Kohlberg's stages, like Piaget's, follow a prescribed order. Unlike those of Piaget however, Kohlberg's stages are not only invariant, but also predictable. For,

> ...moral reasoning develops in a predictable sequence. Not only does one's reasoning about issues of right and wrong become, with experience, more complex, but...more subject to the application of principle in deciding... more moral.[50]

In other words, one's moral capacity and capability grows with experience comes a more developed reasoning about what is right and wrong. We are often not aware, however, of such growth. We move between stages slowly, unable to recognize immediate developmental change.

How did Kohlberg determine his stages and levels of moral development? He presented moral dilemmas to groups of children and adults to evaluate their moral reasoning capabilities. For the studies of particular interest to adolescence in its various stages, Kohlberg used a cross sectional sample of seventy two boys from the Chicago area aged ten, thirteen, and sixteen.[51] Each participant was presented with hypothetical situations in which people generally must make difficult decisions. Each dilemma had no obvious answer, no individual action could provide a complete solution to the problem at hand.[52]

Kohlberg was primarily interested in the social-moral perspective of the

---

[50]Mosher, 62.
[51]Lawrence Kohlberg, *Essays on Moral Development, Volume II. The Psychology of Moral Development: The Nature and Validity of Moral Stages,* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1984) 8; An additional group of twelve delinquent boys were added to the study at a later point. The fact that no girls were involved will be discussed in the section on Carol Gilligan.
[52]Woolfolk, 82.

individuals with which he worked. He examined how each one defined the social facts of the given situations and the socialmoral values of what 'ought' to be done in them.[53] In this way, Kohlberg could determine the various stages of moral development.

And yet, transition from one stage to the next, may not be complete. As Kohlberg writes, "[although] our moral reasoning typically reflects one predominant stage... we always have access to the 'lower' stages through which we have passed."[54] Once we reach a certain stage, we are not guaranteed to always react in ways typical of that level. We may indeed discover that parts of our moral reasoning have not yet fully developed.

There is more to the growth process than it seems. Thinking is not all there is to morality. Extenuating circumstances, one's personal willpower, determination, courage, and strength to do the right thing are part of one's moral behavior.[55] As a person's moral reasoning develops, one's behavior changes to accommodate internal and external pressures and influences. Hopefully the result will be that one's actions will reflects what is considered to be the right thing to do.

How does one's reasoning faculties grow? Kohlberg divides our moral development into three levels, each containing two distinct stages. The first level, the preconventional level, consists of judgments based on a person's own needs and perceptions. The second, the conventional level, occurs when the

---

[53]Kohlberg, 173.
[54]*Ibid.*, 62.
[55]*Ibid.*, 62.

individual takes the expectations of both society and its existing laws into account when making moral decisions. The third and final level, the postconventional level, involves the individual able to make judgments based on abstract, more personal principles that are not necessarily defined by society's laws and standards.[56] In dealing with the preadolescent, we will focus primarily on the second level, the conventional level, and its stages. This is where we will find the majority of middle school students in the moral developmental process.

The Conventional Level

The Conventional Level is marked by the onset of adolescence. At this level, success is attained within the context of interaction with others. Therefore, the early adolescent tries to achieve and maintain family and peer expectations and rules. The need to fit in is essential. Students must feel that their actions are accepted not only by the family, but by peers and the society at large as well. There also tends to be concern at this stage with being able to justify the requirements of the expected social order. Students want to be able to explain themselves. They strive not only to act according to society's dictates, but also to offer reasons for their actions.[57]

Whereas previously rules and social expectations were seen as something external to the individual self, now rules become tools by which to govern individual behavior within the community. The conventionally oriented student, then, begins to understand the importance of both civil and religious

---

[56]Woolfolk, 81.
[57]Kohlberg, 80.

laws, learning to regard them as absolute, unalterable, and directly applicable to individuals.[58] In other words, what defines and unifies individuals at this stage is a characteristic social perspective; a consideration for the viewpoints of all the participants or members in a peer group or relationship. The lesson learned then, is that both individual needs and desires and those of the group are equally important. Furthermore, there may be times when those of the individual will become subordinate to those of the group.[59]

Stages Three and Four

The conventional level of Kohlberg's work contains his stages three and four. Many early adolescents may not have yet reached this higher level of cognitive development. Formal operational skills at the middle school age are most likely not yet fully developed. There is indeed a correlation between Piaget's cognitive stages and Kohlberg's psychosocial ones; moral development does depend on cognitive achievement. An individual must reach a certain operational level in order to 'advance' to moral reasoning of a different type.

Stage three is what Kohlberg calls the stage of "good-boy, good-girl orientation."[60] This stage includes an inclination towards gaining approval, and pleasing or helping out others. Students attempt to conform their behavior to stereotypical images and expectations of the society; they include themselves as members of that society capable of doing what is required of them. Furthermore,

---

[58]*Ibid.*, 83.
[59]*Ibid.*, 177.
[60]Woolfolk, 81.

one judges actions by intention, not merely by outcome. For one can 'mean well', even if the result of a given action is not the desired one. A student at this stage would rather be considered "nice" and "well-intended" than moral or outstanding.

Good behavior at this stage is defined as "living up to what is expected of you or what people generally expect of people in your role... it means having good motives, showing concerns about others... keeping mutual relationships, such as trust, loyalty, respect, and gratitude."[61] Why does an individual at this stage want to be 'good'? Kohlberg notes that an individual at stage three wants to feel that they are a good person, both from their perspective and from that of others around them. Therefore, the Golden Rule is predominant. Actions will reflect stereotypical good behavior.

Stage four has an orientation toward authority, the fixed rules and maintenance of the social behavior. Laws are to be upheld except for in extreme cases where they conflict with other fixed social responsibilities. The right behavior at this stage consists of doing one's duty, of contributing one's share to society, the group, or institution. It also means showing respect for authority, and maintaining the social order for its own sake. For one earns respect from higher authorities, teachers and parents, and peers by performing dutifully, and by fulfilling the obligations of society.

---

[61] Kohlberg, 174.

Educational Implications

If Kohlberg's theory of moral development could be applied to educational programs, he would surely wish to create situations certain to ensure the greatest development of each person.[62] Understanding that level of individual development would facilitate the educator's task of getting to know students. For "comprehending the stages and the concerns, the justifications and the criteria about right and wrong, and the unique way of thinking that characterizes each of them can help teachers and administrators understand teenagers."[63] By knowing the perspective from which students come, teachers can better cater to their needs within the classroom. Just how those needs can be met will be discussed further in chapter five.

Carol Gilligan

Gilligan's work demonstrates that "the influential theories of personality development for the most part have been created by males and reflect greater insight or understanding into male personality development than into female personality development."[64] In other words, Gilligan challenges the theorists and their theories that we have looked at thus far. She questions the validity of these theories for women, noting that they have been left out of much of the research.

The two greatest theorists of personality development, Sigmund Freud and Jean Piaget both identified morality and its development with justice.

---

[62]Mosher, 63.
[63]*Ibid.*
[64]Kohlberg, 339.

Furthermore, both noted that their observations of females suggested to them

that either females were less developed in their sense of justice than men, or

that the nature and development of women's morality could not be fully

explained by their theories.[65] It would seem that both Freud and Piaget were

sympathetic to the differences between men and women, yet neither offered a

way to adequately measure women's development.

Perhaps the reason is summed up in Gilligan's own words about Erik

Erikson:

> From Erik Erikson, I learned that you cannot take a life out of
> history, that life-history and history, psychology and politics, are
> deeply entwined. Listening to women, I heard a difference and
> discovered that bringing in women's lives changes both psychology
> and history. It literally changes the voice: how the human story is
> told, and also who tells it.[66]

If women were included, different results would occur. Women would change the

story of human experience.

A good example of this can be found in Lawrence Kohlberg's work. It too,

is problematic for Gilligan. Having worked as a research assistant for him while

at Harvard University, she was able to fully view his research and to understand

its implications. She points out that only males were used in his studies; only

their growth was recorded. She notes the resulting impossibility for women to

achieve full morality on Kohlberg's scale. The highest level of his work is based

on universal principles of justice and fairness, ways of viewing morality more

typically found in men. The principles that women treasure, those that support

---

[65] Ibid.
[66] Carol Gilligan, In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), xi.

26

reasoning based on caring for others and maintaining relationships is far lower on the scale. Women then, according to Kohlberg's stages, are developmentally inferior to men. They appear to be "moral midgets"; although men will reach stage four or five by adulthood, women remain "stuck" at stage three.[67]

Gilligan asks, how would our gauge of moral development change if women's voices were heard, if their experiences were recorded? Her goal then is to reframe women's development in a way that centers on their struggle for connection rather than simply passing them off as immature or incapable. A closer look at her work will show how she tries to reduce the disparity between women's experience and the representation of human development, and to prove that this does not signify a problem in women's development. What it does signify, according to Gilligan, is a problem in representation, a limitation in the conception of the human experience.[68]

The Relational Voice

Gilligan writes of how the 1973 U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Roe v. Wade* brought to the forefront the underpinnings of relationships between women and men and children. She writes that:

> When the highest court made it legal for a woman to speak for herself... many women became aware of the strength of an internal voice which was interfering with their ability to speak. That internal or internalized voice told a women that it would be "selfish" to bring her voice into relationships, that perhaps she did not know what

---

[67]Woolfolk, 84.
[68]Gilligan, 2.

she really wanted, or that her experience was not a reliable guide in thinking about what to do.[69]

Gilligan's research however, shows that this is indeed not true. Women do know what they want, and also what they think to be the best course of action in difficult situations. The problem lies in the fact that women's voices are not heard.

What does Gilligan mean by voice? "To have a voice is to be human. To have something to say is to be a person. But speaking depends on listening and being heard. It is an intensely relational act."[70] To articulate thoughts is not enough, unless they are heard and reacted to within a human relationship. It sounds simple, yet for many women it is not:

> ...from eleven years and for the rest of her life the girl goes ethically underground and keeps her view of connectedness of humanity as appropriate only in the "interpersonal sphere" - and not in the big world.[71]

Women need to feel that their voice is respected; they need to understand that they can speak out, even in relationships that extend beyond their personal spheres.

Relationship does not come automatically, it requires connection. It takes work on the part of those involved:

> It depends not only on the capacity for empathy or the ability to listen to others and learn their language or their point of view, but also on having a voice and having a language..."[72]

---

[69]Gilligan, *ix*.
[70]*Ibid.*, *xvi*.
[71]Kohlberg, 149.
[72]Gilligan, *xx*.

28

Gilligan redefines the relationship between men and women; she gives a new perspective into the resulting development due to shifts in the hierarchy of power relationships.[73] She asks, why don't men and women fully communicate within their relationships? Gilligan writes of their 'relational errors' by noting that, "men... think that if they know themselves... they will also know women, and women... think that if only they know others, they will come to know themselves."[74] Unfortunately, neither part of the equation is true.

Developmental Differences

Gilligan emphasizes that equality is not the goal of moral development. Because men and women view situations so differently, it is not likely that they will develop in the exact same way. Men and women do develop differently; from the onset, one's gender plays a role. The very definition of gender is telling; "...masculinity is defined through separation while femininity is defined through attachment..."[75] Men move away from each other; women struggle to remain connected within an intricate web of interpersonal relationships.

This web of connection creates a safety zone, one in which women feel sheltered from aggression and competition. Whereas men feel safe with rules and structural limits and often seek out competitive situations, women tend to feel threatened by competitive achievement situations. Being in competition breaks the delicately woven strings of connection.

---

[73]Kohlberg, 156.
[74]Gilligan, xx.
[75]Ibid., 8.

Success then, is threatening. Even the anticipation of success in competitive achievement can be stressful, by producing the expectation for certain negative consequences as well. The danger in doing too well is that it isolates. Women who stand out because of either their judgments or because of their accomplishments will stand alone. Success can bring the threat of social rejection and a perceived loss of femininity. The result? Women will feel a lack of the support they are used to, especially if they beat out other women to reach the top.

Intimacy too, has its problems, albeit more so for men than for women. Close relationships can be threatening as well. For intimate relations bring the possibility of entrapment or betrayal. They pose the threat of capturing the individual in smothering relationships, or humiliation by rejection or deceit. The task lies in finding the balance between suffocating intimacy and isolating competition.

Women and Moral Decisions

How does all of this relate to making moral decisions? We know from the other theories how men develop their sense of justice, their feelings of what is morally right.[76] But how do women act in situations that involve making moral decisions? Women do act quite differently; when women perceive that they have no choice in a given matter, they excuse themselves from the situation. In other words, they back out and forsake their opportunity to speak out. At the base of

---

[76]See previous discussion on Lawrence Kohlberg.

this behavior is the fact that making choices conflicts with traditional femininity. Being assertive goes against the image of passivity and dependence that defines the 'typical woman'. The conflict is a common one, the opposition between virtue and power - the dilemma involved in deciding to show compassion or to seek autonomy.

For women, "thinking about moral decisions is contextual and narrative rather than formal and abstract... instead of centering on fairness according to rights and rules, the tendency is to think about relationships and responsibilities."[77] This is what theorists such as Kohlberg omitted from their studies. They failed to measure the significance of human interactions. They did not look at the way women maintained their relationships.

Women define themselves in the context of human relationship, they judge themselves in terms of their ability to care.[78] Gilligan notes the paradox. The very traits that are used to define the "goodness" of women, their ability to care for and be sensitive to the needs of others, are the same ones that mark them as being deficient in their moral development. The solution is to see women's development in a different light, to notice the patterns that arise throughout the female life span, instead of merely comparing their experiences with those of men.[79]

What does surface is an ethic based on thinking that is contextual and narrative rather than formal and abstract. This conception of morality is one that

---

[77] Gilligan, 168.
[78] *Ibid.*, 17.
[79] *Ibid.*, 18.

focuses on moral development as a growing understanding of responsibility and relationships, rather than one that sees such growth as merely an increased comprehension of fairness through rights and rules.[80]

The Adolescent Phenomenon

Gilligan alerts her reader to what can be termed the adolescent phenomenon. By this she means that something happens to teenage girls that quiets them; they stop speaking out, they stop using their voices. Gilligan noticed this is her work involving the use of the Heinz dilemma.[81] She traces the development of her subjects' moral growth. The girls she works with become increasingly quieter. They wonder if in terms of wrongdoing, it is "better not to say anything at all." Why would an adolescent girl feel this way? Because, writes Gilligan, she faces "a silencing of her own voice, a silencing enforced by the wish not to hurt others but also by the fear that, in speaking, her voice will not be heard."[82] This is why our female middle school students begin to speak out less, to stop participating in discussions in which louder, more aggressive male classmates seem to be in control. The task before us then, is to find a way to create an environment in which all students can feel comfortable speaking out, one in which each individual knows that their voice will be heard.

---

[80] *Ibid.* 19.
[81] One of Kohlberg's dilemmas is used to determine the participant's moral stage. Gilligan used the same dilemma, comparing the responses of both boys and girls at different ages and stages of development.
[82] Gilligan, 51.

32

Educational Implications

The ongoing discussions concerning the differences in women's and men's voices, as well as within the foundations of knowledge about relationships, have radical and far-reaching implications for educators. These will be discussed in greater detail in the final chapter of this thesis.

James Fowler

James Fowler introduces a different developmental frame, that of Faith Development. A relatively new approach in the exploration of developmental processes, Fowler nonetheless has "...situated faith development squarely within the domain of human developmental processes."[83] For him, faith is the essential component of the growing human psyche. Faith is the ongoing process that takes place in a person's religious life across the course of a life span.[84]

Yet, Fowler does not think of faith merely in religious terms. He separates the content of faith, the beliefs and values, from the psychological factors that facilitate the operation of faith within the personality. In other words, what one believes has little to do with one's cognitive, affective and social development.[85] In part, this is what makes Fowler's theory so appealing. This partial separation of the 'what' from the 'how' leaves room for faith that does not necessarily stem from religious roots.

---

[83]Jardin and Viljoen, 74.
[84]R. R. Osmer, "Faith Development." *Harper's Encyclopedia of Religious Education*, eds. Iris V. Cully and Kendig Brubaker Cully (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1971), 247.
[85]Jardin and Viljoen, 75.

Fowler does not intend to give the impression that religion and cognitive development are completely unrelated, however. For the "division of content and structures can give the theory the appearance of being unrelated to a theological understanding of faith."[86] There are indeed definite connections. It is likely that one's level of cognitive ability may affect the ability to grasp and comprehend increasingly complex transcendent realities. Said differently, competence in thinking abilities deepens one's understanding of difficult faith experiences.

Fowler's work, though innovative, reflects the previous accomplishments of both Jean Piaget and Erik Erikson.[87] Fowler expands Piaget's narrow focus on cognition to include a more complex understanding of self. Erikson's work involving the psychology of ego development provides a much needed context. From it, Fowler gains an understanding of how faith grows. Fowler borrows Erikson's life cycle theory, using it to show how faith addresses different issues throughout the span of the life cycle.[88] As we shall see, at times, Fowler's theory directly correlates with stages set out by Piaget or Erikson. In this way, he establishes the context for moral judgment by incorporating both the rational and affective spheres into a comprehensive theory of faith development.[89]

Fowler also draws on the more modern work of H. Richard Niebuhr, a theologian who studied what he calls "human faith". It is faith that begins from the very start of our humanity, at birth. This means simply that faith takes form from the onset of our very first relationships with those who care for us in

---

[86]*Ibid.*
[87]Mosher, 155
[88]*Ibid.*, 7
[89]Fowler, 77.

infancy. Faith continues to grow throughout our subsequent life experiences; through our struggle with trust and fidelity, and our pain of mistrust and betrayal with those closest to us. This ongoing struggle with faith is universal. All humans go through it in much the same way. Faith then, according to Niebuhr, develops in "the shared visions and values that hold human groups together..."[90] Faith then, is the glue of humanity.

But how does faith act when it is separated out of its religious context? For Niebuhr, and so too for Fowler, faith does not equal belief in the religious sense. Fowler explains it as such: "...the variety of religious belief and practice is far greater than we might have imagined... the similarities in religious faith also turn out to be greater than we might have expected."[91] One only has to look at the multitudes of religions and religious denominations to know the vast range of beliefs and rituals. Pluralism is nothing new. But Fowler wants us to understand the idea that beneath each individual's religious practices of choice lies a form of faith nearly identical to another person with different practices and beliefs. This idea of sameness is what Fowler brings to the examination of faith.

Before we take a look at Fowler's stages in general, and more specifically the ones that pertain to the middle school student, we must first ask an important question. Why is it so essential that we study faith development? The answer is obvious to Fowler. He writes that "faith shapes our identities. They determine (and are determined by) the communities we join." Our faith then, can be that which binds us together:

---

[90] *Ibid.*, 5.
[91] *Ibid.*, 10.

...in each significant relationship we have with others, in each institution of which we are a part, we are linked to others in shared trusts and loyalties... we serve common goals, we hold shared meanings, we remember shared stories...[92]

By comprehending the basics of faith, we can understand our developing selves.

The Stages: An Overview

Fowler presents seven distinct stages in the course of Faith Development. As is the case with other constructivist theories, movement between the stages is not an automatic function of biological maturation, chronological age, mental age or physical development. Transition from one stage to the next occurs when a 'crisis' threatens the limits of the individual's present patterns of knowing. The impact of new experiences, a changed environment, and developmental growth in other domains, cause the current structural patterns of faith to undergo relinquishment and transformation, and the individual to move into the next stage[93]

Of the seven stages, only two are directly applicable to the early adolescent. The second stage, that of Mythic-Literal Faith, and the third stage, when Synthetic-Conventional Faith emerges are the stages we will now look at in depth.

---

[92]*Ibid.*, 18-19.
[93]Mosher, 26-27; Erikson's influence is apparent here.

Stage Two: Mythic-Literal Faith

The main factor precipitating the transition into this stage is the emergence of concrete operational thinking. The skills that go along with Piaget's second cognitive level[94] are essential for this level of faith development. For the student at this stage uses new found cognitive abilities to differentiate "real" from fantasy, to order personal experiences into a temporal sequence, and to construct another's perspective of similar or same experiences. Most importantly, individuals developing mythic-literal faith also have the ability to narrate experiences. They remember and retell stories of events happening to them and those around them.[95] In other words, the mythic-literal stage brings with it the ability to turn our experiences into meaningful scenarios through the medium of stories.[96]

However, there is a limit to this storytelling ability. Individuals at this stage do not yet have the ability "to step back from our stories, reflect on them, and to communicate their meanings by way of more abstract and general statements." Abstract thought develops along with Piaget's Formal Operational Stage, it comes later in adolescence. For our early adolescent then, "meanings are trapped in the narrative, there not being yet the readiness to draw from them conclusions about a general order of meaning in life."[97] Stories are taken at their most literal. At this stage students are unable to place themselves into the story and suppose what the outcome may be.

---

[94]See above section on Piaget's cognitive levels.
[95]Osmer, 247.
[96]Fowler, 136.
[97]*Ibid.*, 137.

Because our interest in Fowler's work takes on a religious bias, it is appropriate to ask, how does the student at Fowler's second stage relate to God? For the early adolescent, the average middle school student, God takes on anthropomorphic elements. This view of God makes sense in light of what is known about individuals at stage two. God therefore, is seen in the most literal of roles, that of a parent. God follows an already existing model of authority, one which the student in possession of concrete operational skills takes seriously. Like a parent, God does what God thinks best. For some that means strict reciprocity -- bad fortune to bad people and good fortune to the virtuous. In such a literal view of reciprocal justice, even God is held up to God's lawfulness.[98]

Literalness is the essence of this stage. The student does not and cannot see the infinite possibilities that abstract thinking brings. Instead, the youngster sticks with the most vivid, the most concrete, the most present versions of the many stories, beliefs and observances that symbolize belonging to a faith community. Literal interpretations of moral rules, attitudes and symbols substantiate the one-dimensional understanding obtained.

How then does faith add meaning to life when its many layers have only begun to be discovered?

> Stories become the major way of giving unity and value to experience; marked by increased accuracy in taking the perspective of other persons, and an understanding of reciprocal fairness and imminent justice... the new capacity or strength... is the story, drama and myth as ways of finding and giving coherence to experience.[99]

---

[98] *Ibid.*, 139; this reflect Kohlberg's stage two. See above for further details of his theory and its implications.
[99] *Ibid.*, 149.

Through the telling and retelling of stories, competence and confidence grow. When the tales begin to conflict, then the student moves onto the next stage.

Stage Three: Synthetic-Conventional Faith

Conflicting narratives brings about the transition into Fowler's stage three, that of Synthetic-Conventional Faith. Such clashes of stories are indeed 'disasters waiting to happen; "...the implicit clash or contradiction in stories that leads to reflection on meanings." The transition to formal operational thought brings changes to the thought patterns of the growing adolescent. No longer is the previous version, the unquestioned, ultra-literal, impersonal story good enough. New reflection is both necessary and possible as the skills that accompany the development of formal operations come into focus:

> ...previous literalism breaks down... leads to disillusionment with previous teachers and teachings. Conflicts between authoritative stories (Genesis vs. evolution) must be faced. The emergence of mutual interpersonal perspective taking creates the need for a more personal relationship with the unifying power of the ultimate environment."[100]

As the students reasoning faculties grow, so too does their ability to question, to reject and to reconstruct arguments previously accepted without question.

One of the key elements of this new stage of development is that of 'mutual interpersonal perspective taking.' This concept can be better understood if we look at it from the eyes of an early adolescent. The individual has two thoughts: "you see you according to me; you see the you you think I see."[101] In

[100]*Ibid.*, 150.
[101]*Ibid.*, 153.

other words, the student can now step outside of themselves, and see how others see them. They can understand how they are presented to the outside world.

This in turn affects one's thinking about stories and situations in general. Now the individual can "appraise a situation or a problem and form a variety of hypothetical solution or explanations.... [this] generates methods of testing and verifying the hypotheses." Problems can not only be anticipated, but solved hypothetically. For the student can "work with propositions and symbols, manipulating them to find solutions... can envision a universe of possible realities and futures."[102] This brings new meaning to the stories told, for now

> ...one can see and name certain patterns of meaning arising out of the collection of stories. A myth or myths of the personal past can be composed; this represents a new level of story -- the 'story of our stories.' The youth begins to project the forming myth of self into future roles and relationships."[103]

The stories are no longer merely personal tales, they now take on epoch proportions.

But there are negatives to being able to envision infinite possibilities. The projected outcomes have the potential to be feared.

> On one hand... [mutual interpersonal perspective taking] represents faith in the self one is becoming and trust that self will be received and ratified by future... on the other, it brings dread [that] the self may fail to focus, may find no place with others and may be ignored, undiscovered or shrugged off into insignificance by the future.[104]

---

[102]*Ibid.*, 152.
[103]*Ibid.*
[104]*Ibid.*

The unknown can be both exciting and scary for the adolescent. Especially since both the positive and the negative seem plausible.

How does God fit in here? Although more developed than during the previous stage, the God-belief of individuals at this stage may not yet be permanently fixed:

> ... while beliefs and values are deeply felt, they typically are tacitly held... There has not [yet] been occasion to step outside them to reflect or examine them explicitly or systematically... a person has an 'ideology', a more or less consistent clustering of values and beliefs, but has not objectified it for examination and in a sense is unaware of having it...[105]

The ideology of later years is only in its beginning stages here. Adolescence is the time to question God's role in the world and in individuals' lives.

