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Pekarsky, Daniel. "Vision and Education" [Previously titled "The Place of Vision in Jewish Educational Reform"]. Drafts and editorials, 1996-1997.

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FROM: "Dan Pekarsky", INTERNET:pekarsky@mail.soemadison.wisc.edu
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Received: from dogie.macc.wisc.edu (dogie.macc.wisc.edu [128.104.30.17]) by dub-img-5.compuserve.com (8.6.10/5.950515)
id QAA15446; Wed, 17 Jan 1996 16:04:36 -0500
Received: by dogie.macc.wisc.edu;
id AA03780; 5.57/42; Wed, 17 Jan 96 15:03:44 -0600
From: "Dan Pekarsky" <pekarsky@mail.soemadison.wisc.edu>
Reply-To: pekarsky@mail.soemadison.wisc.edu
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Date: Wed, 17 Jan 1996 15:03:00 -600
Subject: 1/22/96 staff meeting -Reply
X-Gateway: iGate, (WP Office) vers 4.04m - 1032
Mime-Version: 1.0
Message-Id: <30FD6426.CF87.168E.000@mail.soemadison.wisc.edu>
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Content-Transfer-Encoding: 7BIT

Debra,

Could you please download the attached paper and give copies to Barry, Gail, Nessa, and Alan. It's a first draft of the paper I'm preparing for the research conference, and I'd like feedback. Let me know if the whole paper doesn't come through, and I'll fax it. By the way, you'll notice that after the section entitled conclusion there are a couple of disconnected paragraph fragments. Just throw them out.

Thanks.

DP
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THE PLACE OF VISION IN JEWISH EDUCATIONAL REFORM

begin w/present. problem

Daniel Pekarsky

INTRODUCTION

Recent claims concerning the place of vision and goals in the process of Jewish educational reform have rightly given rise to a number of questions concerning whether in fact attention to

such matters is really that important. As one who believes that attention to vision and goals is important, I believe it is important to make the case for them systematically and to respond to likely objections. This is the purpose of the present disoussion.

In their influential book THE SHOPPING MALL HIGH SCHOOL, Arthur Powell et. al. develop a devastating critique of the American high school. At the heart of this critique is the suggestion that, as an institution, the high school has suffered from what might be called "a failure of nerve". It has been singularly unable or unwilling to declare for any particular conception of what the process of education should be fundamentally about, with the result that what happens is not shaped by any coherent set of organizing principles which will give the enterprise a sense of direction. In their own words:

> There is one last, unhappy reason that educators have not pointed to certain misdirections in the current crop of reforms: one cannot point to an indirect direction without some sense of the correct one. But American shcoolpeople have been singularly unable to think of an educational purpose they should not embrace...Secondary educators have tried to solve the problem of competing purposes by accepting all of them, and by building an institution that would accommodate the result.
>
> Unfortunately, the flip side of the belief that all directions are correct is the belief that no direction is incorrect -- which is a sort of intellectual bankruptcy. Those who work in secondary education have little sense of an agenda for studies. There is only a long list of subjects to be studied...But there is no answer to the query, Why these and not others? Approaching things this way has made it easy to avoid arguments and decisions about purpose, both of which can be troublesome -- especially in our divided and contentious society.

Powell et. al. conclude:

> High schools are unlikely to make marked improvement...until there is a much clearer sense of what is most important to teach and learn, and why, and how it can best be done.

The analysis of the high school found in THE SHOPPING MALL HIGH SCHOOL applies very aptly to large numbers of Jewish educating institutions. Like the high schools described by Cohen

et. al., these institutions drift along, unguided by any compelling sense of purpose. To the extent that there are guiding ideals, they tend to be so vague as to give very little direction and to call forth little enthusiasm. What these slogan-like ideals do succeed in doing - and this is no mean achievement - is to give a multiplicity of individuals, representing very different beliefs, the illusion that "We are one!", that we can all participate in the same social and educational community. But, as I will argue in this paper, the price paid for the failure to affirm a purpose for education that goes beyond vague rhetoric is that the enterprise is seriously undermined at a time in our history when this cannot be afforded.