God must be re-imaged in light of the capabilities that arise with this stage. No longer can God be viewed only as a parent. Now so many other options are now present. For what type of God is the adolescent looking? Fowler writes that:

> adolescent religious hunger is for a God who knows, accepts, and confirms the self deeply, and who serves as an infinite guarantor of the self with its forming myth of personal identity and faith... a 'divinely significant other.'[106]

The adolescent then, is looking for an intimate relationship with God, wanting a God capable of knowing and understanding the individual self.

In summary, the stage of Synthetic-Conventional Faith is one in which an individual's experiences now extends beyond the family. A number of spheres now demand attention: family, school or work, peers, the general community and

---

[105]*Ibid.*, 172-3.
[106]*Ibid.*, 153-4.

of course, the religious one. The student at this level looks for faith to provide a sense of coherence in the midst of a diverse range of involvements. In other words, faith must not only synthesize sometimes conflicting values and information, but it must also help to form identity and outlook."[107]

Educational Implications

How can educators incorporate Fowler's theories into the classroom? Education should aim at the full realization of the potential strength of faith at each stage. Classroom teachers should attempt to aid their students' spiritual growth, to help keep the faith struggles in which they engage parallel to their development in other domains.[108] Therefore, a thorough understanding of the cognitive, affective, and psychosocial domains and their stages, is crucial to implementing Fowler's suggestions. Knowing the capabilities, of one's students will make such integration possible.

Nel Noddings

Nel Noddings brings an entirely different perspective to the discussion of adolescent development. She writes:

> The long standing emphasis on the study of moral judgments has led to a serious imbalance in moral discussions... women do not approach moral problems as problems of principle, reasoning and judgment...[109]

---

[107]*Ibid.*, 172.
[108]*Ibid.*, 155.
[109]Nel Noddings, *Caring: A Feminine Approach To Ethics & Moral Education* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1984), 28

She focuses not on psychosocial learning but rather on what she calls an 'ethic of care,' adding that "one might say that ethics has been discussed largely in the language of the father: in principles and propositions, in terms such as justification, fairness, justice. The mother's voice has been silent..."[110] For Noddings, an ethic of care stems from the feminine, from 'the mother's voice.'

Hearing Male and Female Voices

What does Noddings mean by the 'voice of the father' as opposed to the 'voice of the mother'? First, we will look at what Noddings attributes to the 'father' or man. The father[111] as she sees it, maintains a certain sense of emotional detachment, of personal distance from the situation at hand. He approaches matters of morality through law and principle, he justifies his actions based on what he is supposed to do.

And what about the mother?[112] Noddings tells us that the mother is viewed as a caregiver, as one from whom pours forth emotion and love. She, unlike her male counterpart, responds in ways unique to each moment. In other words, the mother does not rely on laws and principles that tell her how to deal with a situation. Rather, she sees each moment for what it is, as "a unique human encounter." This directly contradicts the idea of ethical behavior as universal, suggesting that in situations of similar conditions one is not required to act the

---

[110]*Ibid.*, 1.

[111]In a metaphorical sense. Women, too can act in this way, however, as Noddings suggests throughout her work, such behavior tends to come from males within our society.

[112]It is important to note that we must understand the terms "mother" and "feminine" as being potentially all-inclusive. All humanity can participate in the feminine as Noddings describes it (172).

same way. The mother effectively throws out the precedent as law; each encounter is unique, no one can dictate another's behavior.[113]

It is appropriate to ask, by what guidelines does the mother act? If she rejects the rigid principles, how then does she know what to do? Her approach is one "rooted in receptivity, relatedness, and responsiveness." Logic and principle is not entirely discarded, rather, it takes a back seat to moral attitude and reasoning. The mother, then, responds according to how she feels and thinks she should act.

Noddings points to the hypothetical dilemmas posed by Lawrence Kohlberg, as an illustration of the different responses of men and women to situations of a moral nature. Through his research Kohlberg discovered that men and women responded quite differently. Men tended to answer according to what they thought was the right thing to do. For example, in response to the Heinz dilemma in which a man wonders whether or not it is okay to steal a drug he cannot afford to buy for his sick wife, a boy might say that stealing the drug is wrong because in his mind, stealing is wrong, regardless of the circumstances. How would a woman or girl respond? By asking for more information, refusing to make a moral judgment until she has formed a more complete picture in her mind of the scenario. For women, an action must be considered within its context, something cannot be always right or always wrong. Moral decisions, then, must be made in real life situations, not in hypothetical scenarios that may or may not actually occur. The woman must place herself as near as possible to

---

[113]Noddings, 5.

44

the concrete situation. Then she can make decisions; the problem can be seen within a true-to-life context, and not a hypothetical scenario without connection to real life.[114]

The result? According to Kohlberg's stages of moral judgment[115] women who think this way remain 'stuck' at level three, at the stage concerning interpersonal relationships. Kohlberg sees this stage as one in which the individual's moral reasoning has yet to be fully developed. Yet, he places most adult women at this level, and no higher. Women can never achieve the highest level, that of universal ethical principles. Why not? Because women do not organize those around them into a hierarchy of importance that would allow them to act in a universally accepted manner. Instead, they have chosen an alternate route to moral conduct; women are concerned with maintaining and enhancing their caring relationships. As Noddings points out, women focus more on "feelings, needs, impressions and a sense of personal ideal rather than to universal principals and their applications."[116] For women, the process of decision-making, and the reasons for making a given decision or more important than the actual decision itself.

An Ethic of Care

What Noddings proposes is an ethic of care based on the feelings and actions typical of women. She seeks to establish a view of morality based on a

---

[114]*Ibid.*, 8.
[115]See above discussion of Lawrence Kohlberg and his Stages of Moral Development.
[116]Noddings, 3.

heightened moral perception and sensitivity. No stages of development exist for Noddings, only an increasing emphasis on thinking in terms of caring; of conditioning ourselves to think effectively about what we can do in response to the other person. Such caring involves meeting each other morally, reaching out and responding to each other.

But what exactly does it mean to care? Noddings defines caring as what occurs when an individual has regard for someone, when what that person thinks, feels, and desires matters. Caring happens within relationships, therefore, Noddings pays close attention to how they develop, are sustained, and fulfill the parties involved. She writes of the two parties of relation, of the "one-caring" and the "cared-for"[117]. Each component is necessary for building and maintaining a relationship based on caring.

What are the elements of a caring relationship? There are certain similarities in all caring situations. Caring is characterized by a moving away from the self. One has to look beyond their own frame of reference and needs in order to truly care about another person. One has to be able to put themselves into the other's shoes, in a sense, to be able to imagine possible outcomes and resolutions as their own. This does not necessarily imply emotional involvement; rational objectivity is often times more appropriate. As Jean Paul Sarte reminds us, too much emotion can lead to "degradation", to a non-reflective emotional state during which one cannot think or respond in a mature, befitting manner.[118] Too much emotion may prevent us from receiving without evaluation or

---

[117]*Ibid.*, 4.
[118]*Ibid.*, 50.

46

assessment, from being able to keep an our minds open. We need an open

mind, one free of preconceived assumptions in order to truly care. For in caring

relationships, our reasons for acting must reflect the other's wants and needs

and not our own.

Yet few generalizations can be made about caring. The conditions

change. The time span varies and the intensity of the caring relationship

depends on the individuals involved. As Noddings writes:

> To care is act not by fixed rule but by affection and regard... expect
> variety of reaction... rule bound responses in name of caring lead
> us to suspect the claimant wants most to be credited with
> caring...[119]

We consider the objective elements of the situation, the unique conditions of the

moment.[120] We care because caring comes naturally, not because we expect

some reward. The emphasis is not on the consequences of our acts but on the

pre-act consciousness, on what motivates us to act in a caring way.

For the most part, caring has been discussed only as an outcome of

ethical behavior, and not as an integral part of an ethical foundation. Yet, as

Noddings points out, caring is indeed central to the development of one's ethical

persona. By adhering to an ethic of care, one that supersedes the universal

principles suggested by theorists such as Kohlberg, we become caring partners

in relation to others, we learn how to receive and how to respond. We learn how

to meet each other morally.

---

[119]*Ibid.*, 24.
[120]*Ibid.*

Implications for Education

The question that follows, is how does an ethic of care translate into the classroom? How do we create and maintain an environment that allows caring to flourish and moral meeting to occur? The simple answer is that both voices must be present in the classroom in order to offer a balanced program of moral education. The details of this program as well as the suggestions Noddings offers for creating the ideal learning environment will be discussed in the concluding chapter.

Conclusion

Looking at developmental theories can help educators to better understand their charge, the middle school student. From the minds of Jean Piaget, Erik Erikson, Lawrence Kohlberg, Carol Gilligan, James Fowler and Nel Noddings come many important insights and suggestions for improving the educational experience of early adolescents. What remains to be seen is how this information can be successfully implemented into both the general full-time public school as well as the supplementary religious school classrooms.

CHAPTER TWO: THE EMERGING MIDDLE SCHOOL

"Every major study of effective schools has concluded that adult expectations, school climate and especially the nature of school leadership are powerful determinants of student outcomes."[1] In other words, the attitudes and approaches of teacher, principles and miscellaneous staff, the physical plant and classroom environment of the school building, as well as the attitudes and capabilities of the students themselves, all play an important part of the overall success of the middle school.

In this chapter we shall explore the institution of the middle school. In order to truly understand the suggestions for innovations to be made in the realm of middle level education, one first has to know not only why the middle school emerged, but also what it replaced.

History of the Junior High School

The idea of the junior high school was born as a result of a 1888 address given by Charles W. Eliot, the president of Harvard at that time. Eliot spoke of the need to restructure the current school program, of reforming and unifying the entire educational experience. His concern stemmed from the fact that the average age of entering college freshman was on the rise. He hoped that it would decrease naturally if schools unified and improved their programs. His

---

[1] Joan Lipsitz, *Successful Schools for Young Adolescents* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books, 1984), 4.

words provided the impetus for the movement towards public school reorganization.

NEA[2] Committees were organized, but progress was slow. For the first time in the history of education in the United States, the goal was to create schools based on a grade arrangement that would be best for the physical, social, psychosocial, and intellectual development of children and youth.[3] As one NEA committee suggested, it seemed to make sense that the beginning of secondary education should coincide more closely with the onset of adolescence.[4]

One of the first schools to reorganize around these concerns was in Richmond, Indiana. There in 1896, an intermediate school housing grades seven and eight was established. With a broader curriculum, departmentalized teaching, elective courses, promotion by subjects, and homerooms with faculty advisors, Superintendent T. A. Mott was one of the first to implement some of the NEA recommendations.

Soon after school reorganization took place on a wider scale. The end of the nineteenth century saw an upheaval of previous educational systems and patterns. However, it was not until 1909 that the first real junior high school, one that from the onset was designed for early adolescents, was established in Columbus, Ohio. Although other communities already had established had two-year intermediate schools prior to this, Indianola Junior High School in

---

[2] National Education Association
[3] William T. Gruhn and Harl R. Douglass, *The Modern Junior High School*, (New York: The Ronald Press Company, 1971), 7.
[4] *Ibid.*, 37.

Columbus was among the first to include grades seven, eight, and nine together in one school. Additionally, it was most likely the first to call itself a junior high school.[5]

Why the need to reorganize? A number of factors contributed to Eliot's initial words and the committee's subsequent recommendations. To begin with, the turn of the century saw an explosion in population in the urban centers of this country, as immigrants made their way to our shores. The result? Attendance in schools increased tremendously. With high schools overflowing, the idea of creating a separate institution, one that would alleviate the conditions of overcrowdedness and a lack of resources, came into being. However, that was not the only reason for the creation of the middle school. Child labor laws which limited the age at which children could enter the workplace and the hours that could be spent there, combined with newly formed compulsory school attendance laws, freed up a number of children to continue attending school as well. Furthermore, as awareness of the developmental difference between the various ages previously lumped together in the high school arose, it became apparent that the younger students, those in grades seven, eight, and nine, would greatly benefit from having a program tailored to their physical, cognitive and social needs. This last reason was the most important one, the purpose that led to the ultimate creation of the junior high school.[6]

---

[5] *Ibid.*, 46.

[6] John W. Santrock, *Children*, 4th ed. (Dubuque, IA: Brown and Benchmark Publishers, 1995), 506.

Early educational literature iterates this point. It suggests that the main purpose of the new school was to focus attention on the formulation of an educational program intended to meet the needs, interests, and abilities of boys and girls during the early adolescent years.[7] Yet, many have thought of it in terms of certain administrative practices. These include: "departmentalization of instruction with teachers who are specialists in their respective subjects... promotion by subjects and ability grouping... team teaching, flexible scheduling, core or block-time classes and extra class activities."[8] These practices are what decidedly differentiated the junior high from the senior high school.

The restructuring of public schools continued rapidly after World War One. By 1960, nearly eighty percent of all high school graduates had passed through the new structure - grades one through six in the elementary or grammar school, grades seven through nine in the junior high or intermediate school, and finally, grades ten through twelve in the high school. Such divisions remained widespread until the emergence of the middle school movement which set out once again to restructure the public schools.

To what extent did the junior high model succeed? It has been suggested that the creation of junior high schools led to fewer dropouts. Success during the early years of adolescence, within the junior high program supposedly determined whether or not the individual would continue on through high school.[9] The junior high also eased the transition from elementary to senior high,

---

[7] Gruhn and Douglass, 4.
[8] *Ibid.*
[9] *Ibid.*, 3.

providing a school where one could learn to adjust to the more complex

practices of the upper secondary school. Students could naturally ease into the

high school experience.[10]

But the junior high school model left many unsatisfied. Why did it fail?

Designed to fit the developmental needs of seventh, eighth, and ninth graders,

the junior school ultimately became a duplicate model of the high school. How

so? The junior high school adopted the credit and grading systems, the methods

of teaching, the time schedules, and even similar activities to those of the high

school. Critics of the junior high saw a system that too readily adopted the

college preparatory curriculum, one that focused on academic success at the

expense of developmental growth.[11]

In other words, the junior high did not allow for the implementation of the

recommended program for it, the anticipated plan to better meet the needs of

middle level students. The biggest difficulty lie in the fact that ninth grade never

became an integral part of the junior high program. Instead, its courses

contained parts of the high school curriculum, and credits accumulated during

that year continued to count towards graduation, despite the physical separation

from the high school itself.[12] In retrospect, the term "junior high school" may not

have been the best choice for a school designed to meet the needs of early

adolescents. It suggested to many educators and parents that the school is, or

[10]Leonard V. Koos, *The Junior High School,* (Boston, MA: Ginn and Company, 1927), 117.
[11]Putnam County Schools, "The Middle School Program." Located at
http://www.citynet.net/putnam/middle.htm/#national
[12]*Ibid.;* Santrock, 506.

should be, an initiation [imitation?] of the high school.[13]

With that said, we look now at the movement that succeeded that of the junior high. We turn towards the emerging middle schools of the last half of the twentieth century.

The Middle School Emerges...

The general full-time middle school with which we are familiar today, was first instigated under the leadership of William Alexander in the 1960's. His suggestion was for a new type of school, one that would house grades sixth through eighth, or even fifth through eighth, and provide an alternative to the declining junior high school.[14]

Why the renewed interest in changing the structure of the middle education schools? The reasons vary. In many communities, the middle school has been established for more practical reasons, primarily administrative ones such as the reorganization of a school district, the high cost of maintaining school buildings, and the character of buildings presently available. Some focused on developmental concerns, looking for a program that offered a better transition to the high school. The structure of the Junior High School no longer fully served the needs of the students; because of the earlier physiological maturation of youth, many educators believed that the grades housed within the junior high were not ones that should be placed together. Supporters of the

---

[13]Gruhn and Douglass, 53.
[14]John Lounbury, *Key Characteristics of Middle Level Schools*, (Eric Digest ED401050, Nov. 96).

school reform movement believed that grade nine really belonged in the high school, while grade six should be moved up from the elementary program into that of the middle or intermediate school. Write Devita, Pomerantz and Wilklow:

> ...a middle school without the ninth graders will have fewer discipline problems than if they were in the school... these students are older, generally larger physically, in some cases are retainees and in most cases, too sophisticated for incoming seventh graders.[15]

This is only one reason as to why changing the grade structure of the educational experience has found much support within the school reform movement. One of the fundamental differences between the nearly defunct Junior High School and its replacement, the Middle School, is manifested in the grades included within the school.

However, educators found that "simply placing grades 5-8 or 6-8 together does not guarantee that the special needs of these students will be met. For the Middle School to be different from the traditional Junior High School, its curriculum and organization needed to be geared to serve students in the 10-14 age range."[16] Merely changing the grades involved does not better the school. The innovations need to encompass all of the school, affecting all aspects and people involved. We will now look at the changes made that transformed the educational model into that of the middle school as it still stands today.

---

[15] Joseph C. DeVita, *et al, The Effective Middle School*, (West Nyack, New York: Parker Publishing Company, Inc., 1970), 32.
[16] G. Cawelti, Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (Nov. 1998).

Guidelines And Goals

In 1982, the National Middle School Association published a position paper outlining the ten "essential elements of a 'true' middle school." The particulars were as follows:

(1) Educators knowledgeable about and committed to young
      adolescents
(2) A balanced curriculum based on students' needs
(3) A variety of organizational arrangements
(4) Varied instructional strategies
(5) A full exploratory program
(6) Comprehensive advising and counseling
(7) Continuous progress for students
(8) Evaluation procedures compatible with the nature of
      young adolescents
(9) Cooperative planning
(10) Positive school environment[17]

These points defined the ideal middle school. The document as a whole became the commonly cited standard for defining a middle school at its best. As we shall see, the guidelines suggested here have served to change many middle schools into good and effective schools that do meet the needs of early adolescents.

In 1995, the NMSA published a new position paper, updating the criteria for the middle school. Although similar to the original document, this new paper presented suggestions for a school environment that was not only programmatically different, but also developmentally appropriate as well. The language of the updated document is clear - schools must commit themselves to aiding the developmental growth of its students.[18] This new philosophy recognizes that students in preadolescent years are going through a unique

---

[17]National Middle School Association (NMSA). *This We Believe*. 1982.
[18]NMSA, 1995.

stage in human development, one in which an appropriate school experience can help the students reach their full potential.[19]

The overriding goals of the new middle school then, center around creating and developing an educational experience appropriate to the needs of the transescent, or early adolescent learner.[20] These schools strove to better prepare their students to "deal with the present... to cope with physical, intellectual, social and emotional changes of preadolescence."[21] In many schools that means redesigning the program to "relieve the pressure by de-emphasizing overt competition, interscholastic sports, formal social events and other activities which place pressure on students too early in their development."[22] Without the pressures of extracurricular activities, middle school students can focus on themselves.

What schools do to actually improve their middle level education is as varied as the schools themselves. No one innovation describes the changes made from school to school. Some have been more successful than others. The kinds of changes made by schools with significant results will be looked at in the next chapter. Did the institution of the middle school fulfill its goals? Only by looking at what has been implemented can we record its rate of success.

---

[19]Putnam County Schools, 3.
[20]Ibid., 12.
[21]Ibid.
[22]Ibid.

CHAPTER THREE: SPECIFICS OF THE MIDDLE SCHOOL

> In the famous opening of *Anna Karenina*, Tolstoy announces:
> 'Happy families are all alike; every unhappy family is unhappy in its
> own way.' The reverse is true of schools. While not 'all alike,'
> unhappy schools are often so similar that observers constantly
> record their deadening sameness. Happy schools have distinct
> personalities; they achieve clear definition in the midst of confusion
> about schooling for young adolescents."[1]

Happy schools have distinct personalities, yet similarities can be found among

them. Happy schools have all found success. We can learn what their

achievements are and find parallels to other schools that have also found ways

to successfully work with middle school students.

But first, we must define exactly what is meant by a happy school. We

must examine what in general determines the effectiveness of a 'good middle

school.'

* * * * *

The effective school does not form on its own. There are many parts to

the equation. Researchers do not agree, however, on what those components

are. Each has a different recipe for success. Writes Joan Lipsitz:

> Effective schools, as defined by the research literature, are safe,
> orderly schools where poor children, as well as middle-class
> children, perform reasonably well academically, as indicated by
> standardized measures of academic achievement.[2]

---

[1] Joan Lipsitz, *Successful Schools for Young Adolescents* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction
Books, 1984), 23.
[2] *Ibid.*,10.

In a similar vein, Ronald R. Edmonds writes that "effective schools are characterized by... clear academic goals with an emphasis on basic skills instruction; [and] a well-defined testing program..."[3] By these definitions, test scores and skill achievements make the school. But is there more to success than simply having students achieve high scores on standardized tests?

The changes must be all-encompassing and not merely curricular or policy based. Efforts must be broader in scope;

> ...change efforts based only on an understanding of a general school culture and not on its particular form at the local school, will ignore what is most crucial: the particular structures, behaviors, meanings and belief systems that have evolved in that school...[4]

Those responsible for creating the effective middle school must be prepared to examine its existing structures from all angles.

Michael Rutter is one of many who has outlined the criteria for reaching the desired outcome of a good middle school. Rutter's list includes the following:

- High levels of rewards and praise for students' accomplishments
- Pleasant and comfortable school conditions for students and staff
- Ample opportunities for students to take responsibility for and participate in the running of the school
- An academic emphasis set by the school staff
- A consensus among staff members about curricular expectations, school norms and discipline procedures[5]

---

[3] Ronald R. Edmonds, "Some Schools Work And More Can," *Social Policy* 9 (March-April 1979), 28-32.

[4] Bennet Solomon, "Curriculum Innovation: What Jewish Education Can Learn from Educational Research," *Studies in Jewish Education* 4 (1989): 65.

[5] Michael Rutter, "School Influences on Children's Behavior and Development," *Pediatrics* 65 (February 1980), 208-20.

Rutter's list is only a partial one. He provides no concrete suggestions for changes to be made within the school. Rather, he outlines sweeping guidelines for instituting the beginnings of change.

William Alexander and Paul George provide another sort of list. Theirs reflects changes made to the educational program itself. For them, the effective school has the following characteristics:

- Guidance systems
- A transitional curriculum; one that carefully articulates and coordinates learning experiences
- Block scheduling
- A variety of instructional strategies
- Intramural athletics and other exploratory courses
- Core learning experiences for future use[6]

Alexander and George want to see programs set in place that are designed to help the student through the day to day difficulties of school life. In addition to that, their list reminds us of the importance of offering a variety of experiences to our middle school students.

Puntnam County's list is similar to the one written above, with a few notable exceptions. The criteria and characteristics compiled by the Puntnam County Schools shares their vision for the successful middle educational experience. Their schools strive to offer the following components;

- Teaching of basic skills
- Block scheduling
- A team approach
- Physical activities that develop not create competition
- A unified arts program
- An advisory program
- An exploratory program

---

[6] William M. Alexander and Paul S. George, *The Exemplary Middle School* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1981), 2.

The criteria listed here are quite similar to those mentioned by Alexander and George. However, here we find an interest in avoiding fierce competition. Instead, the focus is on the opportunity to develop a sense of competition without the tension that tends to go along with contests and sports teams.

Stuart C. Purkey and Marshall S. Smith provide yet another perspective as to the definition of the effective school. Their criteria lean heavily on the teachers, their training and "control over instruction and training decisions."[7] This differs from the previous documents cited in that Purkey and Smith do not write of community partnerships. Instead, they focus on the teaching staff, on its role in the success of the school. Yet their view does not seem to be that of the majority.

From my research, I think that the 1995 document by the National Middle School Association is the best example of a written list of the goals of the modern middle school. Along with the criteria for the gauging of success, the paper highlights programmatic areas to become the focus of educational restructuring and reform. Those areas are:

1) A curriculum that is challenging, integrative and exploratory
2) The use of varied teaching and learning approaches
3) Assessment and evaluation that promotes learning
4) Flexible organizational structures
5) Program and policies that foster health, wellness and safety
6) Comprehensive guidance and support services[8]

---

[7] Stuart C. Purkey and Marshall S. Smith, "Too Soon To Cheer? Synthesis Of Research On Effective Schools," *Educational Leadership*, 40, no. 3 (Dec. 1982), 67.
[8] John H. Lounsbury, *Key Characteristics of Middle Level Schools,* (ERIC Digest: Nov. 1996), 6

The NMSA's guidelines are clear, concise. The paper presents a way to
segment proposed changes in a way that seems doable for the modern school.

The Challenge

M.G. Fullan and M.B. Miles write that "change is a journey, not a
blueprint."[9] These words are indeed fitting for the educators who face the task of
creating successful schools for middle school students. No concrete plan exists;
each change is made on a trial and error basis. What works for one school may
not work for the next; no solid blueprint or list of instructions is readily available
to help with the restructuring and reorganizing of a school. The challenge of
finding success is indeed a journey of which we all are a part. We fumble our
way along the path together.

In order to be successful, schools must not only find a way to address the
massive individual differences in the young adolescents' development, but also
to design an educational experience that meets parental expectations about
academic learning and socialization as well.[10] Schools must become positive
environments for early adolescents, caring spaces which foster both personal
and social development.[11] In fact, this is the most striking feature of a successful
school, the ability to adapt all practices and procedures to fit the individuals
within the school.

* * * * *

---

[9] M. G. Fullan and M. B. Miles, "Getting Reform Right: What Works and What Doesn't," *Phi Delta Kappan* 73, no. 10 (1992): 749.
[10] Lipsitz, 3.
[11] *Ibid.*, 168.

The concept of the middle school has met with varying degrees of success. It is a success difficult to measure. No two middle schools follow exactly the same schedules, teach the same subjects or function in the same way. But we can look at general trends, at what they have accomplished that merits their school being labeled as a good middle school. Incorporated into the following sections are some of the best practices available, some of the ideas that make these schools work.

What are the components of a good middle school? "Every major study of effective schools has concluded that adult expectations, school climate and especially the nature of school leadership are powerful determinants of student outcomes."[12] In other words, not only the curriculum, but the attitudes and approaches of both parents and teachers, the physical plant and classroom environment of the school building, as well as the attitudes and capabilities of the students themselves, all play an important part in the overall "goodness" of the middle school.

Curriculum and Instruction

We begin with a question: what is the middle school supposed to teach? Irving E. Sigel defines curriculum as being "the core of the educational enterprise. It is the knowledge that the child is expected to assimilate and to accommodate."[13] This could be interpreted to mean far more than the traditional

---

[12]*Ibid.*, 4.

[13]Irving E. Sigel, "The Piagetian System and the World of Education," *Studies in Cognitive Development: Essays in Honor of Jean Piaget*, eds. David Elkind and John H. Flavell, (New York: Oxford University Press, Inc., 1969), 484.

view that curriculum is only the academics of education. It also includes the extracurricular activities reflecting a wide range of individual differences in biological and psychological development.[14] A good curriculum contains a strong emphasis on opportunities for competence, achievement, self-exploration and definition, social interaction, meaningful school participation. A good curriculum plans for personal growth as well as for academic achievement.[15]

Educators agree that the curriculum must match the developmental level of the student. In fact, success depends on it. However, it is not an easy task,

> Since the teaching strategy and curriculum are dependent on the educator's awareness of child's capacity to deal with material, it is necessary for the teacher to identify the child's level of cognitive functioning... the matching of curriculum and teaching strategy to the intellectual level of the child is a tricky issue. It is easy to confuse the child's manifest level of cognitive competence with his 'true' understanding...[16]

Just because a student appears to have mastered material does not mean that is truly the case. Many students successfully reiterate points and answer questions without fully understanding that about which they are speaking.

How then to plan a curriculum? How to provide what is needed most by middle school students? This issue is indeed a pressing one. However, it is not what ultimately makes a school a good one. For the curriculum of a school is not what changes schools from being mundane. The content taught at most middle schools is the same, it is the methods of delivery that differ.[17] Here are a few

---

[14]John W. Santrock, *Children*, 4th ed. (Dubuque, IA: Brown and Benchmark Publishers, 1995), 506.
[15]*Ibid.*, 188.
[16]Sigel, 471.
[17]Santrock, 189.

approaches that are successful within the general full-time middle school.

Independent Study

Independent study can be a way of keeping students interested and engaged in schoolwork by allowing them to choose areas of study which appeal to them. The topics chosen, however, must fit in with the rest of the curriculum. Independently learned subjects must be held to similar standards and expectations for the student. A statement within a bulletin dedicated to exploring the realm of independent study within the Rupert A. Nock Middle School says,

> To be effective, independent study must be a part of, not apart from, the regular program. Its emphasis should be on creative, meaningful research that will stretch and strengthen the minds of students. Properly conducted it will help pupils grow... self-control, time management, and decision-making are not taught by lecturing or completing questions in a workbook, but by allowing the pupil the freedom to develop these traits by developing them.[18]

Independent study supplements classroom activities by focusing on skills involved with working alone. The skills learned from such an experience are indeed valuable ones.

How to choose the topic of study? "Teachers can guide students who are interested and have rudimentary study skills to do individual projects in lieu of part or all of the regularly assigned work in regular classes."[19] Teachers can assist their students in deciding what they should research, perhaps even suggesting additional work in an area covered in the classroom in which the student showed great interest. Once the topic of the independent study is

---

[18]Alexander and George, 66.
[19]*Ibid.*, 65.

chosen, William Alexander and Paul George suggest creating a contract. By this they mean an agreement between the teacher and the student as to the nature of the project, the time involved in its completion, the role to be played by the teacher, and the expectations for the student involved in the project.

Exploratory Courses / Special Interest Areas

In the Junior High School, such courses were of a more traditional nature, tending to fall within the realm of home economics, industrial arts and music. The original intent was to introduce students to these subjects through relatively brief, introductory courses with the opportunity to take longer, more intensive courses during another year for those interested.[20] In the middle school, offerings are of a much more diverse nature. Oak Park Middle School in Decatur, Alabama, offers the following throughout the school year:

> I. ACADEMIC ACTIVITIES: Banking; Worldwide Folk tales and Superstitions; Classic Books; Geometric Designs; Geometric Line Design or String Art; Geometric Mobiles; Math for Fun; Plant Collections; Pleasure reading; Reading for Pleasure; Speed Math; Small Mammal Survey of Fields and Woods.
> II. ART AND CRAFT RELATED ACTIVITIES: Basic Drawing; Basket Weaving; Bottle crafts; Bread Dough Artistry; Ceramics; Christmas Crafts in Felt; Christmas Decorations; Copper Tooling; Craftsticks; Decorative Painting; Decoupage; Float Painting and Other Oddities; Flower Arranging; Flower Making; Gingham Flowers; Graphics; Handicrafts; Linoleum Block Printing; Macramé; Number Painting; Papier Mâchè; Polydom...
> III. COMMUNICATIONS: One-Act Plays; Plays and Skits; Spanish (Conversational); Teen Talk.
> IV. GAMES: Beginning Bridge; Advanced Bridge; Chess; Checkers; Science Games; Scrabble.
> V. HOBBIES: Ghost Stories; Home Decorating; Horses, Horses, Horses; Hot Air Balloon; Model Airplanes; Model Rocketry; Movie

---

[20] *Ibid.*, 61.

History; Pen Pals; Photography; Small Engine Repair; Soap Box Derby; Stamp Collecting; Whittling; Lanyard Weaving...
VI.   MUSIC: Band (Beginning); Band (Concert); Chorus; Guitar; Group Singing; Music Theory...

The list goes on, but what is here is enough to see the vast amount of activities available to middle school students. This is of course, a rather extensive and impressive list. Although not all schools have the resources to provide as many or as varied activities, nonetheless, this list shows that nearly anything is possible.

Such courses are now often called 'related arts' or even 'unified arts.' Designed to help middle school students explore a variety of things, these mini-courses "have potential for helping middle school students to identify their own interests and disinterests."[21]

There are schools in which these exploratory courses are more directed and focused. The Practical Arts course at Noe Middle School in Louisville, Kentucky, exposes students in the sixth grade to an overview of twelve of the standard career clusters. Similarly, at North Marion Middle School in Ocala, Florida, students follow a 'wheel' schedule in grade six rotating through each of the following programs for about five weeks each: agriculture, business education, construction, graphic communication, home economics, manufacturing, and power and transport. In this way, students are exposed to some of the career options available; they can begin to discover what may be a potential vocation for them.

---

[21] *Ibid.*, 62.

It is important to note however, that the middle school movement does not consider such special interest activities to be parallel to a student's regular classes. They are however, an important part of the curriculum of a school. These unofficial activities assist the child's social growth by allowing the student to pursue additional areas of interest above and beyond the traditional courses. Alexander and George list a set of guidelines or characteristics of these exploratory or special interest activities:

1. Student initiative in organizing, selecting, planning and conducting is encouraged.
2. The activity meets much less frequently and for a shorter term than the traditional exploratory classes.
3. Teacher responsibility for an activity is a part of the teacher's assignment, but teachers have much freedom in proposing and planning the particular activities they guide.
4. The students' participation is voluntary and no grades are given by teachers; however, the teacher advisor does help students make choices of appropriate activities.
5. Students throughout a middle school may choose activities so that these activities are not organized by grades or ability levels or other factors toward homogeneity.

Special interest activities, alternately called 'classes,' 'activities,' 'mini-courses,' and 'electives,' if organized and executed properly, do much for the students involved. Looking at the characteristics listed above, it is apparent that if done correctly, the addition of interest opportunities to the traditional curriculum can be a wonderful asset to the educational experience.[22]

---

[22]See chapter 5 for how this idea can fit into the supplementary school.

The School Culture

How important is the culture of the school? Rutter and his associates write that "...students' behavior and academic success are considerably influenced by the internal life of the school."[23] What happens within the school, within the classrooms as well as throughout the rest of the building, all of it has a substantial impact upon the achievements of the students.

The Building Space

The words, "We shape our buildings; thereafter they shape us," attributed to Winston Churchill, are appropriately used in the struggle to create good and effective middle schools.[24] Many middle schools find themselves the inheritors of buildings originally planned for older students. The facilities of these buildings are designed for purposes and programs that are foreign to those that the middle school advocates.[25] In order for the middle school to be effective however, its layout must fit the needs of the middle school program. It requires a very different set up than that of either the elementary school or the high school.[26] Its design must be one geared for success.

For the physical setting of the school building is very important. Adolescents are sensitive to the physical environment of their surroundings. Students reciprocate the care expressed in the building by making it their

---

[23]Michael Rutter et al., *Fifteen Thousand Hours: Secondary Schools And Their Effects on Children* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979), 93.
[24]Alexander and George, 197.
[25]*Ibid.*
[26]*Ibid.*

building. The school setting provides the perfect opportunity to explore some of the challenges involved with being an adolescent. There, students can begin to form a sense of identity, commit to group ideals, develop personal autonomy, and pursue increasingly intimate relationships.[27] The correct spacing within the school may even help to control discipline problems; design concerns such as lighting, openness, and the like can do much to increase the general morale of both staff and students.

Morale can be raised by the way that the space is used inside the building. Do individual grades have a space of their own? Is there a sense of belonging by the staff and students? Is there pride in the way the school looks and feels?[28] These are important questions, for there is indeed a relationship between the philosophy of education held and the type of building erected. "Classes are particularly kinds of environments. They have distinctive properties affecting participants regardless of how students are organized for learning or what educational philosophy the teacher espouses."[29] The overall environment of a school says much about what the members of that institution value and deem to be important.

The Atmosphere

Another important element to consider is the atmosphere found within the school walls. How it is perceived by students and staff? A positive school climate

---

[27]Lipsitz, 7.
[28]Nancy Berla, Anne T. Henderson and William Kewersky, *The Middle School Years: A Parent's Handbook.* (The National Committee for Citizens in Education, 1989), 26.
[29]Anita Woolfolk, *Educational Psychology,* 7th ed. (Prentice Hall, 1997), 440.

is necessary for success to occur. An environment that is positive is one in which every positive act is recognized and valued. It is one in which both students and teachers feel that their work is appreciated and applauded by the school. How can such a feeling be achieved? Nancy Berla, Anne T. Henderson, and William Kewersky, suggest placing bulletin boards throughout the school to display school work and hanging portraits of those students who have excelled or contributed to the school's positive energy.[30]

School As A Social Institution

Larry Cuban writes that, "...policy-maker wisdom on schooling has flip-flopped from schools not making much difference in children's lives to the school being the single most important instrument in securing equity and excellence for all children."[31] Today's schools teach not only "fundamentals" but also values and behavior patterns, concepts of world and self and stuff necessary for becoming adult in contemporary society.[32] The school becomes a sort of 'surrogate society', an important institution within the lives of its students, which greatly influences and impacts their lives.[33]

In many ways, the school has replaced the societal assimilation that used to occur in the home. And yet, it has not completely overtaken the role of the parent. "The school is second only to the family in its impact upon the self of

---

[30] Berla, Henderson and Kewersky, 18.
[31] Barry S. Kogan, ed., *Common Schools, Uncommon Futures: A Working Consensus for School Renewal* (New York: Teacher College Press, 1997), 15.
[32] Ira J. Gordon, *Human Development: From Birth Through Adolescence,* 2nd. ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1969), 148.
[33] Lipsitz, 7.

child..."[34] In essence, the school acts to teach and reinforce those values and skills perceived by the community as desirable, or at least those so perceived by the power elements of the community.[35] The school reinforces what the child learns at home. It gives the student a society of sorts in which to practice appropriate behavior and mannerisms.

In order to fulfill its duty as a practice arena for entrance to society, the school must feel safe to its students. Such security is obtained by successfully assimilating students into the school's particular subsociety or way of life. Each school has its own values and ways of communicating them, a series of expectations and routines, an interpersonal climate in which socialization occurs, and a unique physical setting that conveys these systems.[36] Each school is its own society. Each functions as a training ground for early adolescents to learn how to become fully integrated adolescents and adults in the larger society.

A School For All: Involving Parents And Families

An important part of the school culture is the parents and families of the students. Parents of middle schoolers are quite willing to become involved in their children's education when they feel that they have a definite role to play and are made to welcome within the school.[37] As educators, our goal is to make

---

[34]Gordon, 148.
[35]Ibid., 150.
[36]Ibid., 152.
[37]Nancy L. Ames and Edward Miller, Changing Middle Schools: How to Make Schools Work for Young Adolescents (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1994).

72

both of these things happen. A successful school must incorporate the family into its overall program for its students.

Do The Students Want Their Parents In School?

Many students have ambivalent feelings toward seeing their parents at school. Young adolescents are sometimes embarrassed by parents' participation in school activities. At the age where they are actively seeking their independence, having parents around may feel threatening. Yet, direct parent involvement seems to be an important factor in helping middle school students to be school oriented and learning focused.[38]

Parents Become Distanced

During the elementary school years, parents are very involved in their child's school life. This involvement, however, tends to end, or at least significantly decrease, when the student moves into the middle school. Why is that the case? Because as the early adolescent moves into the more complex structure of the middle school program, the onset of multiple instructors, increasingly complicated subject material and the student's growing need for autonomy and independence all work to weaken the tie between parents and their student's curriculum and progress.[39] It becomes harder for parents to keep track of all that goes on in the day to day life of the busy middle school.

---

[38]Lipsitz, 197.
[39]Ames and Miller, 3.

Bridging the Gap: Creating Family Partnerships

How then to bring the parent and families back in to touch with the school? The easiest way, it seems, is to include all in decision making processes:

> Schools need to include middle-grade families, teachers, and students in decisions about curriculum and instruction... involve families and students in conferences about course work and individual progress... Families need to know what policies and expectations are...[40]

Families must know what is going in their child's school. They must be involved in all that happens there.

It is also possible to 'decrease the fragmentation' that families feel. In Rochester, NY, many parents take adult basic education classes in order to learn what their children are doing in school. It is part of a plan set up to bridge the gap between students and their families.[41] Schools can help bring families together through the creation of similar programs. Teachers can provide parents with methods and strategies to support the success of their middle school student.

One sure way to include families is to create meaningful home tasks that ensure parental assistance. Such home "learning kits" have been successfully implemented in Community District 3 in New York City. The kits create opportunities for families to learn together. Another similar idea is to form a parent center like the one set up in Natchez, Mississippi which creates activities

---

[40] *Ibid.*, 2.
[41] Barry Rutherford and Shelly H. Billig. "Eight Lessons of Parent, Family, and Community Involvement in the Middle Grades." *Phi Delta Kappan* 77, no. 1 (1995), 66.

to do at home. In this way, families can do things together based on what the student is learning in school, but in a way that doesn't resemble conventional homework.[42]

The use of parent volunteers can also be a good way to involve parents within the school. Too often, parents are invisible within the classroom, volunteering to be present can change that. It is not a good idea, however, to have parents volunteer in their own child's classroom. Simply being a caring parental presence's will be beneficial for all the students, even if none of them are related to the parent volunteer. Being within the actual classroom is one of the better ways for parents to stay informed about what goes on in the school[43]

The Teachers

What makes a good teacher? What is a successful teacher expected to do within the classroom? Vince Lawrence writes that a good teacher:

> Involves students in the learning process; Uses a variety of different teaching techniques; Provides a positive classroom atmosphere; Is flexible; Tries to understand and accept cultural differences; Has a sense of humor; Cooperates with other teachers and with parents; Knows how to communicate with students, parents and staff; Accepts a variety of behavior and beliefs in others that differ from his or her own; Shows a genuine concern for all children and their growth; Knows the subject matter; Serves as an advisor to the students in the class, not just as an instructor.[44]

In other words, the ideal teacher is an infallible human being, one who gives endless amounts of love and support to students, and never has a bad day.

---

[42]*Ibid.*, 68.
[43]Berla, Henderson and Kewersky, 27.
[44]Vince Lawrence, "The Teacher in the Middle School" in *The Early Adolescence Magazine* (January 1988).

Being a good teacher is not an easy job. It takes a person fully dedicated to the education of students to be successful. Woolfolk describes good instructors as being "expert teachers."[45] Such an individual is defined as being, "experienced, effective teachers who have developed solutions for common classroom problems. Their knowledge of teaching process and content is extensive and well organized."[46] Woolfolk also provides a rather detailed list of specifics as to what such "knowledge" contains. The expert teachers knows:

> [the] academic subjects they teach; general teaching strategies; age/subject appropriate materials; subject-specific knowledge for teaching; the characteristics and cultural backgrounds of the learners; the settings in which students learn; the goals and purposes of teaching...[47]

An individual must have not only impeccable qualifications, but also be able to meet the high expectations set out for them. But do any teachers really come this highly qualified and excited to teach? Do we expect too much from those willing to teach our children?

An 'expert teacher' is indeed a tough standard to live up to, but many teachers do come awfully close to being exceptional teachers. What makes them so exceptional? Of course who they are and what they bring to their classroom is important. But there are essential skills they must have as well. For example, teachers who work with middle school students must possess training and background in working with young adolescents. Additionally, to be

---

[45]Woolfolk, 7.
[46]*Ibid.*
[47]*Ibid.*

76

successful, teachers must have support within the school, positive relationships with administrators and co-teachers can and often does make all the difference.

Supporting And Involving Teachers

How do teachers feel supported within the school environment? Who pats them on the back and praises them for a job well done? Much comes from relationships with peers; working connections with other teachers. Teachers are often the best resources for one another. As professionals they can learn more from peers than from an outside authority.[48] Where does this learning take place? Perhaps in staff meetings where teachers can share ideas, 'best practices' and work out programs together. Risa Buckstein and Norman Fischer suggest the implementation of a peer coaching program, one organized to facilitate opportunities for planning and meeting, to allow teams of teachers to observe one another, and to create situations in which to discuss observations and brainstorm solutions to instructional problems.[49]

Team teaching can be an important element of successful teaching within the school. Not only do teachers feel supported by fellow staff members, but being part of a team also prevents feelings of isolation. Team sharing is a necessary part of the teaching process. A high level of communication really does make a difference in teacher competency and pride about their work.[50]

---

[48]Risa Buckstein and Norman Fischer, "Peer Coaching: A Better Way to Staff Improvement," *Jewish Education News* (Summer 1992), 36-37.
[49]*Ibid.*, 36.
[50]Lipsitz, 185.

The organization of teachers into teams can also help to integrate the curriculum and to ease the transition from one school to another. In team arrangements, teachers can meet regularly to discuss the curriculum and the students, as well as how to provide an interdisciplinary approach to classroom studies and homework assignments.[51] Such meetings are especially essential when new teachers join the already established staff of a school. For "just as students need to be socialized into the goals, norms and expectations of a school, so do teachers."[52] New teachers need to feel welcome, placement on a teacher team can do much to ease the transition into the new school.

Such feelings of belonging are crucial, they stem from true involvement in and interaction with the school and its programs. For teachers should be involved in all aspects of school life, not merely those that take place within the classroom walls. Planning and executing curriculum is one area in which it is essential for teachers to participate. This is known as developmentalism, meaning that those who teach a particular curriculum should be involved in the development of it.[53] Teachers should feel ownership over what they teach, not as if the material outlines are being forced upon them. Additionally, current research has found that implementation of new programs and ideas are overall more successful when teachers have participated since the beginning.

[51]Berla, Henderson and Kewersky, 20.
[52]Lipsitz, 185.
[53]Solomon, 70.

The Teacher As Advisor And Friend

One way to increase teacher involvement in student life is to establish a teacher-advisory system. Each teacher in school is responsible for a small group of students. This group meets regularly to discuss things that are not normally classroom related. This group provides a comfortable setting in which teachers and students can get better acquainted. It also serves to shrink the size of an otherwise huge institution by providing the student with a particular teacher always there to look out for the student's interests. The group, then, becomes a good place to celebrate birthdays, share good news, and worry together about upcoming tests and special events.[54]

The creation of such advisory groups reinforces the idea that in many ways, teachers become surrogates for parents during school hours. Today, teachers are dealing with issues that once stayed outside of school walls.[55] It becomes the teacher's responsibility to help students through the difficult times of adolescence. Many of what the students struggle with, ambivalence about attachments, insecurity about social and intellectual competence, and concern about bodies and feelings, become issues with which the teacher has to deal.[56]

Is this new role for the teacher an appropriate one? Nel Noddings writes of the work of Martin Buber, relaying his words that a true teacher-student relationship is one that moves away from formalities towards friendship...[57]

---

[54]Berla, Henderson and Kewersky, 25.
[55]Woolfolk, 96
[56]Lipsitz, 7.
[57]Nel Noddings, *Caring: A Feminine Approach To Ethics & Moral Education* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1984), 67.

Students need to feel not only that their teachers truly care for them, but also that those same teachers are available for them.

The Students

The learners themselves are an integral part of the middle school. Who they are and what they are capable of greatly affects all other elements of the school system. It is difficult, however, for researchers to agree as to what truly defines the middle school student, their learning styles and capabilities.

In chapter one, we explored some of the prevalent theories of child development, and the resulting educational implications. We will not go into that discussion again. Rather, suffice it to say that the middle school student is,

> well-informed, discriminating, aware of the world around him[58], and geared to the various forms of communication, media. If we are to teach him, indeed to inspire him, we must utilize the resources of modern instruction and ingenuity...[59]

In other words, students at this age learn in a variety of ways. They enjoy the opportunity to make use of the latest technologies and methodologies.

But, some educators such as Herman Epstein, feel that the scope of educational aspirations for this age group should be rather limited. He writes that,

> ...12-14 year olds are neurologically incapable of abstract thought because they are in a period of slow brain growth... they cannot process more complex information then they could when they were 10-12 and in a period of rapid brain growth... children should not

---

[58]The use of gender pronouns here is because of the author's use in the source quoted.
[59]Joseph C. Devita, Philip Pomerantz and Leighton B. Wilklow, *The Effective Middle School* (West Nyack, New York: Parker Publishing Company, Inc., 1970), 208.

be pushed to rise very much in cognitive level during these years but, instead, might be encouraged to develop and consolidate already initiated skills...[60]

Epstein's words provide further support for the varied capabilities of students. He writes that not only do these differences exist in not so subtle ways, but that we should not encourage additional growth during the preadolescent years. We should instead, strengthen already existing skills and abilities. This is perhaps the reason why the concept of the Learning Center has found popularity in many schools.

What is meant by a 'learning center'? It is generally thought to be a place combining activities for children with questions and research on a subject so that they can learn on their own. This type of learning is facilitated through stations set up throughout the school. Not only does it give the impression that learning happens both within and outside of the classroom, but it gives students real opportunities to take their own initiative in learning. It creates learning at the level of each individual in areas that interest each student. Such tactics enable the teacher to individualize the learning process.

Optimal Methodologies

As noted earlier, students in any class will vary greatly both in their level of cognitive development and in their academic capabilities. How then to know where the students are in their development? The students themselves are often the best source of information about their abilities. Writes Noddings, "'Start

[60]Herman T. Epstein, "Learning To Learn: Matching Instruction To Cognitive Levels," *Principal* 60 (May 1981), 28.

where the kids are,' we tell new teachers. 'Make your lessons relevant.'"[61]

Observing students in both social and academic situations can provide insight as to 'where they are.' They give the clues needed to indicate their level of development. Such knowledge is a helpful thing to know about a student within the classroom.

What is the best way to teach a class with its many levels of ability? x40 suggests that one possibility is for students to be introduced to a topic together, but then to work individually or in smaller groups on follow-up activities matched to their level. Another idea is to offer a list of possible activities and to let students choose which most interests them. It is likely that they will choose wisely; that students will pick activities they are capable of completing.

Berla, Henderson and Kewersky write that it is preferable for students "to switch classes as little as possible, rather, to stay with one teacher for most or even all of the school day."[62] Why? Because young adolescents need to connect with the adults in their lives. In school, true bonds develop upon increased contact with a certain teacher or instructor. For that reason, schools should allow students to remain with one teacher for longer periods of time.

But there is more to the problem of creating a program that works for students. No matter the curriculum or strategy, and regardless of the instructor, students may continue to face difficulties in learning. A number of vicissitudes may arise within the classroom, the following are but a few examples. Hunt

---

[61]Nel Noddings, "Learning, Teaching, and Existential Meaning," *Common Schools, Uncommon Futures: A Working Consensus for School Renewal,* ed. Barry Kogan (New York: Teachers College Press, 1997), 50.
[62]Berla, Henderson and Kewersky, 21.

writes of "the problem of the match."[63] Students must be engaged, not bored by work that is too simple nor left behind by teaching they cannot understand. This is where relevance plays a key role. The student must find the subject material pertinent as well as interesting. John Santrock writes of the "top dog phenomenon."[64] This can be a problem for students new to the middle school system. What is it? Defined as the circumstance of moving from the top position in elementary school, to the lowest position in the middle school, it is a difficulty encountered by students struggling to adjust to the complexity of the middle school system. Finally, Noddings explores what she calls the "telephone number phenomenon."[65] So called because students often learn the necessary material for a test and then promptly forget it, this brings into question the methods employed to convey information to our students. It would seem that retention of material learned depends heavily on purpose, regular use, and personal significance. Students only remember what they choose to; they retain that which they feel is relevant to them.