More generally, this paper develops and defends the thesis that one of the principal reasons why Jewish education is not more effective than it is, is that all-too-often our efforts to educated not animated by powerful visions of the kinds of Jewish human beings and/or community that are, through the process of education, to be cultivated. Before developing this view and entertaining objections, some preliminaries are in order.

First, because the term "vision" is used in more than one way and is sometimes in danger of becoming empty rhetoric, it will be important to begin by explaining what I have in mind. By "vision" I am referring to an image or conception of the kind of human being and/or community that the educational process is to bring into being. For purposes of clarity I will refer to "vision" in this sense as an "existential vision" -- for it identifies what Jewish existence at its best in its social and/or individual dimensions looks like. Such visions are to be found not only implicit in the social life of Jewish communities throughout the ages but in writings of such diverse thinkers as Ahad Ha-Am, Martin Buber, Mainmonides, Ha-Rav Soloveichik, and so on. Notice that an existential vision can be more or less filled-in. That is, it might consist of a thick, ordered constellation of attitudes, skills, understandings, and dispositions; or it might be limited to a particular attitude or way of approaching the world (and the skills and understandings that make this possible). There is no need to assume, then, that a vision is coextensive with a way of life.

"Existential vision" in the sense just articulated is to be distinguished from what I would call an "institutional vision" -- an image or conception of what an educational institution at its best should look like. To speak of an educating institution as "a caring community" or as "a community organized around serious study of basic texts" is to refer to an "institutional vision", where the vision identifies the fundamental organizing principles of institutional life. Though having an "institutional vision" is no doubt important, I want to argue that ultimately the worthwhileness of any institutional vision depends on its being

anchored in an adequate existential vision. The reason for this is as simple is the old adage that "form follows function:" educational arrangements must be judged by their capacity to lead students towards those individual and social states of being - those constellations of attitude, knowledge, skill, and disposition - that are the raison d'etre of the enterprise. An adequate institutional vision is one that shows promise of optimizing progress towards the existential vision that undergirds the entire enterprise.

As a second preliminary, I want to distinguish between having a vision of the kind of person and/or community the educational process should nurture and having a vision-statement that speaks to such matters. To have a vision-statement (or a mission-statement) is not uncommon; to have a vision, on the other hand, is far from common. For an institution to have a guiding vision entails, among other things, that this vision is genuinely compelling to the institution's key stake holders, so much so that they work to organize the life of the institution around it. It is the importance of a shared and compelling vision in this sense, rather than a vision-statement which may or may not see the light of day or elicit genuine enthusiasm, that I want to defend in this paper.

As a third preliminary, it bears mention that though this paper urges the importance of educating institutions being guided by powerful visions of a meaningful Jewish existence, it is not a advocating for any particular vision. My intention is not to urge a particular vision on educating institutions; rather, it is to encourage those who lead or depend on them to do what they can to develop a compelling vision to guide their activities. If I have anything in a prescriptive vein to suggest, it only to urge that the process of developing a vision to guide the work of an institution prominently include wrestling with ideas from out of the Jewish tradition that speak to the problem at hand, rather than being limited to values-clarification and consensus-building.

As a final preliminary, I want to stress that this paper does not deal in any depth with questions concerning how an institution that includes rich mixes of ideological diversity and indifference can arrive at a shared and compelling vision. Though the point is briefly discussed later on, my principal concern is to highlight where we need to arrive, not how to get there. That to get there will no doubt be difficult I readily acknowledge.