How then to make students pay attention to that which holds little immediate importance for them? Using appropriate rewards is one way to stress the overall importance of learning regardless of individual interest. Frequent rewards are very important to youngsters of middle school age. They need to feel that their actions are positively received and reinforced.[66] Publicly

[63]Woolfolk, 40.
[64]Santrock, 508.
[65]Noddings (1997), 50-51.
[66]Berla, Henderson and Tewersky, 18.

acknowledging a student's success on a particular project also elevates the lasting effects of both the work and the subject examined.

Dividing Students

One of the most pressing issues in the movement of school reform, is the question of how to divide students so that they are in the best position to learn. It has been estimated that nearly three quarters of the middle schools in America use a standard chronological age-graded student grouping system.[67] Yet this is not necessarily the best arrangement.

One alternative has been to divide students into classes according to their ability level. It is thought that this makes teaching more appropriate for students. It is a practice known as 'tracking'. Students are placed according to ability into different levels or tracks within the school. In such a situation there tends to be little to no interaction between students of the different tiers. [68]

The common research points out that such segregation of students may not be the ideal way to improve teaching. According to *Turning Points*, a report by the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, "tracking has proven to be 'one of the most divisive and damaging school practices.'" [69] High ability students often do benefit from such an arrangement. It causes problems, however, for those at the lower end. Those students in the lower levels receive lower-quality

---

[67]Alexander and George, 144.
[68]Woolfolk, 122.
[69]Berla, Henderson, and Kewersky, 73.

instruction, face low expectations by instructors an the school itself, and may as a result develop severely decreased self-esteem.[70]

Why is tracking so detrimental? The process of division demonstrates a hierarchy of values to the student. A student may perceive that an academic student is worth more than a vocational student. The latter, then, may develop a lowered sense of self-worth as well as feelings of inadequacy. As a result, the school may become a threatening, defeating experience.[71]

How to avoid that potential outcome? Two possible alternatives are either the non-graded classroom, or ability grouping within the classroom itself. The first option, the Joplin Plan, or non graded school, allows for students to move according to their own developmental needs and learning capabilities. In this horizontal approach, advancement is based on subject matter and achievement.[72] Traditional promotion by grade levels is replaced by a plan which allows a child to advance in one subject or another whether or not he or she is ready to advance in all subjects.[73] A non-graded environment eliminates the false impression of homogeneity given by grade levels based on chronological age. Such a relaxed promotion system allows for a wide-range of individual differences. However, this tactic works better for some students than it does for others. Although it is good for gifted and fast learners, slower learners may not fare so well.[74]

---

[70]Woolfolk, 122.
[71]Gordon, 154.
[72]Santrock, 16.
[73]*Ibid.*, 30.
[74]Gordon, 153.

85

A second option is that of ability grouping within the classroom. This arrangement is thought to provide a greater advantage for the students than does 'tracking,' they benefit from having the same instructor for longer periods of time. Furthermore, valuable class time is not wasted with classroom changes or other such distractions. Grouping students, is of course, inevitable; but there are ways to keep students together regardless of ability. Berla, Henderson and Tewersky suggest that when grouping does have to occur, the classes should be temporary and flexible. In other words, students should be moved when they understand or have difficulties with class material. Why? Because locking adolescents into a certain ability level gives them no chance for improvement.[75]

Involving Students

The bottom line is that students must be involved in all that happens in the school. This not openly increases their participation in classroom activities and school events, but also gives them a sense of ownership of what happens around the school building as well. Without such feelings of belonging, a child will not succeed, no matter what the qualifications of the school may be. Involvement is the key to bolstering a student's academic and social success. Therefore it is important to "share decisions - whenever possible, get students involved in decisions about rules of conduct, activities, academic expectations, even textbook reviews."[76] Allowing students to participate in decision making situations makes students feel important. Listening to their input exemplifies the

---

[75]Berla, Henderson and Kewersky, 22.
[76]Woolfolk, 62.

school's trust in its students. Trust builds confidence, and confidence ultimately

leads to healthier classroom environments and happier students.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE JEWISH SUPPLEMENTARY SCHOOL

> The Rabbinic dictum, *v'talmud torah k'neged kulam* (Mishnah Peah 1:1) 'and the study of the Torah excels all ethical deeds' -- is indicative of the place of learning in Jewish life during the millenniums of dispersion. Teaching the young the tenets of Judaism was paramount among all other social and cultural functions of the Jew at all times.[1]

Education has always played an important role in Judaism. It involves more than simple schooling, however, for learning was considered to be "more than the pursuit of knowledge. It was the fulfillment of a religious duty..."[2] One has an obligation to learn and to teach. In the Book of Deuteronomy are the words by which parents are commanded to impart knowledge unto their children. 'You shall teach... diligently unto your children."[3] To teach is to do one's part in passing along the culture and its traditions. To learn is to participate in an important pattern of Jewish life.[4]

A History

Colonial Times -- The Qahál

The early American Jewish community mirrored its counterpart in Europe. The Jews joined together into a *qahal*, into a unified religious community within the larger society. Membership was easy to determine. Every Jew living within the geographical area of a given city, New York or Charleston, for example, was included. Every Jewish activity in the community was supervised by the *parnass*,

---

[1] Judah Pilch, "Jewish Religious Education," *Religious Education: A Comprehensive Survey*, ed. Marvin J. Taylor. (New York: Abingdon Press, 1960), 382.
[2] *Ibid.*
[3] Deut. 6:7.
[4] Pilch, 382.

the president or chairperson of the community. All actions were either supported or blocked depending on the aims and wishes of the leaders of the *qahal*.[5]

Yet, the *qahal* did not take responsibility for the education of its children. "On the whole, education during the colonial and early federal period was not felt to be a communal responsibility comparable to [running] a cemetery, a place of worship, or [giving] aid to the poor."[6] with the exception of one school, the task of educating the young was left to the parents. The community assisted only when help was needed.

Facilities for the first Jewish school of record were consecrated by members of Congregation Shearith Israel (of New York) in 1731.[7] The dedication of the school *Yeshibat Minhat Areb*, coincided with the completion of an additional room, a gift of Jacob Mendez de Costa, added on to the synagogue building finished only one year earlier. This new room was to be used by the congregation and as a study hall for students. However, no records exist attesting to a school starting in that year. It was not until January 1737, that the school finally opened its doors to students. The instructor, David Mendez Machado, was to serve as the *hazzan* of the congregation and as the administrator and teacher of the school. The minutes of the congregation recorded that,

---

[5] Hyman B. Orinstein, "In the Course of the Nineteenth Century," *A History of Jewish Education in America,* ed. Judah Pilch (New York: The American Association for Jewish Education, 1969), 27.

[6] Seymour Fromer, "In the Colonial Period," *A History of Jewish Education in America,* ed. Judah Pilch (New York: The American Association for Jewish Education, 1969), 9.

[7] Walter I. Ackerman, "What We Know About... Schools," *What We Know About Jewish Education: A Handbook of Today's Research for Tomorrow's Jewish Education,* ed. Stuart L. Kelman. (Los Angeles: Torah Aura Productions, 1992), 21.

> the said Mr. Machado... obliges himself to keep a publick school in due form for teaching the Hebrew language, either the whole morning or afternoon as he shall think most proper, and any poor that shall be thought unable to pay for their children's learning they shall be taught *gratis*.[8]

Thus the first school on American soil was born. It was the precursor of what was to come.

Transition from Religious to Secular Learning

The beginning of the nineteenth century brought about the gradual decline of the *qahal*. The unified communal organization disintegrated in favor of the new charitable and benevolent societies that were rapidly forming. The establishment of Jewish institutions independent of any synagogue further fragmented the community. By 1880, no indication of the once cohesive *qahal* remained.[9] The Jewish community had become diversified, not only in practice, but also in views pertaining to the religious education of Jewish youth.

The advent of the public school system was one of the factors that greatly changed the community perspective towards religious education. Congregations no longer felt an obligation to maintain private institutions and to pay salaries to teach what the public school offered to every taxpayer's children.[10] With public schools already functioning in a large number of cities, German Jewish immigrants who arrived during the 1840's and the subsequent decades, quickly availed themselves of the opportunities afforded them through public education.

---

[8] Alexander M. Dushkin, *Jewish Education in New York City*, (New York: Bureau of Jewish Education, 1918), 449.
[9] Orinstein, 27.
[10] Fromer, 10.

For Jewish instruction, they relied on private tutors.[11] The immigrants could not immediately build schools similar to the ones they grew accustomed to back home -- they lacked the numerical strength as well as the necessary funds for such an endeavor.[12] However, as more and more Jews of similar background came to America, it became feasible to establish such schools. Their success was short-lived, by the mid-1870's, the majority of them had closed their doors. The reasons for their failure can be attributed to the lack of students and appropriate funding as well as the constant turnover of teachers and the ever-increasing nature of salaries.[13]

During this time, a debate ensued within the Jewish community as to what was the best means of educating Jewishly. Proponents of the day school such as community leader Rabbi Bernard Felsenthal expressed the opinion that only through the intensive education that Day Schools could provide would Jewish children receive the appropriate level of Jewish education.[14] On the flip side, advocates of the public school system such as Isaac Mayer Wise stressed that Jewish children needed to attend public schools and receive their Jewish education in supplementary schools.[15] Great emphasis was placed on the value of Americanization, supporters of the public schools felt that public education was the only means to achieve it.

---

[11] Julius H. Greenstone, "Jewish Education in the United States," *American Jewish Year Book* 16 (1915), 94.

[12] Orinstein, 31.

[13] *Ibid.*, 33.

[14] Eduardo L. Rauch, "Jewish Education in the United States, 1840-1920" (unpublished thesis from Harvard University, 1978), 74-75.

[15] *Ibid.*, 68.

Thus, support for the public schools was high among the established community. Many openly opposed the formation of Jewish day schools, considering them unnecessary and even dangerous to the community. Protestant hostility towards Catholics in the mid-century deterred them from advocating an arrangement of 'parochial' schools for Jewish students.[16] Therefore, many Jews staunchly supported the public schools. Wrote Judah Pilch, "...the Jews exhibited a unique devotion to secular learning and an understanding of its need and utility."[17] Public school attendance made sense for an immigrant generation adjusting to a new way of life. By the end of the nineteenth century, secular education taught within the public school setting was nearly universally accepted by the Jews of America.[18]

The Beginnings of Supplementary Education

Supplementary education began in earnest with the arrival of the Eastern European immigrants in the late 1800's. The already established German Jews felt it was important to educate and Americanize the newly arrived Jews. They set up institutions to provide both secular learning and religious instruction for their Eastern European neighbors. These schools included the Talmud Torah and the heder, both of which had their roots in Eastern Europe but now were adapted to fit the American way of life.[19]

---

[16]Orinstein, 30.
[17]Pilch, 383.
[18]*Ibid.*
[19]Rachel Rembrandt, "Major Trends in Jewish Education: Looking Towards Jewish Family Education" (unpublished rabbinical thesis, HUC-JIR, 1994)

The Talmud Torah

The most popular educational institution of the time was the Talmud Torah, first established in this country by Pesach Rosenthal in New York in 1857. It was for 'free of charge' instruction for poor children after public school hours.[20] Its program of study was geared to "an appreciation on a child level of the totality of the Jewish cultural heritage, including religion."[21] It met after public school hours, three or four days a week, for a total of between seven and ten and a half hours of religious instruction.[22] The course of study focused on the Hebrew language and its literature. The school's Zionist origins were made apparent by the fact that Hebrew became both the language of instruction and the subject of study.[23] Rosenthal's school closed after seventeen years for lack of funds, but reopened two years later as the *Machzike* Talmud Torah (Supporters of Talmud Torah).[24] From then on, the Talmud Torah remained a fixture of the Jewish community.

In the 1920's, the Talmud Torah was the predominant type of weekday school. It was an ideal experience for the new immigrant, providing the opportunity for an intensive religious educational experience while still allowing the children to attend public school.[25] The curriculum was extensive. Based on the concept of *ivrit be-ivrit,*[26] Hebrew played an important part within the school. Since the instructors "included Hebrew essayists and poets, some of high

[20]Ackerman, 22.
[21]Pilch, 390.
[22]*Ibid.*
[23]Ackerman, 29.
[24]Dushkin, 69.
[25]Rembrandt, 36.
[26]W. I. Ackerman, "Some Uses of Justification on Jewish Education" *AJS Review* 2 (1977), 16.

standing, as well as scholars and modernist Orthodox rabbis,"[27] the studies included those areas with which those teaching were most familiar. Generally, the education provided was a good one.

However, the Talmud Torah was not without its difficulties. As an institution, it never maintained a high level of stability. First of all, its students rarely stayed at one school long enough to make real progress. The nature of the immigrant life prevented families from settling permanently immediately upon their arrival.[28] Secondly, the Talmud Torah was known as the school for the poor since they were established by the well-to-do German Jews for the poor immigrants of Eastern European origin. Because of this image, those Jews capable of improving the schools through further financial assistance often refused to do so.[29] Furthermore, with the move of the Jewish community to suburbia and the subsequent rapid growth of the congregation and its school in the following decades, the Talmud Torah declined both in enrollment and importance within the Jewish community.[30]

The Talmud Torah is still in existence today, but in a very different guise than when it first came into being. Today it exists as either an intercongregational effort or as a community-supported Hebrew school.[31]

---

[27] Ibid.
[28] Ibid.
[29] Rauch, 383.
[30] Pilch, 390.
[31] Ibid.

The Heder

A second major Jewish educational institution established by the Eastern

European immigrants during the late nineteenth century was the heder.

> Every synagogue or *shtiebel* in the east-European area had a *rebbi*
> who taught forty or fifty children in a *heder* in what the uptown Jews
> thought to be a 'barbarous' manner. Instruction started at three in
> the afternoon after public school hours and centered around the
> prayer book, the Pentateuch in the original Hebrew, and the
> Mishnah.[32]

After a long day at school, the students, mostly boys, would meet the

melammed, the teacher, in a room designated for study, usually in the basement

or upper floor of a tenement building.

The quality of instruction was poor. The teacher was often "an elderly

man who feared and despised everything he had found in the new world."

Furthermore, his students did not appreciate his efforts. The *melammedim* were;

> earnest, medieval men, zealously trying to impart unwished-for
> knowledge to unwilling youngsters... while one pupil drawls
> meaninglessly the Hebrew words of the prayer book, the rest play
> or fight.[33]

The experience seemed not to benefit anyone. The teachers were disgruntled by

lack of respect and decorum. The students cared little for the environment or

subject material.

In short, the heder was a disaster in America. The immigrant community

knew all too well of its failings, most of what passed for Jewish education was in

reality of little substance.[34] With this educational institution, the Eastern

---

[32]Orinstein, 48.

[33]Irving Howe, *World of Our Fathers: The Journey of the East European Jews to America and the Life They Found and Made* (New York: Schocken Books, 1989), 200.

[34]*Ibid.,* 203.

European Jews had tried to retain some of their familiar ways. However, the heder proved not be what their children needed. The heder all but disappeared by 1940 and the number of students today that attend the heder is negligible.[35]

The Sunday School

The first Sunday School in this country, an adaptation of the Christian model which had originated in England, was established in Philadelphia in 1838 by Rebecca Gratz.[36] The daughter of a prominent Philadelphia businessman, Gratz was concerned about the lack of organized programming to provide Jewish education to Jewish youth.[37]

Her first attempt, in 1819, took place in her own home. There she met with children from the Congregation Mikve Israel each Sunday afternoon. It soon became apparent however, that she needed to find a bigger space for her students. The group had grown too large for her small living room. It had grown to include children who did not belong to the synagogue but still benefited from religious instruction.[38]

In 1838, Gratz formed the Hebrew Sunday School Society (HSSS). Its charter was set under her guidance and inspiration. She began with fifty students. She would begin each meeting with a prayer which the children would repeat back to her. She would then read a chapter from the Bible and conduct a

---

[35]Simon Greenberg, "Jewish Educational Institutions," *The Jews: Their Religion and Culture*, ed. Louis Finkelstein (New York: Schocken Books, 1971), 929.
[36]Ackerman (1992), 22.
[37]Jerome I. Leventhal, "Jewish Community Sunday Schools: The Legacy of Rebecca Gratz," *Religious Education* 75, no. 1 (1980), 15.
[38]*Ibid.*

question and answer session on such subjects as Jewish holidays and religious practice.[39] By the mid 1900's, the numbers had swelled to nearly ten thousand children involved in the various instructional programs.[40] The HSSS did more than just teach. It helped small synagogues to establish their own Sunday schools. Members of the Society would travel to the place in need and hold classes on the premises until the school could stand on its own.[41] No moneys were ever involved other than contributions and donations that were collected. Students were expected to bring loose change if they could afford it, otherwise, all instruction was free of charge. An interesting note, that for the first hundred years, all teachers were volunteers further lowering the costs involved in maintaining the Sunday schools. Based on the achievements listed above, it appears that the HSSS was quite successful in its endeavors. Its tactic of holding classes throughout the city that were free and available for all, appealed to many of America's Jews.[42]

Individuals were not alone in their support for the growing supplementary school. Community organizations such as the Bureau of Jewish Education in New York City also advocated the change in structure:

> The commitment of the Bureau to part-time schooling was born of a conviction, drawn from the teachings of John Dewey, that to separate children in parochial or sectarian schools during their formative years and to deny them the opportunity of shared experience with children of different beliefs and backgrounds was to deny them opportunities critical to the development of that sense

---

[39]Orinstein, 35.
[40]*Ibid.*
[41]Fromer, 16.
[42]*Ibid.*

of interdependence and cooperative effort without which a democracy cannot function.[43]

It was felt that in order for Jewish children to truly be a part of the American community, they needed to go to school with children of other ethnic backgrounds and faith systems. They needed to be a part of the larger community, fitting in meant making avail of the public school system and all it had to offer. Jewish education was relegated to a supplementary status, the specifics of which now needed to be determined.

The Modern Religious School

The Jewish supplementary school as we know it appeared for the first time in the 1920's.[44] It differed from the Sunday School discussed above mainly because it met regularly during the week and not only on Sunday mornings. These schools were created to meet the changing demographics of the Jewish community; the movement of Jews into neighborhoods placed more of the educational responsibility on the growing suburban congregations. The Talmud Torah could not compete either in terms of the number of students or financial status. Thus "the large communal Talmud Torahs began to disappear and were replaced by the smaller and less intensive congregational schools."[45] Oddly enough, while the schools themselves became more individual, the economic

---

[43]Ackerman (1992), 29.

[44]David Schoem, "What We Know About... the Jewish Supplementary School," *What We Know About Jewish Education: A Handbook of Today's Research for Tomorrow's Jewish Education,* ed. Stuart L. Kelman (Los Angeles: Torah Aura Productions, 1992), 163.

[45]Alexander Dushkin, "Forty Years of Jewish Education in America" *Religious Education,* 39, no. 5 (1944), 261.

responsibilities of Jewish education were taken over by the community.[46] As opposed to the Talmud Torah and the heder which were funded privately or with money from the Federation, congregational schools were well connected to the synagogue. Its funding, for the most part, came solely from the congregation to which it was attached.

The congregational supplementary school is here to stay. It continues to serve the needs of a majority of American Jews. And yet, along with the congregational school came many of the difficulties still grappled with by Jewish educators today. Problems concerning curriculum, teachers, students, and family involvement continue to plague the Jewish school and its educational endeavor. We now turn to look at the specifics in greater detail.

Problems of the Supplementary School

The supplementary school has had its share of problems. Although the most favored means of educating Jewishly, by no means is it the most perfect one.

> We have been content too long with the quantitative success of our religious institutions in the United States... New multi-million dollar buildings, increased membership rolls, larger school enrollments, namely in Sunday schools, bigger and more lavish Bar and Bat Mitzvah and Confirmation celebrations, all have deflected our attention from the erosion of significant Jewish religious commitment.[47]

---

[46]Rembrandt, 32.
[47]Louis Kaplan, "For Our Time, A Philosophy of Jewish Education," *Studies in Jewish Education,* 17.

Unfortunately, much 'deflects our attention' from making our religious schools places of true Jewish learning.

Some things are beyond our control. Changes within the larger society have impacted Jewish supplementary education. Enrollment has been declining due to low birthrate, intermarriage, broken homes, out migration and general apathy towards Jewish schooling.[48] These things challenge us to rejuvenate Jewish education and its educational methods in order that Jewish heritage and moral values will appeal to, and be relevant for, the students and their families.[49]

Other problems facing the Jewish supplementary school are of a more complex nature. These will be explored separately as each is a major obstacle to success.

Teachers and Educators

In many schools, the problem begins at the top. The quality of instruction and supervision of many schools is questioned in light of fact that the majority of supplementary school educational positions are part-time.[50] In fact, Joseph estimates that only half of all UAHC congregations have someone acting as an educator or principal of the school.[51] Without a full-time professional, these schools do not run as efficiently as they could.

---

[48]Alvin, I. Schiff, "On the Status of the Jewish Supplementary School," *Jewish Education* 50, no. 4 (1982), 3.
[49]Sara G. Efron, "Old Wine, New Bottles: Traditional Moral Education in the Contemporary Jewish Classroom" *Religious Education* 89 (1994), 63.
[50]Schiff, 3.
[51]Samuel K. Joseph, *Portraits of Schooling: A Survey and Analysis of Supplementary Schooling in Congregations* (New York: UAHC Press, 1997), 34.

Additionally, many schools face difficulties in attracting and retaining

qualified and committed professional personnel. Good teachers are hard to find.

Most of the teachers in our schools are uncertified ones with little to no

pedagogic training. Judaically, many are lacking the necessary skills as well. An

extreme example is both telling and disparaging - in one small community there

are no persons who know how to read Hebrew available to teach in its

congregational school. According to a recent survey of Reform supplementary

schools, congregational schools have only a 40 percent chance of employing at

least one teacher with a degree in Jewish studies.[52] There are simply not enough

expert teachers within each developmental level available to teach in our

schools.[53]

Qualifications are important, but so is experience. Veteran teachers are

preferred because,

> after years of experience, [they] have a more thorough knowledge
> of their subject matter; they know the culture of the school; and
> they know their students and their needs. After a number of years
> at a school, a teacher tends to feel a sense of commitment and
> loyalty to it that can benefit the school and its students.[54]

Unfortunately, many teachers never reach that sense of familiarity with the

school. Joseph reports that an average of 60 percent of the teaching staff of any

congregational school either is new or has taught in the school for less than five

years.[55]

---

[52]*Ibid.*, 22.
[53]Matthew Clark, "The Specialized Role of the Supplementary School," *Studies in Jewish Education* 3, 6-7.
[54]Joseph, 31.
[55]*Ibid.*

The Learners

Our students come to us tired, exhausted, and not alert enough to learn.[56] After a full day of school, it often seems that the place they want to be is sitting in our classrooms. Many view their Jewish education and the supplementary school experience as being of a secondary concern after "regular school." They consider it to be a voluntary educational experience adjunct to required education. [57]

But the difficulties our students bring to the classroom are far more complex than adolescent hunger and exhaustion. As mentioned earlier, the increasing occurrence of intermarriage changes the perspectives and needs of the learners with which we work. Joseph reports that 99 percent of UAHC Congregations responded by reporting that "one or more students in their school come from a two-religion family."[58] Furthermore, almost eleven percent of the congregations reported cases of students within their schools who also attended a non-Jewish religious school on a regular basis.[59] This creates problems in the classroom. Students end up with conflicting values and beliefs - it is difficult to instill Judaism to students who may be practicing another religion at home.

Many schools also find it hard to keep their students within their programs. Avraham Weiss writes that a "majority of students do not continue after Bar Mitzvah."[60] Many become disenchanted with the synagogue.

---

[56]Avraham Weiss, "Is There an Alternative to the Decline of the Jewish Supplementary School?" *Religious Education* 49, no. 2 (1981), 3.
[57]*Ibid.*
[58]Joseph, 47.
[59]*Ibid.*
[60]Weiss, 8.

Unfortunately, parental and peer pressure can turn the bar or bat mitzvah into a negative experience, one which ruins our chances for retaining the student. This will be discussed in further detail in the section dedicated to examining the problems surrounding the bar or bat mitzvah preparation and ceremony.

In attempting to maintain enrollment, congregations have tried various strategies over the yeas to keep students from dropping out. One strategy is to make it a bar/bat mitzvah requirement for students to stay in school after the big event.[61] Joseph points out that nearly 39 percent of congregations nationwide report having such requirements as part of bar / bat mitzvah programs.[62]

But does it work? "Virtually all schools, regardless of region or size, offer classes from kindergarten through grade 7..." But after grade 7, the programs offered greatly decrease in the post bar/bat mitzvah years.[63] Perhaps this is why the overall trend shows a sharp drop-off in enrollment after grade 7. In many cases, there are no classes offered to these students. It is difficult to expect students to continue learning when they are provided with no opportunity to do so.

Curriculum and Instruction

Joseph defines curriculum as a "course of study, a plan, a way."[64] But a good curriculum is more than just simple guidelines for teachers to follow. It is,

> the road map that the teacher uses to instruct the students in the material to be learned... some plan for what subject matter is to be

---

[61] Joseph, 50.
[62] *Ibid.*
[63] *Ibid.*
[64] *Ibid.*, 53.

covered... The curriculum includes the overall goals for the students, for classes offered as part of the curriculum, and for the print and non-print resources to use to supplement the curriculum.[65]

The curriculum is an essential element of a good school. It provides not only an over-all view of what a student can expect to learn over a course of time, but it also shows the interconnectedness of one year's subjects to the next.

What exactly is included within the curriculum of the Jewish supplementary school? In recent years, lay leadership and congregational rabbis have placed increasing emphasis on the acquisition of synagogue skills, leaving little time for either Hebrew language instruction or traditional subject offerings.[66] So what is taught within our schools? In Joseph's chart entitled 'Major Curriculum Subjects by Grade Level,' we find the following subjects taught within the middle school grades:

Grade	Most Frequent Subjects	Next Most Frequent Subjects
6	Liturgy	Midrash
	Theology	Holidays
	American Jewish history	Life cycle
	Jewish history	
	History of Israel	
7	Theology	Midrash
	Holocaust	Rabbinic commentaries
	Social ethics	Liturgy
	Ethics	
	Current events	
	American Jewish history	
8	Ethics	Midrash
	Comparative religions	Rabbinic commentaries
	Comparative Judaism[67]	

---

[65] *Ibid.*
[66] Schiff, 4.
[67] Joseph, 56.

There are definite similarities between the subjects taught throughout the middle school years. It seems that schools tend to cover the same subjects within the three year period including from sixth through eighth grades.

The chart is misleading, however, in that it does not fully show what is actually taught within the movement's schools. According to Joseph, most UAHC schools do not teach *mishna* and/or Talmud. In fact, movement wide, only 26 percent of all schools teach it at all. Interestingly enough, all those who do, do so in grade seven.[68] Similarly, midrash is also infrequently taught within our classrooms. It is mostly a subject for grades seven and eight (when taught), appearing within a mere 21 percent of all UAHC schools.[69]

The discrepancy between schools is hardly surprising. Our tradition gives us little in the way of guidelines for our students' education. Although there is much to suggest that thirteen is indeed the age for bar/bat mitzvah, there is little available to suggest of what our students' curriculum should be comprised.

Besides these traditional subject offerings, many schools still provide co-curricular opportunities within the religious school. Joseph's work shows that "music, art, and library [are] still strongly connected to a school's curriculum.[70] Other offerings include cooking, drama, and dance[71] as well as a variety of creative mini-courses and activities. These additional subjects are designed to appeal to the interests of students. They are provided to break up the time in the classroom as well as to add variety to the religious school curriculum.

---

[68] *Ibid.*, 53.
[69] *Ibid.*
[70] *Ibid.*, 55.
[71] *Ibid.*

On average, only 85 percent of all UAHC congregations report that they have a written statement of goals for the school.[72] If available, these statements are often the result of collaborative work between the educator, rabbi, and/or religious school committee.[73] What this means, essentially, is that many of our schools do not have a plan for students to follow, the curriculum does not necessary flow in a cohesive manner from the start to finish of our formal educational experience. This is problematic because continuity is sacrificed. Students are at the whims of their teachers, learning whatever he or she is capable of teaching. Joseph notes that the majority of schools do not give their teachers written lesson plans.[74] Unless attempts are made to unify daily lesson plans, students at the same school and in the same grade level but in different classrooms, may very well learn different things.[75]

Besides the lack of uniformity within the classroom, we have yet another matter with which to cope, that of insufficient time. For there are a host of attractions and activities competing for a child's time.[76] No matter what the length of the class, or the number of times that a school meets each week, there is no guarantee that the student will be in attendance. Here are a few examples from the 'all-too-well-known list of reasons for nonattendance and absenteeism: piano and dance lessons, Little League, dentist and doctor appointments and family

[72]*Ibid.*, 58.
[73]*Ibid.*
[74]*Ibid.*, 58.
[75]These are my observations from having taught religious school for nearly ten years.
[76]Schiff, 4.

vacation schedules...[77] The list goes on, endlessly. Our students miss frequently. The excuses they provide are unfortunately, often not legitimate in our eyes.

With all these obstacles before us, can religious school be a positive, affirming experience for our students? Writes Asher Shkedi, "many who do think about Jewish education, spend their time thinking about how to put out fires. Few are asking why the fires continue to rage despite repeated attempts to douse them."[78] What we need are long-term solutions, not 'quick-fixes' or 'Band-Aids' that provide immediate results with little lasting effect. We need to look at the roots of our religious school woes and to build a better school from those roots on up into our classrooms. Only then can we be successful at overcoming the inherent problems of Jewish education.

The Purpose of The Supplementary Religious School

Ask what the purpose of the Jewish school is and you will receive many answers. Writes Ackerman, the religious school exists "to help our children to become happy, intelligent and knowledgeable Jews on the American-Jewish scene."[79] According to Efron, Jewish schools should connect Jewish tradition with the complexity of modern living.[80] The task of Jewish education, writes Kurzweil, is "to pass on the Jewish heritage from generation to generation... through the transmission of Jewish culture...."[81] What is apparent is that today

---

[77] *Ibid.*
[78] Asher Shkedi, "Recent Trends in the Philosophy of Jewish Education: Chazan, Rosenak, and Beyond," *Studies in Jewish Education* 6 (1992), 121.
[79] Ackerman, 28.
[80] Efron, 58.
[81] Z. E. Kurzweil, "Fundamental Principles of Jewish Education in the Light of Halakhah," 154.

we count on our schools to supply values and basic information that was once taught in the home. The religious school has replaced the home as the central agency where Jewish values and rituals are taught.

With that in mind, what are the goals of the supplementary religious school? What information do educators and teachers within the schools want to impart to their students? One of the most discussed goals of Jewish education is the formation of Jewish identity. Such a concept was never a concern in past - identity was built at home, in the community, through everything an individual did. Now schools have become the place where identity is nurtured. Schools are now places of growth of knowledge and spirit, and of identity, too.

There are two other goals of the religious school that will be discussed here. They are specific to the middle school, to those grades serving early adolescents within our school programs. Both are aims of nearly all schools. The first is that of Bar Mitzvah. By that I mean achieving the necessary learning and fulfilling the obligatory requirements in order to participate in the coming of age ritual which is by far the most pressing goal of religious school students. The school program is built to climax at the ceremony, all Hebrew studies lead up to the 'big day.' The problem lies in the aftermath. What happens when the 'big day' has ended?

Research shows that enrollment drops significantly after the Bar Mitzvah year. Joseph reports that in UAHC Congregations[82] "on average, movement wide, 28.4 percent of male students drop out after bar mitzvah; for female

---

[82]Those member congregations of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations.

108

students the rate is a comparable 25.5 percent." When assessed by region and size of congregation this dropout rate equals that of their male counterparts.[83] It is difficult for schools to keep their numbers up once their students' few minutes on the *bimah* is over.

The question surfaces, how to make these students realize that the Bar Mitzvah is just the beginning of one's Jewish commitment and not the end of the educational experience? We have to turn these students into lifelong learners, into Jews who want to continue gathering knowledge after this rite of passage is concluded.

The tasks in front of us are not easy ones.

Goal #1: Making it to the Bar / Bat Mitzvah

The most important life cycle event of Jewish adolescence is Bar Mitzvah for a boy and Bat Mitzvah for a girl. Writes Rabbi Jeffrey Salkin,

> Bar and Bat Mitzvah is about ritual maturity. It is about growing up as a Jew. It is about becoming a fuller member of the Jewish community. But it is also about moral responsibility, about connecting to Torah, to community, to God.[84]

For a boy who has turned thirteen and a girl who has reached the age of twelve and a half, the day one becomes a Bar or Mitzvah is a day of tremendous significance.[85]

---

[83]Joseph, 47.
[84]Jeffrey K. Salkin, *Putting God on the Guest List: How to Reclaim the Spiritual Meaning of Your Child's Bar or Bat Mitzvah* (Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing, 1992), 11.
[85]Rabbinic texts tell us the ages of maturity. Evidence for the difference in age between boys and girls at the time of the mitzvah ceremony can be found in Kiddushin 16b. See footnote 16 and the corresponding discussion.

Traditionally, it is a day that marked one's entrance into adulthood. It is an event that occurs whether or not there is a formal religious ceremony to commemorate it. Reaching the age of Jewish maturity is synonymous with becoming a Bar or Bat Mitzvah.[86] Today, students at age thirteen are all too aware of the fact that they are still far away from adulthood. None of the rights that accompany adulthood become theirs. Little changes in their day to day routines. What then merits such a ceremony at age thirteen, at an age that is not considered to be an important one in today's secular society? A look at the historical background of the bar and bat mitzvah ceremony as well as at some of the relevant rabbinic texts can help us to understand the traditional reasons behind the age choice.

A Historical Perspective

The terms 'bar mitzvah' and 'bat mitzvah' are not contained within the *Tanakh*. The age of thirteen is also not recognized as a significant time in a Jewish person's life. In fact, twenty was considered to be the age at which one reached maturity. That was the age of both mandatory army service and of priestly service.[87] Similarly, twenty was the age at which one could be counted in the census. God tells Moses, "All who are entered upon the records, from age twenty upward, shall give an offering to God."[88] And later, God says, "You and Aaron shall record them by their groups from the age of twenty years up, all

---

[86] Barbara Binder Kadden and Bruce Kadden, *Teaching Jewish Life Cycle.* (Denver: Alternatives in Religious Education, Inc., 1997), 27.
[87] Salkin, 5.
[88] Exodus 30:14.

110

those in Israel who are able to bear arms."[89] Twenty then, was the age at which

one counted within the Israelite community.[90]

But what about thirteen? Bar mitzvah, as a concept,

> actually emerged during the first centuries of the common era. It is
> an invention of the early rabbis, the sages who interpretations of
> Torah created contemporary Judaism. We cannot be absolutely
> sure why these sages lowered the age of majority from twenty to
> thirteen, although certainly the connection to the age of puberty
> has some significance. When the term 'bar mitzvah' appears in
> rabbinic literature, it simply refers to a young man who has reached
> the age of thirteen and a day.[91]

We cannot be certain why for the rabbis, the age of thirteen became a significant

time in a person's life. Nonetheless, since the earliest rabbinic sources, thirteen

has marked the age at which a person's status within the Jewish community

changes. We will now examine some of those rabbinic texts that pertain to the

age thirteen and reveal its importance within the life cycle of events.

Rabbi Judah ben Tema, the 'inventor' of bar mitzvah,[92] envisioned the

way that one's life of Jewish study and responsibility should unfold. He wrote:

> At five, one should study Scripture, at ten, one should study
> Mishnah, at thirteen, one is ready to do mitzvot, at fifteen, one is
> ready to study Talmud, at eighteen, one is ready for the wedding
> canopy, at twenty, one is   responsible for providing for a family...[93]

In the Talmud, and in Midrashic literature, age thirteen is significant as a time of

religious responsibility. When one turned thirteen, the mitzvot became an

obligation to fulfill.

---

[89]Numbers 1:3.
[90]Kadden and Kadden, 27.
[91]Salkin, 4.
[92]*Ibid.*
[93]Misnah, *Avot* 5:24.

The Mishnah also tells of the legal responsibilities that accompany one's turning thirteen. A young man[94] could serve on a *beit din* at age thirteen. He could also purchase specified items, and any vows he made were considered binding.[95] The rabbis understood that age thirteen for boys and age twelve and a half for girls was significant because they were the ages for physical maturity.[96] Furthermore, according to Rabbi Nathan, the *yetser tov*, or 'good inclination' is developed on the thirteenth year of a child's existence.[97] One could only be expected to control one's desires after reaching the age of maturity, after turning thirteen. However, the clearest and most explicit mention of age thirteen is the statement, "At age thirteen one becomes subject to the commandments."[98] At that age, then, one was considered to be a fully responsible member of the community.[99]

The midrash, the interpretative stories that help us to better understand the Torah text, also stresses the importance of age thirteen. For example, the rabbis taught that Abraham looked into the heavens and realized the existence of one God at age thirteen. That same year, they tell us, Abraham also destroyed the idols in his father's shop, cementing his belief in and commitment to God.[100] Another midrash teaches that it was at age thirteen that the twins

---

[94]The masculine is referred to here and not the feminine because at the time, women were not included in the institution of 'bar mitzvah' and its obligations. 'Bat mitzvah' was a later development. See below for details.
[95]Niddarim 5:16.
[96]Kiddushin 16b
[97]*Avot D'rabbi Natan* 16:3
[98]Avot 5:21.
[99]Deborah E. Lipstadt, "Bar/Bat Mitzvah," *The Second Jewish Catalog*, ed. Sharon Strassfeld and Michael Strassfeld (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1976), 61.
[100]*Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer* 26.

Esau and Jacob went their separate ways - Jacob to study Torah, and Esau to worship idols.[101] Jacob's own sons, Simeon and Levi, were also thirteen when they retaliated against the people of Shechem after the rape of their sister Dinah.

These biblical episodes are more than just stories. They teach that adolescence can be a pivotal part of being a responsible person, and a responsible Jew. Writes Salkin,

> Bar and bat mitzvah says to our young people: Imagine yourself as Abraham, an idol breaker, rebelling against easy answers. Imagine yourself as Jacob and Esau, facing choices and ready (we hope!) to make the right ones. Imagine yourself as Simeon and Levi, ready to defend Jewish honor.[102]

Torah and its accompanying midrash give us examples to follow. From them, young adolescents can find heroes to emulate and guide them on their journey from adolescence into maturity and responsibility.

Jewish texts provide many examples for adolescent males to follow. But where are the female role models? Salkin suggests that perhaps Miriam fits the bill:

> According to the midrash, Moses' parents, Amram and Yocheved, decided to live apart in Egypt because they did not want to bring any more children into the world of slavery and oppression. Their daughter, Miriam, convinced them to get back together. "This is wrong!" she said. "By refusing to live together and to have more children, you are depriving our people of a future!"[103]

As a result of her parents' reconciliation, Moses is born.

---

[101]Genesis Rabbah 63:10.
[102]Salkin, 6.
[103]Salkin, 6. Rabbinic source unknown.

Rabbinic sources, however, suggest that Miriam was only five at the time

of her courageous act, and not twelve or thirteen. But Salkin feels justified in

using her as a model for today's B'not Mitzvah. Of Miriam he writes:

> She may have been an exceptionally precocious child, but
> considering the healthy rebelliousness of adolescent girls, it has
> always seemed to me that she was closer to thirteen years old at
> the time.[104]

Thus Miriam becomes a model for Jewish girls. They too have a biblical example

to look to - they can perhaps imagine themselves as Miriam, a thirteen year

playing a pivotal role in the history of Jewish survival.

The Evolving Ceremony

As mentioned above, it is apparent that for much of Jewish history, bar

mitzvah (and later, bat mitzvah) was an automatic development, not necessarily

recognized in any formal way.[105] Becoming a bar or bat mitzvah was a peripheral

event, one hardly noticed or celebrated in the manner done so today.

During the middle ages, a ceremony developed to mark this important

time of transition.[106] In the sixteenth century, it became the custom to invite the

boy to read Torah on the Shabbat nearest to his thirteenth birthday.[107] To be

called to the Torah for an *aliyah* became something that only those of Bar

mitzvah age could do.

In some communities, the young man would also lead all or a part of the

---

[104]*Ibid.*
[105]Kadden and Kadden, 28.
[106]*Ibid.*
[107]Salkin, 10.

worship service and deliver a *drash*, a short discourse discussing that week's Torah portion.[108] At first, the *drash* was offered at the celebration following the service usually held in the family's home. It wasn't until later that the *drash* became a part of the service, delivered in the way it is today.

Development of Bat Mitzvah

In the nineteenth century, some families celebrated a girl's twelfth birthday with a special meal (*Seudat Mitzvah*) and other non-synagogue rituals.[109] However, the first bat mitzvah ceremony to be celebrated in conjunction with a worship service did not occur until 1922. It was the bat mitzvah celebration of Judith Kaplan, daughter of Rabbi Mordechai Kaplan, the founder of Reconstructionist Judaism. Years later she would remember that:

> the night before the event, her father had still not decided on the exact form of the ceremony. The next day, as usual as a Shabbat service, Rabbi Kaplan read the *maftir*, and the *haftarah*. Then his daughter, "at a very respectable distance" from the Torah scroll (because girls did not traditionally read from the Torah scroll) recited the first blessing and read the Torah selection from her own *chumash*.[110]

When later asked how it felt to be such a pioneer, she wrote:

> The scroll was returned to the ark with song and procession, and the service was resumed. No thunder sounded, no lightening struck. The institution of bat mitzvah had been born without incident, and the rest of the day was all rejoicing.[111]

Judith Kaplan set the way for generations of girls to follow. Today within Reform

---

[108]Kadden and Kadden, 28.
[109]*Ibid.*
[110]Salkin, 15.
[111]*Ibid.*

Judaism there is no distinction liturgically between the ceremony of bar mitzvah and that of bat mitzvah. Students learn together, worship together, and of course, celebrate each other's accomplishments together.

Bar/Bat Mitzvah Today

Barbara Diamond Goldin reminds us that:

> *Bar* or *bat mitzvah* is the Hebrew phrase for coming of age. One becomes responsible for one's own actions and for fulfilling religious obligations. Becoming a bar or bat mitzvah does not have to be marked formally in a synagogue or home or by a ceremony or party. When Jewish girls reach twelve or Jewish boys thirteen years of age, they become responsible for carrying out the religious duties of a Jewish adult, taking themselves and Judaism seriously.[112]

We expect a lot from our young adolescents. The ceremony itself is quite demanding. They are often expected to lead the prayer service, recite lengthy passages from either the Pentateuch or the book of Prophets or both, and give a short *drash* or talk on the related portion for that week. As noted above, it has not always been this way. We expect more from our students than did our ancestors.

Even though the observance of many Jewish traditions and rituals have waned in modern times, bar mitzvah is actually one of the few Jewish observances that has actually grown in importance in our society.[113] As Isaac Levitats wrote in 1949, "The bar mitzvah has become the most important milestone in a Jew's life in America. Never in our millennial history was so much

---

[112]Barbara Diamond Goldin, *Bat Mitzvah: A Jewish Girl's Coming of Age* (New York: Viking, 1995), 1.
[113]Salkin, 11.

importance attached to this ceremony."[114] The bar and bat mitzvah ceremony indeed has grown in importance, but not always in positive ways.

Concerns have been raised, in recent times, about the meaning of bar and bat mitzvah and the way that students relate to it. Students tend to overemphasize the party or celebration and to down play the significance of the ceremony itself. "The contemporary bar or bat mitzvah ceremony has become an occasion merely to amass monetary gifts or to enjoy lavishly catered parties."[115] In some European countries, sumptuary laws were passed to discourage overly large expenditures on such celebrations.[116] No such measures have been taken in regards to American Jews.

Another problem involves what Salkin terms "privatization." By this he means "the focus on the individual and the resulting diminishing of religious community."[117] Unfortunately, this happens in many communities where the "Saturday morning service has become the setting for the weekly enactment of Bar Mitzvah ceremonies, attended mainly by invited guests." This is further exacerbated by the fact that some synagogues do not hold services on mornings when there is no bar or bat mitzvah ceremony.

How can we turn the Bar / Bat mitzvah experience into a more positive one? In chapter five, we will explore some options and suggestions for 'putting the mitzvah back in bar and bat mitzvah.'[118]

---

[114]*Ibid.*
[115]Weiss, 11.
[116]Kadden and Kadden, 28.
[117]Salkin, 11
[118]This is the title of chapter 5 in Jeffrey Salkin's *Putting God on the Guest List*.

Goal #2: Becoming a Lifelong Learner

The concept of *Talmud torah*, that of continuous study, is at the center of Jewish life. Judaism values learning, viewing it as a constant within our ever-changing lives. The term 'lifelong learning' implies a commitment to this inherent value of learning, as well as to the skills or practices necessary to both facilitate and foster such growth. The skills are provided by the intensive training and preparation that leads up to the bar/bat mitzvah ceremony. However, the commitment to learning does not automatically follow. The synagogue often does little to promote continued learning. The student, therefore, receives a mixed message. As Cantor Helen Leneman writes:

> Something should change in the relationship of the student to the synagogue after the Bar/Bat Mitzvah ceremony. If nothing changes, 'coming of age' is a meaningless phrase. Many congregations simply lesson the time commitment to Jewish study, giving the opposite message from what they want to say.[119]

We should not be rewarding our 'newest members of the congregation' by allowing them to minimize their learning time. Instead, we need to offer opportunities to cultivate this most important Jewish principle. We must remind our students of the importance of becoming 'lifelong learners.'

How do we instill this Jewish value into our students? The key seems to be in having quality programs available to post-bar and bat mitzvah students. Leneman adds:

> It is also important not to just duplicate the Hebrew School experience of the early years. Classes for teens must be new and

---

[119]Helen Leneman, ed., *Bar/Bat Mitzvah Education: A Source Book*, (Denver: Alternatives in Religious Education Publishing, Inc., 1993), 289.

uniquely different from other educational programs in which students have been involved. [120]

A good program must be flexible and creative in both subject matter and time requirements. It must engage students and make them feel that the synagogue sees them in a new light. A good program also makes students feel competent and capable. Writes Kaplan, "...what we are trying to produce - a *talmid hacham*, a 'wise student.' For if one stops studying, one is no longer wise..."[121] We want students to remain wise, to be perpetually learning.

There are a number of good programs which assist in creating lifelong learners that have been successfully implemented into religious schools within the movement. These will be discussed in greater detail in the next section. We will look at individual programs and ideas, why they succeed, and how they can be used in other schools and learning situations. Then, "we will be paying more than lip service to the notion that bar/bat mitzvah is a beginning, not an end."[122]

---

[120]*Ibid.*
[121]Kaplan, 23.
[122]*Ibid.*

CHAPTER FIVE: SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT

The question remains, how to improve our supplementary schools? The developmental theorists and the theories they present tell us quite a bit about the cognitive and affective levels of our students. The work of Jean Piaget, Erik Erikson, Lawrence Kohlberg, Carole Gilligan, James Fowler and Nel Noddings give insight and ideas as to what will work within our classrooms. Additionally, much has been accomplished with middle school students within the general full-time program of the public school system. Many of the innovations implemented within the public schools can work in our religious schools as well

Incorporating Developmental Ideas into the Classroom

Jean Piaget

Jean Piaget reminds us that knowing a student's age or grade level is no guarantee of knowing and understanding that individual's level of cognitive ability.[1] Furthermore, "the individual's achievement may be rather discontinuous, subject to spurts and plateaus..."[2] An individual's growth may be inconsistent, difficult to gauge and to track in a methodical manner. The implications are that it may be impossible for a teacher to create a single lesson which equally serves the needs of all the students within the classroom. This means that students will be engaged by different activities, that they will not necessarily be able to work

---

[1] See the section on Jean Piaget in chapter one.
[2] Irving E. Sigel, "The Piagetian System and the World of Education," *Studies in Cognitive Development: Essays in Honor of Jean Piaget,* eds. David Elkind and John H. Flavell (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969),468.

together in a large class group. Smaller and more cohesive groups, made up of students at nearly the same cognitive developmental level will greatly benefit the students involved.

As educators then, we must focus on our students' skills and capabilities. We must hone in on new problem solving skills, on allowing our students to make use of their newfound capabilities. It is important to remember however, that early adolescents are not necessarily hypothetical thinkers. Such thinking capacities develop during Piaget's fourth and final stage, that of formal operations. This may or may not be achieved by our middle level students, many will still be at stage three.

What then is developmentally appropriate for us to teach? We can ask our students to create model settings, such as the perfect synagogue design, or the ideal youth lounge. We can request that our students begin to relate torah stories to each other, to understand the parallels between them. We can also hope that they will begin to understand that an identifying characteristic of themselves and their classmates is their Judaism, and that religious identity can be expressed in many ways.

As the students develops formal capabilities, we can begin to question the individual's future plans for religious involvement. We can ask how the students view themselves in situations they will be confronted with in the future. How do they choose between conflicting obligations? How do they support the decisions that they make? How will they make time in their busy lives for all that Judaism has to offer?

Erik Erikson

Erik Erikson reminds us that the challenge facing school age students is to successfully balance the different worlds of home and school, the demands of relationships with parents, teachers and friends, and the requirements of home responsibilities, academic life, and group activities and obligations. As educators, it is our responsibility to help our students as they struggle to maintain that balance they seek.

How do we help children to develop this sense of industry, of self-worth and accomplishment? It would seem to be an easy task, for "...at no time is the child more ready to learn quickly and avidly, to become big in the sense of sharing obligation, discipline, and performance... also eager to make things together, to share in constructing and planning."[3] we have only to capitalize on this excitement for learning to enable our students to develop feelings of competence and self worth.

Not only teachers but parents also help in this learning process. They provide much needed supervision and inspiration at home and at school. Students at this stage need motivation to learn new things, to stretch their minds and to use their newly acquired skills. They also need role models to emulate the behavior and skills they are trying to master. Thus, Erikson's work seems to encourage and support parent participation in the school.

Erikson, like Piaget, advocates working in groups. For developing a sense of industry involves more than a mere mastery of the task at hand. It must

---

[3] Erik H. Erikson, *Identity: Youth and Crisis*, (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1968), 122.

include successfully accomplishing the task while working beside and along with others. One must be able to successfully do one's share of the work. Group projects then, become important measurements of success. If such an enterprise succeeds, the students have learned to divide labor and use each other's skills in varying ways. Feeling industrious, or competent means being able to succeed in any learning situation, whether as an individual or as part of a group.