In a related vein, this paper stakes out no position concerning the process through which an incoherent educating institution becomes more vision-guided. It decidedly does not assume, although it does not preclude the possibility, that the process begins with, or necessarily involves, some activity called "visioning". Similarly, the paper takes no view concerning Fullan's suggestion that the attempt to formulate an a guiding

vision should only come after extensive small-scale problem-solving efforts that engage the energies of the institution's participants in new ways and effectively transform the operative culture. Similarly, while it may well be that progress towards vision is best assured not by some publicly announced effort in this direction but by approaching in the right spirit the routine challenges that arise in the life of an institution, this paper takes no stand on this issue. Not that such matters are unimportant; they are simply not the subject of this paper. And I mention them at all only because I want to make clear my view that a commitment to the importance of vision does not entail any particular approach to the development of vision.

THE BENEFITS OF VISION

In this section, I discuss important educational benefits that flow from having a guiding "existential vision" (which I will henceforth refer to simply as "vision").

To have a vision of the kind of person and/or community that is to be nurtured through the educational process is to have a powerful tool for making basic educational decisions. In Jewish, as in general education, educational goals often have a kind of arbitrary character. In general education, we may laud "creativity"; in Jewish education, we may speak of the importance of "Love of Israel" or "Identification with the Jewish People;" but if one asks why these things are important, or even what they mean, it is apparent that these are often slogans without much intellectual content or justificatory foundation. The moment, however, educational goals are grounded in a conception of the kind of Jewish human being one hopes to cultivate, the situation changes dramatically. To the extent that this conception is one that we strongly believe in, educational goals that flow from this ideal, goals that must be achieved if we are to succeed in cultivating this kind of a person, have a twofold power they rarely have. First, their importance, that is, the desirability of achieving them, is readily understood. Second, insofar as they are interpreted by the larger vision, they lose their character as "slogans" and acquire a determinate intellectual content.

An example may help to illustrate these points. "Love of Israel" is on its face very vague as an educational goal: it is unclear what "Israel" refers to (Is it the land? Is it the State?); it is unclear by virtue of what Israel is worthy of our love; and it is unclear how such love is to be expressed. But this situation changes dramatically when "love of Israel" is understood as an element in a particular understanding of Judaism that gives rise to a particular conception of a meaningful Jewish existence. "Love of Israel" as interpreted by Martin Buber will no doubt be different from "Love of Israel" as understood by Franz Rosenzweig, Ahad Ha-Am, or Ha-Rav Soloveichik. Viewed through the lens of any of these outlooks, it will be clear why and in what sense Israel is to be loved, how such love is to be

expressed, and what understandings, skills, attitudes, and behaviors are requisite for appropriately participating in such love. Suddenly, what a moment ago had been an empty slogan becomes an educational goal rich with intellectual, moral, and affective content -- that is, the kind of goal that can give genuine direction to one's effort to educate.

A related point is this. To the extent that the human characteristics identified by educational goals are all anchored in a vision of the kind of person one hopes to educate, not only their relative importance but also their relationship to one another becomes readily apparent. Thus, for Professor Moshe Greenberg, in-depth engagement in text study, exemplary moral conduct, and identification with the Jewish People are all educational goals. But to have access to the vision that underlies these educational goals is to have the key that interprets each of them and explains how they are inter-related; it is, specifically, to understand that the encounter with the text is the existential source of these other goals, the foundation out of which emerges the understanding of and commitment to exemplary moral conduct or "Ahavat Yisrael".

To have a powerful vision of the kind of person one hopes to nurture is, then, to have a rich source of well-articulated educational goals; and such goals, in turn, become a basis for educational decisions across a variety of areas. Consider, for example, the problem of personnel. There is much talk concerning the need for high quality, well-trained educators. But what it means for an educator to be "high quality" and "well-trained" itself depends substantially on one's conception of the desired outcome of the educational process. The kinds of knowledge, commitments, attitudes, skills the educator needs to have will differ depending on whether one is guided by Buber's, or Soleveichik's, or Ahad Ha-Am's vision of an appropriately educated Jewish human being. Thus, to commit oneself to a particular vision is to have a powerful tool in the selection of educational personnel, in the organization of inservice education, in the activity of supervision, and so forth.