The middle school student, on the verge of adolescence, is also beginning to struggle with identity issues. Erikson calls this the time of identity formation, during which the student "fluctuates between building an identity that will provide a firm basis for adulthood and the experience of role confusion, of not understanding who one's inner self truly is."[4] It is during these early adolescent years that the student begins discover who he or she truly is.

What does this mean for our classrooms? It may explain some of the odd behaviors we observe from our students that prompt us to ask, "why can't they just all work together?" The answer is rooted in the developmental processes of this age. Students who are starting to clarify their self image may seek attention and affirmation in destructive ways. In an attempt to figure out who they are, they may treat others poorly. Among their peers, they may act clannish or intolerant, or be cruel in their exclusion of others. Unfortunately, it is normal for students to exclude each other. By forming cliques, stereotyping themselves, and setting ideals for each other, they test their own capacity for sustaining loyalties in the midst of inevitable value conflicts.[5] This can lead to problems in the classroom,

---

[4] Anita Woolfolk, *Educational Psychology,* 7th ed. (Prentice Hall, 1997), 70.
[5] Erik H. Erickson, *Childhood and Society*, 2nd ed. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc.,

however, by sabotaging a teacher's efforts at creating a viable community. Yet, it is important to understand that such behavior may be a necessary defense against a sense of identity loss, and not merely acts of meanness or hatred.[6] We as educators must be aware of the possible reasons behind students' undesirable behavior, and the identity struggle it represents.

Lawrence Kohlberg

Lawrence Kohlberg was interested in determining not only how morality develops, but also in discovering what precedes and nurtures moral growth. In our classrooms, a variety of activities help to foster the necessary conditions for moral awareness. Things such as role playing, discussing moral dilemmas, working through conflicting demands, facilitating and participating in social action projects, as well as making real moral choices within the classroom - all lead to moral growth and development.[7] School environments have a powerful effect on development. Within school walls, students grow morally as well as cognitively and psychosocially.

Our students also have the opportunity to cultivate religious growth through a better understanding of what Judaism expects of them. However, as noted in chapter one, Kohlberg believes that moral education and religious education should be separated. From his perspective, religion is not necessary or highly important for the development of either moral judgment or conduct. Our

---

1963), 133.
[6] *Ibid.*, 132.
[7] See footnote 47 in chapter one.

religious school classrooms, however, are places where morality and religion naturally meet.

What does this mean for the Jewish teacher? Perhaps we must teach morality in two different ways. The first, of course, is moral living as dictated by Jewish beliefs and values. The second is to teach morality in a more general context, to impart upon our students the importance of being a mensch in all situations, not just in Jewish ones. Such thinking ties in well with the increasingly popular 'mitzvah project.' Many students choose to help associations and organizations that are not Jewish. These students are demonstrating morality that goes beyond the realm of the Jewish community and its religious guidelines.

Such behavior marks the onset of adolescence and a willingness to be a part of a community that works together and takes care of all its members. Kohlberg stresses that for early adolescents, "whereas previously rules and social expectations were seen as something external to the individual self, now rules become tools by which to govern individual behavior within the community."[8] Both civil and religious laws become important guidelines for personal behavior. Students at this stage hold a characteristic social perspective. They become concerned for the well-being of all the participants or members in a peer group or relationship, or the community at large. The students learn that both individual needs and group desires are important. Involving our students in social action projects, in *tikkun olam*, seems to be an exemplary way to nurture this growing concern for those around them.

---

[8] See section on Lawrence Kohlberg in chapter one.

125

Carol Gilligan

Carol Gilligan encourages us to listen to both the male and female voices of our students. She urges us to stop 'the adolescent phenomenon,' to prevent girls from losing their voices within our classrooms. For in early adolescence, female middle school students begin to speak out less, to stop participating in discussions in which louder, more aggressive male classmates seem to be in control. The task before us then, is to find a way to create an environment in which all students can feel comfortable speaking out, one in which each individual knows that their voice will be heard.

What does this mean for our classrooms? Much of the classroom environment will reflect the practices of the teacher. Therefore, educators need to be aware of their responses to their students. Does the teacher respond differently to girls than to boys? Additionally, are masculine values viewed as superior and female values as inferior? For example, are students who are louder than others allowed to speak more? Are students who hesitate to answer given a fair chance to express themselves? We must condition ourselves to respond fairly to all our students.[9]

The teacher also sets the tone as to the way students view their work in relation to their peers. Whether or not the classroom will be one of isolating competition or comfortable cooperation depends on how the teacher mediates student relationships. Gilligan writes of how the class must learn to work together, to grow towards a "mutuality of goals." Only in a classroom where all

---

[9] See section on Carole Gilligan in chapter one.

feel comfortable in expressing their ideas and making contributions to the class, can an environment in which all flourish exist.

Gilligan too, advocates the use of small group learning. She stresses that this is one of the more constructive methods for learning within the classroom. She adds that it is important that these groups change constantly, that students have the opportunity to work with different partners and groups throughout the daily school experience. This provides opportunities for an individual's skills to be used, as well as a chance to make new connections, and to learn how to successfully enter and leave a given group situation. Furthermore, it is important to stress that achievement and success can mean rewarding students for being good team members.[10]

Gilligan suggests that classroom technique involve a variety of methods. These include narratives, case studies, and directed observation of a student's work. Role-playing is an essential activity. It helps girls, in particular to develop those much needed decision-making skills. Through the acting out of challenging scenarios, students will have the opportunity to think autonomously, make decisions, and take responsible action.

James Fowler

How can educators incorporate Fowler's theories into the classroom? Stories seem to be a good medium for faith development and growth. We educators can help our students to learn through the telling and retelling of both

---

[10]Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development,* 2nd ed. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993).

cultural and personal stories. In school age children, the capacity for and interest in narrative makes the school age child particularly attentive to stories. Of special emphasis are those tales that conserve the origins and formulate experience of the familial and communal groups to which the individual belongs. An example of such stories are the tales from the book of Genesis. There, we find the origins of the Jewish people. Stories of lives and of great adventures -- true or realistically fictional -- whether or not they are personal or of more epoch proportions, appeal because of our students' inherent interest. They also become media for extension of child's experience and understanding of life."[11] However, as discussed in regards to Piaget's concrete operations, here too, students have limited capabilities. Students can only appreciate the most literal of meanings within the stories they hear. They are not yet capable of gleaning lessons from them that are applicable to their own lives.

Not until early adolescence and the beginning of formal operational development and abstract thinking, can a student form a variety of hypothetical endings or solutions. Now the need is present to test out various hypotheses for situations both imagined and real. Therefore, in the classroom, providing opportunities to develop and utilize those problem solving skills will help students to further develop the skills they need to create their own personal ideologies and theologies.

Early adolescence is the time to begin the individual's exploration of God. As noted in chapter one, until now, it is likely that one's views of God have not

[11]James W. Fowler, *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning*, (San Francisco: Harper & Row, Publishers, Inc., 1981), 136.

been seriously challenged. Writes Fowler, "... while beliefs and values are deeply felt, they typically are tacitly held..."[12] Adolescence is indeed the occasion to question God's role in the world and in individuals' lives. Our classrooms become the laboratory in which students test out their feelings about and relationship with God.

Nel Noddings

Nel Noddings reminds us that schools do have a responsibility to encourage students' moral growth and development. She writes of an 'ethic of care,' and stresses that this ethic must become part of the classroom. But how does an ethic of care translate in a tangible way into the supplementary school classroom? How do we create and maintain an environment that allows caring to flourish and moral meeting to occur?

We must allow for, as Gilligan states, both male and female voices to be heard. Noddings however, couches those voices in the sounds of tradition. She writes of the 'father's voice' and also of that of the 'mother.' She fears the implications of moral education that allows for the 'father's voice' only:

> ...if it is guided only by a study of moral principles and judgment, not only are women made to feel inferior to men in the moral realm but also education itself may suffer from impoverished and one sided moral guidance.[13]

Both voices must be present in the classroom in order to offer a balanced program of moral education.[14]

[12]Fowler, 172-3.
[13]Nel Noddings, *Caring: A Feminine Approach To Ethics & Moral Education,* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1984), 28.
[14]See section on Nel Noddings in chapter one.

129

What does such a program entail? Noddings stresses that it is not the institution alone that makes the environment a caring one. She believes that schools as institutions, "cannot care directly. A school cannot be engrossed in anyone or anything. But a school can be deliberately designed to support caring and caring individuals."[15]

But what about society's tendency to believe that discussions about values belong only within the home or religious institutions? Noddings feels that values should be discussed in schools, that schools play an important role in a child's education of all topics. She writes,

> school is an ideal setting where values, beliefs, and
> opinions can be examined both critically and
> appreciatively... absurd to think that we are educating
> when we ignore those matters that lie at the very heart of
> human existence.[16]

Schools then, do have a responsibility to encourage students' moral growth and development. Noddings hopes that parents, teachers, and other adults within the community will work together as cooperative and encouraging educators. In this way, all will become caregivers, providing educational opportunities to support students as they grow.

Noddings points toward the need to restructure our schools, to turn them into places where caring exists. What are her suggestions for this new type of school? To begin with, Noddings suggests that teachers should also act as counselors and advisors, thereby providing extended contact between them and their students. The student-teacher relationship can do much to ensure success

---

[15]Noddings, 182.
[16]*Ibid.*, 184.

130

for the student. The one-on-one contact can help students through the difficult times of adolescence and the middle school experience.

Additionally, Noddings feels that students should stay with the same teacher, not only throughout the day, but from year to year as well. She suggests that a teacher stay with a particular group of students for three years, so that real bonds can be formed, and real learning take place.

Noddings also suggests different grade divisions for our schools. She throws out the current thinking that sends students through elementary school, junior high or middle school, and finally high school. Instead, Noddings divides students into only two institutions, a first for grades K-7, and a second for grades 8-12. Her reasoning? This way, students have to transition into two new environments, not three. Her model also leaves room for differences in development level. Noddings envisions both grades seven and eight as optional years. Seventh grade as she sees it, provides a "finishing experience" to the elementary years and can be skipped if a student is developmentally mature and ready for the high school experience. Similarly, grade eight becomes an "introductory experience" to the secondary institution. This too can be forsaken if the student is ready to proceed to the higher levels of education. Noddings is quick to point out that her ideas for transformation take into account each student's level of readiness.[17]

In the practical realm, Noddings urges the creation of regular service projects. By this she means that students should be expected to participate in

---

[17]*Ibid.*, 190.

regular service acts around the school and within the community. In the school setting, students could help the custodial staff, work as office aides, assist the grounds keeper, or even act as aides in the younger grades. Through these tasks, students would learn to care about their environment, i.e. their school. In the community, a plethora of opportunities exist, from volunteering in nursing homes, to cleaning up parks and highways. Noddings sees such opportunities as being true apprenticeships in caring, significant components of education that should be taken as seriously as glasswork and homework assignments.

What else goes into a curriculum that stresses caring? Noddings wants to lay out educational topics and subjects "along the entire range of human experience."[18] In doing so, students will encounter material repeatedly throughout the educational process. They will receive the opportunity to interact meaningfully with concepts and ideas at the different stages of their development. Noddings uses the image of a spiral as a visual illustration of this sort of curriculum. No topic or lesson is isolated, all of what is taught is embedded in and directly related to what comes next.[19] Much of Noddings' work has been incorporated successfully into the general full-time public middle school. Perhaps it will work for the Jewish supplementary school as well.

---

[18] *Ibid.*, 191.
[19] Nel Noddings, "Learning, Teaching, and Existential Meaning." *Common Schools, Uncommon Futures: A Working Consensus for School Renewal,* ed. Barry S. Kogan. (New York: Teachers College Press, 1997), 51.

Public School Ideas in the Religious School Classroom

> Every decade contributes new movements, new insights, and new
>
> goals to education in general and Jewish education in particular.
> We need to be energized by these findings and learn how to apply
> them to Jewish education...[20]

Public education has much to offer the supplementary school. Much that is good

and effective has already been implemented into the middle school educational

enterprise. We will now look at how those successes can be translated into our

religious school classrooms.

The lists of criteria presented in chapter three give us concrete guidelines

to follow. Michael Rutter, in his suggestions for components of a good middle

school, includes giving high amounts of rewards and praise for students'

accomplishments, and creating ample opportunities for students to take

responsibility for and participate in the running of the school.[21] Rutter's

guidelines give ideas for instituting the beginnings of change. Rewarding and

praising students for their accomplishments is essential to building self esteem

and self-confidence.

How do we reward our students? All too often, the prize is food. Giving

candy to our students is not the way to make a lasting impression that we are

proud of their accomplishments. No, rewards must be more substantive and not

just a bag of lollipops picked up by the teacher on his or her way to the

synagogue. What then can we do to praise cooperative behavior? With middle

---

[20]Cecile Jordan, "The Quest for Excellence in Public Education Affects Jewish Education,"
Jewish Education 59, no. 1 (1991), 35.
[21]Michael Rutter, "School Influences on Children's Behavior and Development," *Pediatrics* 65
(Feb. 1980), 208-20.

school students, one can leave an interesting topic of discussion for last, waiting to see if the class behaves well enough to make it through the rest of the lesson. Telling the students ahead of time about the possibility for discussion of the particular topic may help them to exhibit the good attitudes that will merit the special activity in the end.

William Alexander and Paul George provide another sort of list. Theirs reflects changes made to the educational program itself. For them, the effective school has a guidance system, a transitional curriculum, one that carefully articulates and coordinates learning experiences, a variety of instructional strategies, intramural athletics and other exploratory courses, and core learning experiences for future use.[22] Alexander and George give specific examples of programs to be set in place that are designed to help the student through the day to day difficulties of life both within the school and outside of it. In addition to that, they remind us of the importance of offering a variety of experiences to our middle school students.

The ideas that Alexander and George suggest can work in the supplementary school. We can successfully implement an advisory system within our schools and classrooms. Rabbi Harold Shulweis has created and implemented a b'nai mitzvah counseling program using dedicated lay leadership to help facilitate the bar/bat mitzvah process for students and their families.[23] Under the direction of a program coordinator, the b'nai mitzvah counselors each

---

[22]William M. Alexander and Paul S. George, *The Exemplary Middle School,* (New York: CBS College Publishing, 1981), 2.
[23]Sally Shafton, "Para-Rabbinic and B'nai Mitzvah Counseling Program," *Bar/Bat Mitzvah: A Sourcebook*, ed., Helen Leneman (Denver, CO: Alternatives in Religious Education, 1993), 339.

work with some six to eight families a year. Each counselor provides an important link between the family and the congregation. All involved are volunteers, giving their time to creating a supportive and caring environment for the students and their families.[24] This program could be expanded to focus more on the relationship between the counselor and the student. Interaction between them outside of the family meetings could provide impetus for creating important advisory opportunities.

We can also vary our methods of instruction, as Alexander and George suggest. Using techniques such as group learning, independent study, and the use of learning centers, and real life experiences, we can offer a plethora of exciting ways to present curricular material.

Finally, Alexander and George mention the necessity of providing core experiences for future use. In the religious school, we must prepare our students for their adult life as a Jew. This involves creating lifelong learners, instilling within our students the desire to continue their Jewish learning above and beyond the formal religious school program. This will be discussed later.

The 1995 document by the National Middle School Association provides the best written list of the goals of the modern middle school. Along with the criteria for the gauging of success, the paper highlights programmatic areas to become the focus of educational restructuring and reform. Those areas are:

> 1) A curriculum that is challenging, integrative and exploratory
> 2) The use of varied teaching and learning approaches
> 3) Assessment and evaluation that promotes learning
> 4) Flexible organizational structures

---

[24] *Ibid.*

5) Program and policies that foster health, wellness and safety
6) Comprehensive guidance and support services[25]

The NMSA's guidelines are clear, concise. The proposed changes are ones that we can implement into the supplementary school. These guidelines will serve as the headings of the following section, as we look at what the general full-time school has to offer the supplementary religious school program.

Curriculum and Learning Experiences

A good curriculum is one that contains a strong emphasis on competence, achievement, self-exploration and definition, social interaction, and meaningful school participation. In other words, a good curriculum plans for personal growth as well as academic achievement.[26] How then to plan a curriculum? As noted earlier, educators agree that curriculum must match the developmental level of the students. However, because of the varying levels of development among the students of any one class, it is difficult to find any single curriculum that will work for all the students involved. What then does work? Here are a few approaches that have found success in the general, full-time middle school, and can perhaps be successful in the supplementary religious school as well.

Independent Study. This can be a useful tactic for classrooms in which one or two students are consistently ahead, or unfortunately, behind the rest of the class. Individual work allows students to work at their own pace, to remain

---

[25] John H. Lounsbury, "Key Characteristics of Middle Level Schools," ERIC Digest 401050 (Nov. 1996).
[26] Joan Lipsitz, *Successful Schools for Young Adolescents,* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books, 1984), 188.

interested and engaged in their schoolwork by allowing them to choose areas of study that both interest them and are appropriate for their level of achievement. How to go about setting up independent study within the classroom? The Rupert A. Nock Middle School bulletin reminds us that "independent study should be a part of, not apart from, the regular program."[27] This means that students should not miss out on full-class experiences to do their independent work. Their individual projects should supplement what occurs in the classroom, and not supplant it. Not everyone within the classroom has to be doing the same thing at once, students can be working on independent projects during class time.

Once the topic of the independent study is chosen, William Alexander and Paul George suggest creating a contract. By this they mean an agreement between the teacher and the student as to the nature of the project, the time involved in its completion, the role to be played by the teacher, and the expectations for the student involved in the project.

Exploratory Classes and Special Interest Areas. In the general, full-time middle school program, exploratory classes exist to introduce the student to a variety of topics and activities not included within the standard curriculum. These mini-courses assist the student's social growth by allowing him or her to pursue additional areas of interest above and beyond the more traditional subjects usually taught within the classroom.[28]

In the supplementary school, such courses allow our students to explore

---

[27]Alexander and George, 66.
[28]See the section entitled 'Exploratory Courses/ Special Interest Areas' in chapter three for a sample list of courses taught within the middle school.

aspects of Judaism that interest them. These *chugim*, the Hebrew word for activities, supplement what happens within the classroom. If done correctly, they can turn our students 'on' to Judaism.

Alexander and George list a set of guidelines or characteristics for exploratory courses or special interest activities within the public school:

1) Student initiative in organizing, selecting, planning and conducting is encouraged.
2) The activity meets much less frequently and for a shorter term than the traditional exploratory classes.
3) Teacher responsibility for an activity is a part of the teacher's assignment, but teachers have much freedom in proposing and planning the particular activities they guide.
4) The students' participation is voluntary and no grades are given by teachers; however, the teacher advisor does help students make choices of appropriate activities.
5) Students throughout a middle school may choose activities so that these activities are not organized by grades or ability levels or other factors toward homogeneity.

These criteria can work within the supplementary school as well. How do they translate into our religious schools? Students should be able to request that certain courses be offered. These can be previously taught offerings that interest the students currently enrolled, or new areas to be discovered by student and teacher alike.

Alexander and George suggest that the special interest courses meet less frequently than those of the core curriculum. This makes the course seem more special when it does meet, and less like a requirement to be endured on a daily basis. At Congregation Etz Chaim in Lombard, Illinois, *chugim* meet for one half

hour between the Judaica and Hebrew classes.[29] It is barely enough time for the students to grow bored. They know that if they do not use that half hour well, it will quickly be wasted.

The *chugim* at Etz Chaim are taught by parents who volunteer their time to bring these special interest areas to life. Indeed this is a good way to draw parents into the school, to ask them to come and share their expertise with eager students. Parents bring a variety of talents to the area of mini-courses. Etz Chaim offers Jewish cooking, Jewish art, Reading Jewish books, Drama, Jewish jewelry, conversational Hebrew, to name a few. The courses differ from year to year, depending on who is available to teach and what they feel comfortable presenting. Nonetheless, it is an excellent way to promote parents and children learning together in the religious school setting.

Finally, *chugim* do not need to be divided by grade level. Etz Chaim groups fourth through seventh graders together in mini-courses. In this way students get to mingle with other students not in their class. They receive the opportunity to become friendly with kids they do not encounter within their classroom.

Social Action Projects/ Mitzvah Corps. Students need opportunities to practice the morals they learn about in the supplementary school.[30] This marks the most significant innovation within the contemporary religious school,

> the inclusion, by design, of an ongoing program of mitzvah
> activities within the school... until quite recently in Jewish history,

---

[29]This is where I am currently working as a student rabbi. During the past year, I have gained much insight into the program the Etz chaim school offers to its students.
[30]Effron, 56.

there was no need for the Jewish school to program mitzvah activities. The child grew up in a family and in a community in... surrounded by the observance of mitzvot... the school taught the child about mitzvot but it did not need to guarantee opportunities to perform or practice mitzvot..."[31]

Many religious schools now include social action programming, the doing of mitzvah opportunities, as a regular part of their overall curriculum.

Homework. Supplementary school teachers must be careful "not to assign the same type of homework as the public school teacher does."[32] Religious school homework must be less rigorous and less repetitive in order to maintain students' interest.[33] The home assignments we give must be meaningful tasks that enable our student to continue learning Jewishly outside of their religious school classrooms.

Homework assignments should include the family as well as the student. Parents can learn alongside their children. Even Hebrew studies can be pursued at home. If the parent is not able to read Hebrew letters, a transliteration sheet can be provided. Furthermore, tasks that promote discussion between parent and child allow for understanding and acceptance to flourish.

Dividing Up the Students. As in the movement of school reform, supplementary schools, too, worry about how to divide students so that they are in the best position to learn. Within Hebrew programs, students tend to be divided either by the standard chronological age-graded student grouping

---

[31] Burton I. Cohen, "Some Considerations for Planners of Mitzvah Activities in the Jewish School," *Jewish Education* 47, no. 2 (1979), 38.

[32] Barbara Elish, "Should Jewish Supplementary Religious Schools Be Like the Public School?" *Jewish Education* 57, nos. 2,3,4 (1989), 49.

[33] *Ibid.*

system,[34] or by the students' ability levels.[35] In the first option, students are placed according to age or corresponding grade level within the general full-time school. In the second, through a process known as 'tracking,' students are divided students into classes according to their ability level. It is thought that this makes teaching more appropriate for students. Students are placed according to ability into different levels or tracks within the school. In such a situation there tends to be little to no interaction between students of the different tiers.[36] In our religious schools, such separation can be traumatic. It can prevent students from mingling and getting to know each other.

As noted earlier, the common research points out that such segregation of students does not necessarily lead to improved teaching. According to *Turning Points*, a report by the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, "tracking has proven to be 'one of the most divisive and damaging school practices.'" [37] Those students in the lower levels receive lower-quality instruction, face low expectations by instructors an the school itself, and may as a result develop severely decreased self-esteem.[38]

How to avoid that potential outcome? In the supplementary school classroom, ability grouping *within* the classroom seems to be our best option. This arrangement allows for students of all levels to be in class together. Students can work in groups or individually to finish tasks appropriate for them.

---

[34] Alexander and George, 144.
[35] See chapter three.
[36] Woolfolk, 122.
[37] Berla, Henderson, and Tewersky, 73.
[38] Woolfolk, 122.

Berla, Henderson and Tewersky suggest that when grouping does have to occur, the classes should be temporary and flexible. In other words, students should be moved when they understand or have difficulties with class material. Why? Because locking adolescents into a certain ability level gives them no chance for improvement.[39]

The Joplin Plan also holds possibilities for the supplementary school. In it, students are placed in a non-graded environment, one in which students from various grades learn together. Why not place grades 6, 7, and 8 together in an integrated program? Given the wide range of developmental levels and capabilities of early adolescents, students in a given grade level in the general, full-time school, may find themselves in quite a different place within the religious school environment. These grades are used to learning together in public school. Why should we change a situation to which they have grown accustomed? It might behoove our schools to reflect the composition of the general, full-time school.

Teaching

We have to believe that our teachers want to be in the classroom, that they enjoy spending time with their students. Teaching religious school is not for everyone:

> No one who teaches in a Jewish school does not want to transmit deep knowledge of and affection for the Jewish tradition -- to the best of their abilities -- to their students. We all know that the pay

---

[39]Berla, Henderson and Kewersky, 22.

142

> is so low and the frustration level so high that no one goes into
> Jewish teaching for the money. Jewish teacher is all about the love
> and commitment even if it is seldom perceived that way.[40]

Jewish teaching is about love and commitment. There are many who sign up to share their love of Judaism with the students in our schools. They come from varied backgrounds with different levels of Judaic knowledge and pedagogic training. Some are ready to teach a lesson on nearly any topic at all, while others do not even know where to begin. How can we, as educators, give our teachers the tools they need?

We can begin by helping our teachers receive the training they need to be effective teachers in the classroom. As noted early, the majority of religious school teachers are not certified. We can rectify that situation by budgeting money to send our teachers to training programs and conferences. We can help our teachers to merit certification either at the national level through the teacher certification program of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, or through a synagogue certification process if the necessary resources are available.