Analogous points can be made concerning curriculum, concerning admissions policies, and concerning the organization of the social environment. In each case, to have a clear sense of what, educationally speaking, one hopes to achieve through the educational process affords lay and professional educational leaders as well as front-line educators an extraordinarily powerful tool in educational deliberations. It is, incidentally, a corollary of this analysis that a guiding vision is not just a desideratum along with high quality personnel and curriculum; rather, a guiding vision is indispensable in understanding what quality personnel and curricula are.

Having a guiding vision and a set of educational goals anchored in this vision facilitates serious educational evaluation. Evaluation in the most important sense is an attempt to judge whether an institution is succeeding in accomplishing its fundamental purposes; and evaluation in this sense is important because, properly done, it enables policy-makers and practitioners to revisit existing patterns of practice with an eye towards improvement. But for evaluation in this sense to be a powerful tool requires the identification of clear but meaningful educational goals: clearly defined but low-level goals, such as the ability to sight-read a page of Prayer book Hebrew, may be measurable but do not rise to the level of guiding educational goals; one can be successful in attaining them without being successful in the larger sense - that is, without succeeding in cultivating those habits of mind and heart that are at the heart of the enterprise. On the other hand, goals like "Love of Text Study", which seem to point to basic educational priorities, are often too vague to permit meaningful evaluation of our efforts to achieve them. What is needed are educational goals which are both specific enough to allow for meaningful evaluation but also meaningfully tied to the institution's raison d'etre, so that the answer to the question, "Why is it important for the students to be successful relative to this goal?" could be readily answered to everyone's satisfaction. A guiding vision offers this critical mix of specificity and existential power.

Introducing contemporary Jews to powerful visions of Jewish existence is the need of the hour! During many historical periods, day-to-day experience in the family and the community sufficed to acquaint children with and to initiate them into meaningful forms of Jewish existence that enabled them to navigate their way through the world as Jews. During such periods, formal educating institutions could content themselves with supplementing this powerful informal education by passing on to the young particular skills and bodies of knowledge; it was not necessary for these institutions to take on the responsibility of representing and initiating the young into richly meaningful forms of Jewish existence.

But our own age is very different. As suggested in A TIME TO ACT, ours in an era in which the young are no longer reared in environments saturated with Jewish rhythms, beliefs, and customs; and one can no longer count on informal socialization to assure the young's emergence as adults with a strong understanding of themselves as Jews. Indeed, many of them grow up with scant understanding of things Jewish, and certainly with little sense of the ways in which a life organized around Jewishly grounded understandings, activities, and values can answer some of their most fundamental needs as human beings. For human beings raised under such circumstances, human beings who are surrounded with a variety of images of the good life emanating from a multitude of quarters, remaining Jewish is no longer a destiny but a choice. And it is a choice the young are unlikely to make unless they

meet up with spiritually, morally, and existentially compelling images of Jewish existence. It is a major job of educating institutions to put before the Jews of our generation these kinds of images. Not to do so, to continue, instead, with an ill-thought-out and superficial diet of "this and that", is to reinforce the message that flows from other quarters -- namely, that there is little or no reason to look to the Jewish universe in our efforts to define who we are as human beings seeking a measure of existential and spiritual meaning.

What I am therefore suggesting is that for Jewish educating institutions to be guided by compelling visions is important not just for general educational considerations that would apply to general education as well, but also because of our particular social circumstances. The need of the hour is for contemporary Jews to encounter powerful visions of a meaningful Jewish existence -- powerful in the sense that they answer to our basic needs for meaning, for a sense of place and time. Educational institutions organized around such visions are not only better organized educating institutions; they are responsive to present-day needs.

The evidence from general education. Thus far, I have offered three general reasons for thinking that being organized around powerful visions of a meaningful Jewish existence will greatly enhance efforts at Jewish education. As references to the writings of Powell et al. and Newmann suggest, the proposed linkage between a sense of vision and educational effectiveness is not an idiosyncratic hypothesis, but reflects the considered view of some deeply thoughtful members of the educational community at large. There is also a measure of empirical support for this view which is worthy of attention.