We can also work to produce teachers from among our own ranks. Using high school students as *madrichim*, as teacher's aides and assistants, introduces them to the idea of teaching. Perhaps some of our older students will consider teaching in supplementary schools because of their prior exposure. Additionally, we may not be looking for teachers in the right places. Oftentimes, an interested parent or congregant may be willing to teach if an invitation to join

---

[40]Louis L. Kaplan, "For Our Time, A Philosophy of Jewish Education," *Studies in Jewish Education*, 14.

the school team is extended. We never know who may join us in our educational endeavor.

Team teaching can also be an important element of successful teaching within the supplementary school. Being part of a team also prevents feelings of isolation.[41] Too often each class within a grade level is left to fend for itself. Each teacher works to prepare a lesson without the assistance or collaboration of the other teachers. We can implement the team idea into our schools. As educators we can encourage team planning and teaching by compensating our teachers for their planning time and being supportive of new ideas and methods as they surface. Temple Israel in Minneapolis, Minnesota assigns one teacher at each level to be the 'head teacher.' He or she is responsible for organizing meeting times and places to promote sharing of ideas and working together.[42]

Each year, new teachers join the staff of every supplementary school. For many it is their first teaching experience. How do we welcome them to the school and to the teaching staff? We can begin by publicly welcoming them during the first day assembly or service. Acknowledging the additions to the staff notify other teachers who to look out for, who may need an extra bit of help and support during the first few weeks.

Finally, we must recognise our teachers for the good work that they do. Public acknowledgment of good teaching methods and programs offers encouragement and support. At the Isaac Mayer Wise Temple in Cincinnati,

---

[41]Lipsitz, 185.
[42]As a teacher for one year within the Temple Israel school, I was part of the fifth grade 'team' and enjoyed the support of the 'head teacher' with whom I worked.

144

Ohio, effective teaching and excellent program ideas are highlighted in the weekly teacher's bulletin.[43] This allows for the sharing of ideas as well as for an opportunity for teachers to know of each others; successes within the classroom.

Wise Temple also awards annually the Cele Singer prize. It consists of a small monetary award for an excellent program used to teach Hebrew to students within the school. It serves to push teachers to strive for excellence in the classroom. Once awarded the prize it gives good teachers the recognition they deserve. This can be a model for teacher appreciation awards in the supplementary school in general. It gives incentive to plan and teach good and effective programs and lessons. We can also show that we appreciate our teaching staff by granting scholarships to CAJE conferences, monetary bonuses for attending courses offered by the local Bureau of Jewish Education, and honoring them by asking them to participate in teacher appreciation Shabbat services.

Organizational Structures: A Space of Their Own

Most religious schools do not have a separate space set aside for middle school students. As with the public school, however, those students need a space that fits their needs and the demands of the educational program of which they are a part. However, it is unlikely that these grades will have a space within the synagogue school designated only as theirs. But the rooms they use can be

---

[43]I have taught at the Isaac Mayer Wise Temple for the past four years.

made to accommodate the unique requirements of successful middle level education.

How to make the rooms belong to the middle school students that use them? Decorations must be age-appropriate. Bulletin boards should reflect the work and interests of middle schoolers and not that of younger students. Desks and tables should be the correct size, allowing students to feel comfortable during school hours. Movable furniture is the key to successfully organizing and orchestrating the various teaching methods to be discussed later in this chapter. Finally, carpeting should be part of the finished classroom, allowing students to sit on the floor or even to walk around without shoes within the security of the classroom.[44]

Programs that Foster Health, Wellness, and Safety

Students need to feel that they are a part of the rule-setting process. Most schools do allow students to participate in the discipline policy, in creating a traditional list of rules to be followed and prohibited behaviors to be avoided within the school. The Lewenberg Middle School in Lexington, Massachusetts offers an alternative to the typical do's and don'ts of classroom discipline. Instead of focusing on what students should not do, Lewenberg classrooms display a list of 'agreements' that students and staff members alike will uphold

---

[44] In my teaching experiences, I have found that when working in groups, middle school students often prefer to sit on the floor rather that at their desks or tables.

every day."[45] This list of 'agreements' is called the 'Full Value Contract' and contains the following statements:

> 1) Agree to create and participate in a group that is physically and emotionally safe
> 2) Agree to work together to achieve individual and group goals
> 3) Agree to give and receive honest feedback. To listen, to try, to care, to change, to learn
> 4) Agree not to devalue or discount yourself or others
> 5) Agree to express negative thoughts and feelings and to learn and grow as a result[46]

This contract focuses on the positive aspects of the classroom, and not on the negative ones. Instead of a list of things that students (and teachers!) can and cannot do, the contract works as a true agreement between the students and their instructor. It sets the tone of the classroom, creating an environment that fosters and nurtures growth of the individual as well as that of the class as a whole.

Our religious school classrooms can make use of this contractual idea. Rather than focus on students' negative behavior, waiting in anticipation for our students' outrageous behavior, we can instead create an environment that runs by contract and agreement.

Guidance and Support from the Family

Larry Cuban writes that the school is the most important instrument in the securing of excellence for all children.[47] In many ways, the general, full-time,

---

[45]Mark D. O'Donnell, "Boston's Lewenberg Middle School Delivers Success," *Phi Delta Kappan* 78, no. 7, (1997), 509-510.
[46]*Ibid.*, 510.
[47]See chapter three, note 16.

school has become a "surrogate society," one that has replaced the home as a means of societal assimilation. The supplementary school, too has grown in importance in our students' lives. It too now fulfills responsibilities once left up to parents to teach.

But the parent has not been replaced as primary teacher, rather, he or she has merely joined forces with the school in which the children are enrolled. How to create a strong network of parental support at home? The key to success is to make sure that the parents and teachers work together as members of the same team. Recent research shows that during the past two decades, there are a variety of correlates of effective schooling. Family support for and participation in school life is one of them.[48] Writes Mordechai Kaplan, "To educate a child without educating and involving the parents and the entire family can be compared to heating a house while leaving the window open."[49] Family involvement is essential to success within the middle school.

It is important to remember however, that the school is not working alone at the task of socialization. Parents and families can also lend a hand. Jordan (1991) reminds us that children begin to learn immediately after birth. [50] This implies that "parents must be thought of as educators from day one...."[51] Parents are our partners in the education of their children. The problem lies, however, in the fact that most Jewish parents do not feel competent in their ability to teach

---

[48]Alvin I. Shiff, "The Jewish Supplementary School - A System in Need of Change," Jewish Education 55, no. 4 (1988), 6.
[49]Kaplan, 14.
[50]Jordan, "The Quest...," 24.
[51]*Ibid.*

their children about Judaism. How can we make them feel more capable?

We can offer classes for parents that cover a broad range of topics. We can teach about the Jewish perspective on parenting, how to teach Jewish values, and about the bar or bat mitzvah ceremony so that parents understand the ceremony for which their children are preparing.

It is not always easy to reach the parents of our students. That parent population is the least accessible to educators. They drop their children off at the synagogue on a Sunday morning or weekday afternoon, disappear for a couple of hours and then return to wait in their cars for their children to emerge from the building. We as Jewish educators, may be beginning our quest too late. We try to reach parents only after disengagement and disinterest have already set in. The Parents as Teachers Program (PAT) in parts of Missouri pays 1500 parent educators to make monthly house calls on 53,000 families beginning with the third trimester of pregnancy"[52] Why can't we too send 'parents as teachers' into the homes of our congregants? We too should be teaching our Jewish parents to be qualified Jewish educators for their children.

Parents can become our partners in teaching their children if we only provide the opportunities for them to do so. At Congregation Etz Chaim, second grade teacher Marcy Siegel has created what she calls the 'family class.' Her second graders come to class each week with a parent. Students and parents spend part of the morning together, and part of it involved in separate activities. Mrs. Siegel has made real the partnership between herself and the parents of

---

[52] *Ibid.*

149

her students. She invites them not only to take interest in their child's religious education, but to take part in it as well.

The bottom line is that parents need to come to Religious School along with their children. Not only does such an effort on their part show that they truly care about their child's education, but it also demonstrates their willingness to be a part of the educational process.

But what can parents do at home to be a part of their child's religious education? One sure way to include families is to create meaningful home tasks that ensure parental assistance. Such home "learning kits" have been successfully implemented in Community District 3 in New York City. The kits create opportunities for families to learn together. Another similar idea is to form a parent center like the one set up in Natchez, Mississippi which creates activities to do at home. In this way, families can do things together based on what the student is learning in school, but in a way that doesn't resemble conventional homework.[53]

Temple Israel of Minneapolis, Minnesota. developed a wonderful way of communicating with parents about what happened within their children's classrooms.[54] The project, called 'Fridge Talk,' involved sending home with each student a refrigerator magnet with the words "ask me what happened today" written on it. At the end of each session of religious school, students were given a list of questions to bring home and place on their refrigerator with the magnet.

---

[53]Barry Rutherford and Shelly H. Billig, "Eight lessons of Parent, Family, and Community Involvement in the Middle Grades," *Phi Delta Kappan* 77, no. 1 (1995), 68.
[54]As a *madrich* at Temple Israel in the late eighties, I was often responsible for generating the list of questions to be sent home with the students with whom I worked.

In this way, parents could ask their children the right questions in order to discover just what their child had learned that day. If done correctly, the project ensured discussions within the home about Judaism.

Focus On... Seventh Grade

Many of the aforementioned suggestions will help to transform the supplementary school into one that works for our middle school students. Varying curricula and methodologies, supporting teachers, involving families, and creating value contracts all help to foster an environment in which true learning can take place. All these factors join to make the supplementary school in general a success.

But what about the specific challenges of the middle school years? What about the year dedicated to bar/bat mitzvah? How do we make seventh grade a year of growth and meaning as well as of religious ceremony and rite? We begin by looking at suggestions for innovation and change surrounding the bar/bat mitzvah ceremony, its preparation, and the often tumultuous year during which this life cycle event occurs.

The Bar/Bat Mitzvah Experience

How to make a bar/bat mitzvah...
Take one child. Carefully measure equal amounts of parental guidance and benign neglect. Add unknown quantities of peer influence and sibling rivalry. Butter up occasionally, cuddle regularly, beat rarely, and watch closely. Sprinkle with liberal amounts of Judaism. Simmer without either of you boiling over. Do not baste, but on occasion allow to step in his/her own juices. Let

rise to full height, while keeping the lid on. After thirteen years, hope that he/she is warm, mature, and well-seasoned. Cover with an appropriate dressing and serve to friends and family.[55]

If only is was this easy! Unfortunately, there is no such recipe for a successful bar/bat mitzvah experience.

Zachary and Goodman list the goals and anticipated outcomes surrounding the time of bar/bat mitzvah:

> ...bringing out the mitzvah in the bar/bat mitzvah process, retaining a sense of holiness or sacredness throughout all aspects of the experience, having families see bar/bat mitzvah as a community experience, helping families sort through their values and priorities, giving families a way of planning and communicating with one another.[56]

The successful bar/bat mitzvah experience, then, is one in which the student, family and community all benefit.

Bringing out the Mitzvah...

Judith Davis writes of the mitzvah of remembering. She suggests that b'nai mitzvah students use this time to learn more about their family history and to remember those relatives who are no longer living but who had a role in their lives. Davis says to bring out the family picture album because

> Family photographs are like memory windows. They provide openings through which we reenter old worlds. Most children love seeing pictures of their parents as children. There is no better time for looking at such memories than during the months prior to the bar/bat mitzvah.[57]

---

[55]Written by A. R. E. "Bar/bat Mitzvah Leader," quoted in Faimount Temple's booklet, "Becoming a Bar Mitzvah or a Bat Mitzvah at Fairmount Temple.

[56]Lois J. Zachary and Roberta L. Goodman, " A Learner-Centered Approach to Family Life Educational Programming: The B'nai Mitzvah Experience," *Jewish Education* 59, no. 1 (1991), 26.

[57]Judith Davis, *Whose Bar/Bat Mitzvah is This, Anyway?* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1988),

'Bringing out the mitzvah' means discovering family traditions, remembering family members, and learning how important such memories are.

Davis (1998) offers another example of how researching family roots can bring families together during the time of the bar/bat mitzvah. She writes:

> As part of his preparatory mitzvot, Stephen made a multi-generational collage of family pictures that he attached to the family tree he and his parents had begun putting together. It was a great experience, but also frustrating because they realized how much they didn't know about past generations. what they decided to do was to bring the collage and tree to the bar mitzvah party and ask all the relatives to fill in whatever pieces of information they could. That process, videotaped by Uncle Nate, became the emotional highlight of the party...[58]

By bringing family together in celebration, we can 'bring the mitzvah' back into bar/bat mitzvah.

Another aspect of mitzvah includes the infamous 'mitzvah project' that many congregations require their b'nai mitzvah students to do in partial fulfillment of the requirements for becoming bar/bat mitzvah. Students choose to participate in a variety of programs and projects. At Congregation Etz Chaim, students have volunteered time in animal shelters, set up and worked in a haunted house, organized a food and clothing drive, initiated contact between the seventh grade class and one in Russia. These examples are but a few of the creative ideas that Etz Chaim b'nai students have come up with in order to complete their mitzvah project.

102.
[58] *Ibid.*, 104.

The problem is however, that students seldom have an opportunity to share their creativity with each other. By means of an informal survey, I discovered that seventh graders at Etz Chaim knew little about the mitzvah projects of even their closest friends in the class. [59]

The solution lies in what I call a 'mitzvah project fair.' One Sunday morning, students would set up a 'booth' to explain what they chose to do for their mitzvah project. Each booth would explain what the student did and to perhaps offer additional information for those interested in volunteering and helping out at the same place. The fair would be open to the entire school and parents would be invited as well. Sixth graders, the next b'nai mitzvah class, could search for ideas while admiring those of the class ahead of them.

A Community Experience

One of the unfortunate developments of the modern bar/bat mitzvah ceremony is its increased privatization. Many have forgotten that the ceremony originated as a public event, and not as one characterized as 'invitation only.' How do we as educators help to return the bar/bat mitzvah to the community realm? How do we help our students to understand the true communal nature of the event?[60] Helen Leneman suggests beginning the celebration in the

---

[59]While *shmoozing* with a group of seventh graders before class one Sunday morning, I asked if they knew about each other's mitzvah projects. Most replied that they did not.
[60]I am particularly interested in these questions. At a recent Friday night Shabbat service that I attended, I was unaware beforehand that a young woman was to become bat mitzvah during that service. I attended the *oneg Shabbat* and was later chastised by my seventh grade students who had seen me there and knew that I was not invited. They felt that I had no right to attend without an invitation!

classroom so that all can share in the excitement of the upcoming event. She

suggests a couple of techniques for including the class community.

> The week before a student's bar/bat mitzvah ceremony, he/she got
> up in front of the class, introduced the portion to be read, then
> chanted the *brachot* and the Torah and Haftarah portions for the
> class. Students all followed along in their *chumash*. There was no
> problem keeping the class quiet for these sessions -- they all knew
> their turn would come too! After each recitation, a brief "party" was
> held. (Parents were given the dates of their child's recitation at the
> start of the year, and they were asked to provide a snack for the
> whole class.) This became a sort of pre-celebration party, and for
> some children this rite of passage in front of their peers was a
> greater challenge than the ceremony on the *bimah*. It was also an
> important bonding activity for the whole class.[61]

The class comes together in support of the classmate soon to become bar/bat

mitzvah. Each student receives the opportunity to feel competent and successful

in the presence of his or her peers. As Leneman points out, it is indeed a

wonderful to bring the class together.

Leneman also suggests that students study there own Torah portion as

well as that of their classmates within the classroom. She writes that, "Students

will be more inclined to show an interest in learning Torah if they see the

connection to their own bar/bat mitzvah portion immediately."[62] In Leneman's

classes, students also gain familiarity with the *chumash*:

> While discussing key ideas in a students' *parashah*, the students
> had *chumashim* at their desks. We did "*chumash* searches" to see
> who could find a book, chapter, and verse first. I might point out a
> key phrase in Hebrew or English and ask the first student who
> found it to read it aloud. In this way all students gained familiarity
> and ease with the *chumash*.[63]

---

[61] Helen Leneman, "Designing a B'nai Mitzvah Curriculum," *Bar/Bat Mitzvah Education: A Sourcebook*, ed. Helen Leneman (Denver: A.R.E. Publishing, 1993), 253.
[62] *Ibid.*, 252.
[63] Leneman, 253.

Leneman's idea is a good one. All too often our students know only their own Torah portion, unable to use the *chumash* to follow along at the ceremony of a friend.

Furthermore, I think that *hevruta* study would work quite well with his type of project. Students could be divided into groups based on the Book of Torah in which they will find their Torah portion. They study the *parashah* along with their peers in greater detail then is possible with only a few short meetings with the rabbi or cantor.

A Family Experience

The time surrounding the bar or bat mitzvah sets a rhythm for the connection between families and Jewish schools and synagogues. Incorporating the parents into the process alongside their students is imperative.

Fairmount Temple in Cleveland, Ohio offers the 'Bar Mitzvah and Bat Mitzvah Prep Course' to all b'nai mitzvah families during the four to eight months prior to the date of the child's ceremony.[64] It is a three-session course designed to both ease and enhance the bar/bat mitzvah experience. Topics covered include: the concept of *mitzvah*, the assignment of the mitzvah project for students about to become bar/bat mitzvah, the structure and meaning of the Shabbat morning service, the symbols and choreography of the Torah service, the assignment of the child's portion, details pertaining to tutoring, and other personal and family concerns.

---

[64]Fairmount Temple, 15-16.

What makes this course different from others I reviewed, is the final session. It takes place on a Shabbat morning. For the hour of the morning, parents and children meet separately with a psychologist/social worker from the Jewish Family Service Association. During this time, each group, one with parents, and the other with their children, discuss the emotional issues surrounding the upcoming bar/bat mitzvah ceremony as it relates to them and their families. This is indeed an important part of the b'nai mitzvah program for as the pamphlet states, "It has been clear through many years of observation, that all important milestone occasions, whether of a happy, serious or sorrowful nature, carry with them certain tensions for members of the entire family."[65] A session such as this one, helps both parents and children to better understand these tensions and to perhaps deal with them before they are blown out of proportion. Following these group meetings, all attend Shabbat services together.

It is indeed a time for parents and children to learn about each other. Judith Davis tells a story of a 'failed father':

> Ron, a father whose son's sulleness and reluctance to participate in family discussions about the upcoming bar mitzvah had been a source of great pain and self-doubt, talked about what he had learned at a parents' program on 'adolescent identity development' at the junior high school... Now when Jeremy stands listening to the conversation from the doorway rather than participating actively with the family around the table, Ron thinks about this act as an 'age-appropriate' expression of ambivalence rather than an expression of outright rejection.[66]

---

[65] *Ibid.*, 16.
[66] Davis, 80.

Classes such as the one in which Ron enrolled greatly help parents to better understand their children during the early adolescent years. We do not have to send our b'nai mitzvah parents to programs at the local middle school, however. We can offer such workshops within the synagogue, through the supplementary school. In this way parents can learn what to anticipate and how to deal with the many changes that affect their children during the time surrounding the preparation for and actual ceremony of bar/bat mitzvah.

A Helpful Bibliography

What follows is a listing of resources that may be helpful to middle school educators and parents alike. This is by no means an exhaustive list. New sources appear nearly everyday as our communities work together to restore holiness to the ritual of bar/bat mitzvah.

Torah / Haftarah

✿Fields, Harvey. *A Torah Commentary for Our Times.* Vol. I, *Genesis*, 1990, Vol. II, *Exodus and Leviticus*, 1991. Vol. III, *Numbers and Deuteronomy.* New York: UAHC Press, 1993.

The material written here can be quite helpful to the Bar Mitzvah struggling to understand his or her *parashah.* Midrash and other rabbinic commentaries are presented clearly and concisely in language that is easy for students to understand. Questions are provided at the end of each section to further aid in understanding the content of each portion.

✡Loeb, Sorel Goldberg, and Barbara Binder Kadden. *Teaching Torah*. Denver: Alternatives in Religious Education, Inc., 1984.

This book gives concise synopses of each portion and then focuses on several concepts found in the portion. The strength of this text is twofold. It asks questions of its readers that are of extreme relevance. It helps to bring Torah into the modern world, to reconnect the message of Torah with students' lives. Secondly, it provides wonderful lists of related activities and follow-up projects to further develop one's understanding of the Torah text.

✡Plaut, W. Gunther, ed. *The Torah: A Modern Commentary*. New York: UAHC Press, 1981.
✡Plaut, W. Gunther and Chaim Stern. *The Haftarah Commentary*. New York: UAHC Press, 1996.

These books are the Reform movement's main commentaries on the weekly Torah and Haftarah portions. Found in most synagogue and even in popular bookstores, Plaut's work helps to deepen understanding of the text at hand.

✡Reich, Leo, Rachel Gláser, and Sarah Siegman. *Tree of Life Torah Curriculum*. Baltimore: Board of Jewish Education, 1989.

This curriculum offers an overview of Torah and Tanakh. It devotes an entire lesson to an introduction to the five books of the Torah. In addition to the imparting of valuable information about the Torah, the authors of this curriculum also provide an interesting link to the concept of *Etz Chaim*, to the tree of life. A poster kit is included to provide visual stimulation to the lesson.

✡Beiner, Stan. *Sedra Scenes*. Denver: A.R.E. Publishing, Inc., 1982.
✡_____. *Bible Scenes*. Denver: A.R.E. Publishing, Inc., 1988.

After serious discussions involving the various Torah and haftarah portions, this may be just the break that a class needs. These books provide true to the text scripts' for both Torah and Prophets, allowing students to act out and participate in the text.

General Judaica

✡Olitsky, Kerry M, and Ronald H. Isaacs. *The How-to Handbook for Jewish Living*. Hoboken, NJ: KTAV Publishing, 1993.
✡_____. *The Second How-to Handbook for Jewish Living*. Hoboken, NJ: KTAV Publishing, 1996.

These fact-filled how-to manuals contain all of the basic things that a Jew needs to know to live a Jewish life. These are good books for the soon-to-become bar or bat mitzvah to have - it will help them to understand exactly what it means to become a responsible member of the Jewish community.

✡Isaacs, Ronald H. *Rites of Passage: A Guide to the Jewish Life Cycle*.

A wonderful source for anyone seeking to further their knowledge of Jewish life cycle events. For the bar/bat mitzvah student, the chapter pertaining to the ceremony details the history, customs and rituals surrounding the mitzvah ceremony.

✡Shekel, Michal. *Making a Difference: Commandments and Community.*

Combines the study of the history of mitzvot with the history and functions of our ancient and modern service organizations. Many schools expect their students to participate in some sort of "mitzvah project" as one of the requirements for bar/bat mitzvah. This book will not only help them to understand the importance of such an undertaking, but will also provide tips as to which organizations may need their help. Included is a listing of organizations: their names, addresses, phone numbers and web sites.

Bar / Bat Mitzvah

✡Diamond, Barbara. *Bat Mitzvah: A Jewish Girl's Coming of Age.* New York:
    Viking Press, 1995.

This is a well-written book outlining the history of the bat mitzvah ceremony as

well as an overall view of the contemporary ceremony and practices. It covers

the ceremony as well as the celebration with tips on how to make it meaningful.

Contains a useful glossary of Hebrew terms and a section in which bat mitzvah

girls reflect on their experiences.

✡Efron, Benjamin and Alvin D. Rubin. *Coming of Age: Your Bar/Bat Mitzvah.*
    New York: Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1997.

This book offers Reform Judaism's perspective on bar/bat mitzvah. It provides a

basic introduction to the history, rituals and significance of the bar/bat mitzvah

ceremony. Provides excellent background material and deals with specific

student concerns.

✡Eisenberg, Azriel Louis. *Bar Mitzvah Treasury.* West Orange, NJ: Behrman House, 1956.

An anthology of essays on topics of interest to the bar or bat mitzvah. Cantor Helen Leneman highly recommends the mitzvah stories from different places and times.[67]

✡Isaacs, Ronald H. *Reaching for Sinai: A How-To Handbook for Celebrating a Meaningful Bar/Bat Mitzvah.*

This volume is intended to provide b'nai mitzvah families with all that they need to know as they prepare for this important religious milestone in their children's lives. Included in its pages is a historical overview of the ceremony, a chapter on 'being commanded,' ways of sanctifying the reception, and suggestions of what to do after the bar/bat mitzvah is over. The appendix includes a sample synagogue program, guidelines for parent speeches, a checklist, Torah and Haftarah summaries, and a glossary of terms encountered throughout the process of preparation. A good source for families and classrooms alike.

✡Isaacs, Ronald H. *Sedra Reflections: Guide to the Torah Portions and Their Haftarot.*

This book is a wonderful asset to those working on a d'var torah! Written in clear, user-friendly language, it is appropriate for b'nai mitzvah students to use while preparing their speeches. Each section includes: an outline of the portion, key concepts and values, biblical and rabbinic commentaries, a list of relevant mitzvot and ideas as to how they might be expressed in one's daily living, and a

---

[67]Helen Leneman, ed., *Bar/Bat Mitzvah Basics: A Practical Family Guide to Coming of Age Together,* (Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing 1996), 172.

list of important words and phrases. Accompanying each Torah portion is the 'Haftarah connection.' A brief summary as well as its thematic link to the Torah portion is presented.

✡Isaacs, Ronald H. and Kerry M. Olitsky. *Doing Mitzvot: Mitzvah Projects for Bar/Bat Mitzvah*. New York: KTAV, 1994.

For bar/bat mitzvah students and their families. Includes 12 mitzvot, one for each month of the year. Each chapter contains original sources, questions to think about, research topics, suggested projects, a mitzvah diary and a biography of sources for further reading and exploration.

✡Isaacson, Judith and Deborah Rosenbloom. *Bar and Bat Mitzvah in Israel: The Ultimate Family Source Book*. Published by Israel Info-Access.

This is the source book for Jewish families of any denomination who are interested in celebrating a bar or bat mitzvah in Israel.

✡Kimmel, Eric A. *Bar Mitzvah: A Jewish Boy's Coming of Age*. New York: Viking Press, 1995.

Offers historical background, explanations of ceremonial objects and rituals, and real-life bar mitzvah stories. Suitable for a boy preparing for his ceremony or for anyone who wants to learn more about this tradition.

✡Leneman, Helen, ed. *Bar/Bat Mitzvah Basics: A Practical Family Guide to Coming of Age Together.* Woodstock, Vermont: Jewish Lights Publishing, 1996.

This practical guide gives families all the information they need to prepare for the bar / bat mitzvah ceremony - how to navigate the process, and how to grow together as a family throughout this coming-of-age experience. Topics include: from start to finish, what the entire bar/bat mitzvah process is about, how to deal with tutoring, stress, dealing with family issues such as divorce or interfaith marriage, how to design a creative service and ceremony, and advice on planning an affordable and appropriate reception.

✡Leneman, Helen, ed. *Bar/Bat Mitzvah Education: A Sourcebook.* Denver: A.R.E. Publishing, 1993.

This is a wonderful book for educators striving to improve the b'nai mitzvah program with which they work. Cantor Leneman presents some wonderful ideas for in the classroom, for coping with related stress, and for making the bar/bat mitzvah an event to remember.

✡Lewit, Jane and Ellen Robinson Epstein. *Bar/Bat Mitzvah Plan Book.* Chelsea, MI: Scarborough House, 1991.

Contains useful information about choosing bar/bat mitzvah dates, preparing your child for the big day, choosing invitations and appropriate gifts, as well as suggestions for receptions and tzeddakah projects. Includes many helpful charts and timetables.

✡Reisfeld, Randi. *The Bar/Bat Mitzvah Survival Guide*. New York: Citadel Press, 1992.

This is a practical, lighthearted, informative look at the bar/bat mitzvah celebration. Gives clear explanations of major costs and hidden expenses. Includes moneysaving tips and a complete chart for tracking expenses.

✡Rossel, Seymour. *A Spiritual Journey: The Bar and Bat Mitzvah Handbook*. West Orange, NJ: Behrman House, 1993.

This book is designed for both parents and students. It answers basic questions about the rituals that pertain to the bar/bat mitzvah ceremony. It is presented in a clear, concise question-answer format.

✡Salkin, Jeffrey K. *Putting God on the Guest List: How to Reclaim the Spiritual Meaning of Your Child's Bar or Bat Mitzvah*. Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing, 1992.

This book is a must for bar / bat mitzvah students and their parents. It helps all involved in the ceremony to better understand Judaism's most misunderstood life cycle ceremony. This thorough work answers many of the most asked questions: How did bar and bat mitzvah originate? What is its lasting significance? What are the ethics of celebration? In essence, it is a guide designed to make the whole event a more spiritually meaningful experience.

✡Scharlach, Bernice. "Coming of Age in Israel" in *Hadassah Magazine Parenting Book*. Rosalyn Bell, ed.; New York: Free Press, 1986, pp. 50-53.

This article is about celebrating your child's bar/bat mitzvah in Israel. Provides important information about synagogues, the *kotel* and other possible sites that can be used for the ceremony. Also discusses issues pertaining to borrowing Torahs, booking hotel rooms, travel agents and guides.

Bar / Bat Mitzvah Fiction

✡Adler, Esther. *A Bar Mitzvah of a Different Kind*. New York: Jewish National Fund, 1990.

A story about an American boy's bar mitzvah experience in Israel.

✡Bush, Lawrence. *Emma Ansky-Levine and Her Mitzvah Machine*. New York: Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1994.

Under the guidance of a 'mitzvah machine,' that mysteriously generates motivating messages, Emma discovers her Jewish identity and the meaning of bat mitzvah.

✡Elsant, Martin. *Bar Mitzvah Lessons*. Los Angeles, CA: Alef Design, 1993

David's bar mitzvah fears cause him to alienate five rabbis who try to tutor him and help him prepare. Something surprising happens when he is placed in the hands of an eccentric former Hebrew school teacher.

✡Pfeffer, Susan Beth. *Turning Thirteen*. New York: Scholastic, 1988.

A preteen novel about an American girl approaching her bat mitzvah celebration. Humorous and sometimes 'tongue-in-cheek,' it is a story that deals with several important contemporary issues.

✡Pushker, Gloria Teles. *The Belfer Bar Mitzvah*. Gretna, LA: Pelican Publishing, 1995.

A Jewish girl growing up in rural Louisiana learns about the bar mitzvah ceremony from her older cousin.

✡Wolff, Freida. *Pink Slippers, Bat Mitzvah Blues*. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989.

A busy eighth grader struggles to understand how she feels about her Jewish identity after her bat mitzvah celebration.

Instant Lessons[68]

✡Feigenson, Emily. *Changes Recognized, Changes Achieved: Bat Mitzvah*.

For students in grade 6-adult. In this instant lesson, Rabbi Feigenson finds and expresses what is unique about achieving Jewish womanhood rather than merely justifying bat mitzvah as a female version of the bar mitzvah process.

---

[68]All instant lessons are available through Torah Aura.

✡Feigenson, Emily and Joel Lurie Grishaver. *Coming of Mitzvah.*

This lesson introduces the concept of bar/bat mitzvah as a rite of passage, the meaning of maturity and legal responsibility, and the respective ceremonies of bar and bat mitzvah.

✡Grishaver, Joel Lurie. *Maseket Bar/Bat Mitzvah.*

The Talmud is missing a section on bar/bat mitzvah. This innovative lesson invites parents and pre-bat/bar mitzvah students to create their own Coming of Mitzvah Tractate.

✡Grishaver, Joel Lurie. *The True Story of Bar Mitzvah.*

This lesson introduces the history and the midrashic foundation of bar mitzvah. Students look at what the tradition says about emerging into responsible manhood.

✡Grishaver, Joel Lurie. *What is Midrash?*

Starting with a hands-on Torah study experience and then following a rabbinic path through the Midrash, students gain a detailed insight into the workings of exegesis. A good way to introduce students to the workings of biblical commentary.

✡Grishaver, Joel Lurie. *What is a Rashi?*

This lesson provides an example (Genesis 2.4) for understanding Rashi's commentary. This is a good resource for b'nai mitzvah students beginning to work on their *divrei torah*.

✡Moskowitz, Nachama Skolnik. *The Bar/Bat Mitzvah Game.*

This game is designed for students in grades 6-8 and/or their parents. A values clarification game, it deals with the subjects of bar/bat mitzvah, life cycle and ritual. It helps families to confront the important issues surrounding a bar or bat mitzvah.

✡Pinkwater, Daniel. *Bare-Knuckled Rituals.*

This lesson is based upon Daniel Pinkwater's story "Tallis." This piece allows learners to discuss their own connections to Jewish ritual and Jewish practice.

✡*Tallit.* Author unknown.

This instant lesson explains the how and the why of the tallit including how it is made and worn. It allows students to tie their own *tzitzit* on the corner of the booklet. All materials are included. This serves as a good introduction to pre-bar/bat mitzvah students to the idea of wearing tallit during their ceremony.

Computer Software

✡*Navigating the Bible.* Developed by ORT. [Davka]

This amazing new program is the first complete multimedia version of the

Chumash - the five books of Moses - and the Haftarot - the selected readings

from the Prophets. (Davka catalog, p.5) It is perfect for turning the computer into

an ever-patient tutor -- each verse can be sung and repeated as many times as

necessary. Torah readings can be viewed either with or without the vowels,

making this a wonderful tool for bar/bat mitzvah preparation.

Videos[69]

✡*A Secret Space.* Produced by Roberta Hodes, 1977. Distributed by the New
York Board of Jewish Education.

A moving, sometimes humorous story of a young adolescent boy's search for his

Jewish identity. Touches upon major issues and undercurrents in contemporary

Jewish life. 78 minutes.

✡*The Mitzvah Machine.* New York: United Synagogue of America,1988.

The basic message of this video is that doing mitzvot is essential to Jewish

living. This is a good 'trigger' for initiating a discussion with bar/bat mitzvah

students on the meaning of their ceremony and their changing status within the

community.

---

[69]Helen Leneman's appendix to *Bar/Bat Mitzvah Basics* proved to be quite helpful in the
compilation of this section.

✡ *The Struggle.* Distributed by the Department of Education and Culture of the
     World Zionist Organization, New York.

An American boy's initial reluctance to go to Israel for his bar mitzvah changes

to enthusiasm as an uncle recounts his experience as a Jewish resistance

fighter during the Israel's war of Independence. 30 minutes.

✡ *Someone is Listening.* New York: United Synagogue of America, 1985.

The story of a deaf teenager who meets a rabbi able to help him prepare in sign

language for his bar mitzvah ceremony. 38 minutes.

✡ *The Discovery.* New York: Jewish Theological Seminary.

This film explores the conflicts that arise when a boy does not understand the

meaning of his forthcoming bar mitzvah ceremony. Particularly relevant for

suburban Jews in non-Othodox congregations. 59 minutes. Study guide

included.

✡ *The Journey.* Produced by Media, Inc. and distributed by Ergo Media,
     Teaneck, NJ.

A young Russian boy and an American engineer meet in Leningrad during

World War II and form a friendship that changes both their lives. Explores the

relationship between Jewish education and identity. 34 minutes.

✡ *The Good Deed.* Produced and distributed by the Bureau of Jewish Education of Boston, Newton, MA, 1992.

Depicts a boy on the morning of his bar mitzvah ceremony. Deals with such issues as parents' insensitivity to what their child is experiencing as well as a child's fears and concerns.

✡ "The Birthday Boy." An episode from the TV series *The Wonder Years.* Available from Ergo Media in Teaneck, NJ; the Seidman Educational Resource Center at Auerback CAJE in Melrose Park, PA; and the New York Board of Education.

Kevin is jealous of Paul's upcoming bar mitzvah, which makes him wonder about his own family's traditions. Touches on bar mitzvah as seen through the non-Jewish friend's eyes.

✡ *To Jew Is Not a Verb.* Produced for TV Ontario by Beacon Films, 1992.

A bar mitzvah student moves to a new city and has to find time for new friends, sports and Hebrew studies. Excellent for discussion of role conflict, self-respect, antisemitism, Jewish identity, and prejudice. 15 minutes.

Pedagogic Resources

✡ Grishaver, Joel Lurie and Dr. Ron Wolfson. *Jewish Parents: A Teacher's Guide.* This book is based on the notion that teachers and parents can form partnerships that enhance Jewish learning for their children. This book is loaded with techniques and resources developed by teachers and educators. It contains some of the best ideas in family education.

172

✡Lewis, Barbara A. *The Kid's Guide to Service Projects.* Free Spirit Publishers. This book contains hundreds of ideas for all kinds of service projects from simple ones anyone can do to large-scale commitments that involve whole communities. This book is good for families, small groups, and within the classroom. Also a good resource for b'nai mitzvah students looking for mitzvah project ideas.

Creating Life Long Learners

What is meant by lifelong learning? Obviously it involves a much longer time period than that of the formal religious school years. Rabbi Sylvan D. Schwartzman wrote that:

> When we talk about curriculum, we are not referring to any mere outline of courses from kindergarten to confirmation or even to the textbooks that accompany them. We are speaking of a total program of religious education from birth to death, in which home and preschool training, high school, parent and adult education are thoroughly integrated. There is one continuous, consistent, and consecutive program, broken up only for convenience's sake into segments.[70]

The bar/bat mitzvah experience should not be the end of one's Jewish education. The process itself should welcome the student into the continuum of lifelong learning.

For true growth and maturity comes after the bar/bat mitzvah ceremony. Developmentally, middle school students are not capable of such growth until that point. For:

---

[70]Sylvan D, Schwartzman, "What's Happening with Our Curriculum?" *The Jewish Teacher* (1966), 3.

It is precisely during the post-bar/bat mitzvah years, between the ages of thirteen and eighteen, that a youngster matures, that lifelong views begin to crystallize, and that the values instilled by parents are tested, either to be confirmed and absorbed, or revised and discarded. It is during these years that questions of substance regarding faith and morals, philosophy and science, interpersonal relations and public problems begin to interest and perhaps to trouble the individual... it is a most important time to be exposed to Jewish ideas and values, both for the positive contribution they can make toward the development of one's personality and character, and for the balancing influence they can provide for the non-Jewish, secular, and agnostic influences that dominate.[71]

Now the students are prepared to 'up the ante' They are now ready to begin building the Jewish character that is essential to becoming a Jewish adult in the true sense of the word.

Fairmount Temple tells its b'nai mitzvah families that "after all, a good elementary Jewish education is only a building block designed to prepare the child for serious Jewish study. To stop after elementary Hebrew school is like teaching a child to read and then refusing to give him books!"[72] These words are meant to encourage parents not to allow their students to stop learning Jewishly after the bar/bat mitzvah. Instead, the hope is that parents will become the synagogue's partners in the continued Jewish education of their children.

Keeping Them in School: How to Do it

We as educators must make the years after the bar/bat mitzvah enticing ones for our students. If our goal is to keep them within the supplementary school through confirmation and beyond, we must make it worth their time and

---

[71]Fairmount Temple, 20.
[72]*Ibid.*, 20.

energy. Some communities and congregations offer financial incentives. In such programs, students receive money or gift certificates toward a trip to Israel upon successful completion of ten grades of Jewish education.[73] Many b'nai mitzvah receive such certificates on the day of the ceremony that can be 'cashed in' upon finishing the confirmation year. The benefit of this approach is that it gives students the opportunity to visit Israel, and subsequently, an incentive to stay in school.

Another approach involves making use of our students' newfound Jewish capabilities and skills. Recent b'nai mitzvah can work as helpers within the supplementary school. These students can be used as teacher's aides and even as b'nai mitzvah tutors.[74] Having recently been through the process, they can be a tremendous help to younger students just beginning their bar/bat mitzvah preparation. They can work to ease fears and nervousness, and to serve as a friend and possible confidante during the preparation process.

Also, post-b'nai mitzvah students can be active participates in the synagogue service. Many congregations invite students back one year later to read their Torah portion again.[75] They can also lead sections of the service or assist the congregation by ushering or helping with the *oneg*.

Temple Israel of Minneapolis, Minnesota has adopted a practice that encourages b'nai mitzvah to stay involved. Members of the senior youth group congratulate the b'nai mitzvah from the *bimah*, and then give him or her a T-shirt

---

[73]Jordan, 24.

[74]Leneman, 601.

[75]Usually this takes place during a Friday evening service so as not to impeded on the next morning's bar/bat mitzvah ceremony.

175

with the words 'future TIPTY-ite' printed on it.[76] Right away the student feels

connected, perhaps already looking forward to the year when he or she can join

the youth group.[77]

CONCLUSION

In short, we must be creative. We must make our post-b'nai mitzvah

programs innovative, exciting, and most importantly, different than what came

before the 'big event.' We must entice our students to continue learning.

As noted, this is not an easy task. For a variety of reasons, the middle

school student is the most difficult to teach in the Jewish supplementary school

setting. However, by understanding the stages of developmental growth and

their implications for the classroom, we can better cater to the educational needs

of our students. Similalrly, in devising curricula and mapping out instructional

methods, in fostering a supportive environment for teachers and staff, in

connecting families to their students' studies, and in empowering students to be

more involved in their own education, we do have a model to follow -- that of the

general, full-time school. For the public school system has found some

semblance of success with this age group. Much has been implemented to make

the public middle school classroom a true learning environment.

---

[76] TIPTY is the name of Temple Israel's youth group. It stands for Temple Israel's Program for Temple Youth.

[77] I witnessed this at a bat mitzvah I attended a few years ago. It was truly amazing to see the interaction between the youth group members and the new bar/bat mitzvah. For the particular student I observed, joining the youth group appeared to be an exciting prospect.

If we follow the examples set before us, we too can make our middle school classrooms true places of innovation. We too can create schools that are true places of learning.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Ackerman, Walter I. "What We Know About... Schools." *What We Know About Jewish Education: A Handbook of Today's Research for Tomorrow's Jewish Education.* Ed. Stuart L. Kelman. Los Angeles: Torah Aura Productions, 1992.

Alexander, William M., and Paul S. George. *The Exemplary Middle School.* New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1981.

Ames, Nancy L. and Edward Miller. *Changing Middle Schools: How to Make Schools Work for Young Adolescents.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1994.

Arzt, Raphael. "Jewish Education: A Perspective on Strategies and Tactics." *Studies in Jewish Education* (1983), 139-167.

Berla, Nancy, Henderson, Anne T., and Kewersky, William. *The Middle School Years: A Parent's Handbook.* The National Committee for Citizens in Education, 1989.

Blyth, Dale A. and Elizabeth Lueder Karnes. *Philosophy, Policies, and Programs for Early Adolescent Education: An Annotated Bibliography.* Wesport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1981.

Brimm, R. P. *The Junior High School.* Washington, DC: The Center for Applied Research in Education, Inc., 1963.

Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development. Task Force on Education of Young Adolescents. *Turning Points: Preparing American Youth for the Twenty First Century.*

Clark, Matthew. "The Specialized Role of the Supplementary School." *Studies in Jewish Education* 3: 5-8.

Clark, Sally N., and Donald C. *Restructuring the Middle Level School: Implications for School Leaders.* 1994.

Cohen, Burton I. "Some Considerations for Planners of Mitzvah Activities in the Jewish School." *Jewish Education* 47, no. 2 (1979), 38-41.

Colodner, Solomon. "Half a Century in Jewish Education." *Jewish Education* 51, no. 3 (1983), 36-38.

Commission on Jewish Education -- CCAR and UAHC. Resolution adopted on
        June 21, 1960.

Davis, Judith. *Whose Bar/Bat Mitzvah is This, Anyway? A Guide for Parents
        Through a Family Rite of Passage.* New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998.

DeVita, Joseph C., et al. *The Effective Middle School: A Complete Master Plan
        for Successful Conversion of the Traditional Junior High to the Modern
        Middle School.* West Nyack, New York: Parker Publishing Company, Inc.,
        1970.

_____. Pomerantz, Philip, and Wilklow, Leighton B. *The Effective
        Middle School.* West Nyack, New York: Parker Publishing Company, Inc.,
        1970.

Dullit, Everett. "Adolescent Thinking a la Piaget: The Formal Stage."
        Adolescents' Development and Education: A Janus Knot. Ed. Ralph
        Mosher. Berkeley, CA: McCutehan Publishing, Co., 1979.

Eichhorn, Donald H. *The Middle School.* New York: Center for Applied Research
        in Education, 1966.

Efron, Sara G. "Old Wine, new Bottles: Traditional Moral Education in the
        Contemporary Jewish Classroom." *Religious Education* 89.

Elish, Barbara. "Should Jewish Supplementary Religious Schools Be Like the
        Public Schools?" *Jewish Education* 57, nos. 2,3,4 (1989), 45-52.

Epstein, J., and D. J. MacIver. *Education in the Middle Grades: Overview of
        National Practices and Trends.* Columbus, OH: National Middle School
        Association, 1990.

Erikson, Erik H., *Childhood and Society.* 3rd ed. W. W. Norton & Company, Inc.,
        1963.

_____., *Identity and the Life Cycle.* New York: W. W. Norton &
        Company, Inc., 1959.

_____., *Youth: Change and Challenge.* New York: Basic Books, Inc.,
        1963.

Fowler, James W. *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and
        The Quest for Meaning.* San Francisco: Harper & Row, Publishers, Inc.,
        1981.

Fullan, M. G. and M. B. Miles. "Getting Reform Right: What Works and What Doesn't." *Phi Delta Kappan*. 73, no. 10 (1992): 745-752.

Gilligan, Carol. *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development*. 2nd ed. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993.

Goldberg Kirsten. "Among Girls, 'Ethic of Caring' May Stifle Classroom Competitiveness, Study Shows." *Education Week*, 27 Apr. 1988, 39.

Goldman, Solomon. "The Jewish Supplementary School in 1990 -- What Will It Be Like?" *Jewish Education* 51, no. 2 (1983), 25-26.

Gordon, Ira J. *Human Development: From Birth Through Adolescence.* 2nd. ed. New York: Harper & Row, 1969.

Greenberg, Simon. "Jewish Educational Institutions." *The Jews: Their Religion and Culture.* Ed. Louis Finkelstein. 381-382.

Grooms, M. Ann. *Perspectives on the Middle School.* Columbus, OH: Charles E. Merrily Books, Inc., 1967.

Gruhn, William T., and Douglass, Carl R. *The Modern Junior High School.* New York: The Ronald Press Company, 1971.

Harnett, Anne Marie. *Preparation of Middle School Teachers.* ERIC Digest 335356, 1991.

Hertz, Richard C. *The Education of the Jewish Child.* New York: UAHC Press, 1953.

Jardin, Marlene M. and Henning G. Viljoen. "Fowler's Theory of Faith Development: An Evaluative Discussion." *Religious Education* 87, no. 1 (1992), 74-85.

Joseph, Samuel K. *Portraits of Schooling: A Survey and Analysis of Supplementary Schooling in Congregations.* New York: UAHC Press, 1997.

Kadden, Barbara Binder, and Bruce Kadden. *Teaching Jewish Life Cycle.* Denver: Alternatives in Religious Education, Inc., 1997.

Kaplan, Louis. "For Our Time, A Philosophy of Jewish Education." *Studies in Jewish Education.* 3-24.

Rutherford, Barry and Shelly H. Billig. "Eight Lessons of Parent, Family, and Community Involvement in the Middle Grades." *Phi Delta Kappan* 77, no. 1 (1995), 64-68.

Sachs, Moshe. "After Bar Mitzvah -- What?" *Synagogue School* 10 (1951): 5.

Salkin, Jeffrey K. *Putting God on the Guest List: How to Reclaim the Spiritual Meaning of Your Child's Bar or Bat Mitzvah*. Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing, 1992.

Santrock, John W. *Children*. 4th ed. Dubuque, IA: Brown and Benchmark Publishers, 1995.

_____. *Adolescence*. 7th ed. New York: McGraw Hill, 1997.

Schafler, Samuel. "Needed: A New Vision for Supplementary Schools." *Studies in Jewish Education* 3: 26-28.

Schiff, Alvin I. "On the Status of the Jewish Supplementary School." *Jewish Education* 50, no. 4 (1982), 2-4.

_____. "The Jewish Supplementary School -- A System in Need of Change." *Jewish Education* 55, no. 4 (1988), 4-8.

Schoenfeld, Stuart. "Recent Publications on Bar/ Bat Mitzvah: Their Implications for Jewish Education, Research and Practice." *Religious Education*

Schwartzman, Sylvan D. "What's Happening with Our Curriculum?" *The Jewish Teacher* (Feb. 1996).

Shapiro, Miriam. "The Jewish Supplementary School Needs a Community." *Studies in Jewish Education* 3: 34-35.

Shapiro, Sara S., and Ravid, Ruth. "Student Team Learning in Jewish Schools." *Jewish Education* 57, no. 1 (1989): 12-14.

Shkedi, Asher. "Recent Trends in the Philosophy of Jewish Education: Chazan, Rosenak, and Beyond." *Studies in Jewish Education* 6 (1992): 121-152.

Sigel, Irving E. "The Piagetian System and the World of Education." *Studies in Cognitive Development: Essays in Honor of Jean Piaget*. Eds. David Elkind and John H. Flavell. New York: Oxford University Press, Inc., 1969, 465-489.

Slesinger, Zalmen. "Priorities in Jewish Learning: the Basic Issue in Curriculum Construction." *Jewish Education* 43, no. 2 (1974), 5-13.

Solomon, Bennett. "Curriculum Innovation: What Jewish Education Can Learn From Educational Research," *Studies in Jewish Education* 9 (1989).

Spiro, Jack D. "Bar Mitzvah Dropouts -- A Juvenile Solution." *Jewish Teacher* 33 (Feb. 1965): 15-16.

_____. "The Educational Significance of the Bar Mitzvah Initiation." *Religious Education* 72 (1977): 389-99.

_____. "The Value of Jewish Supplementary Education." *Jewish Education* 47, no. 3 (1979): 19-21.

Spotts, Leon H. "Intensification of Current Trends." *Studies in Jewish Education* 3: 12-14.

Steinberg, Barbara. "Building Blocks and Firm Foundations." *Jewish Education* 59, no. 2 (1991), 27-28.

The Task Force on Education of Young Adolescents. *Turning Points: Preparing American Youth for the 21st Century.* New York: Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, June 1989.

Toperoff, Shlomo P. *Avot: A Comprehensive Commentary on the Ethics of the Fathers.* Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, Inc., 1997, 353-360.

Wolfson, Ronald and Stuart Kelman. "Research in Jewish Religious Education." *The Jews: Their Religion and Culture.* 694.

Woolfolk, Anita. *Educational Psychology.* 7th ed. Prentice Hall, 1997.

Zachary, Lois J. and Roberta L. Goodman. "A Learner-Centered Approach to Family Life Educational Programming: the B'nai Mitzvah Experience." *Jewish Education* 59, no. 1 (1991), 25-30.