Consider, in particular, Smith and O'Day's study of reform efforts in general education. The authors begin by observing the depressing results of most such efforts. Though there have been a flurry of reforms,

> evaluations of the reforms indicate only minor changes in the typical school, either in the nature of classroom practices or in achievement outcomes. For the most part, the processes and content of instruction in the public school classrooms of today are little different from what they were in 1980 or 1970.

Such findings do not, however, lead Smith and O'Day towards skepticism concerning the potential benefits of educational reform. The problem is not, they suggest, that educational reform is incapable of making a difference in educational outcomes but that most reform efforts have failed to focus on the

right kinds of variables. To understand what the right kinds of variables are, they further suggest, we need to look at what characterizes educational institutions which, according to research, are effective. When Smith and O'Day turn to this research, they identify a number of variables, including, for example, "a fairly stable staff, made up of enthusiastic and caring teachers who have a mastery both of the subject matter of the curriculum and a of a variety of pedagogies for teaching it." But among the elements of effective schools that they cite, pride of place goes to what we have been calling vision. They write:

> Beyond - or perhaps underlying - these resources available to the student, the most effective schools maintain a schoolwide vision or mission, and common instructional goals which tie the content, structure, and resources of the school together into an effective and unified whole (Coleman and Hoffer, 1987, Purkey and Smith, 1983). The school mission provides the criteria and rationale for the selection of curriculum materials, the purposes and the nature of school-based professional development, and the interpretation and use of student assessment. The particulars of the vision will differ from school to school, depending on the local context...However, if the school is to be successful in promoting active student involvement in learning, depth of understanding, and complex thinking - major goals of the reform movement - its vision must focus on teaching and learning rather than, for example, on control and discipline as in many schools today. In fact, the very need for special attention to control and discipline may be mitigated considerably by the promotion of successful and engaging learning experiences.

goals

In other words, as against those who argue for a focus on "practical matters" like higher salaries, better facilities, more inservice education, Smith and O'Day defend the need for educating institutions and those who would reform them to step back and focus their energies on a question which sounds suspiciously philosophical: namely, what is our fundamental mission as an educating institution? What kind of a person possessed of what skills, dispositions, and attitudes should we be trying to nurture? To arrive at answers to such questions which will be compelling to the institution's key stake holders is to take a - perhaps the - decisive step forward on the road to institutional self-renewal.

RESPONDING TO TWO OBJECTIONS

In this section I want to address two major objections to the position that I have staked out in the foregoing discussion. One of them pertains to the feasibility of the proposal, and the

other to its wisdom.

Is it feasible? Among those who admit that to have a guiding vision can be invaluable for an educating institution, it some will nonetheless urge that in our present social circumstances it is unrealistic to expect Jewish educating institutions to be able to arrive at a guiding vision that will at once be shared, clear enough to guide practice, and sufficiently compelling to elicit genuine enthusiasm. There is, they will suggest, an insuperable obstacle.

The problem is that the constituencies served by Jewish educating institutions are so varied that it will be impossible to arrive at a shared vision that will be anything more than "Motherhood" or "Apple Pie." That is, only vague slogans will have the power to unite the various sub-groups that make up typical Jewish educating institutions outside of the Orthodox community; and the attempt to forge a vision that goes beyond this will inevitably push to the margins some of these sub-groups. For a number of reasons, the leadership of many institutions are unwilling to undertake a course of action that will lead to this kind of marginalization and alienation. Loss of membership could have unacceptable economic consequences; and there is also the fear that marginalized families who withdraw may end up providing their children no Jewish education at all.

It is clear that this concern has some foundation in reality. Institutions are held together by consenses that are sometimes fragile, consenses that may survive precisely because the participants tacitly agree not to call into question or to seek clarity concerning some of its operating assumptions and principles. But to the extent that the preceding argument concerning the indispensability of a guiding vision is on the mark,this sociological circumstance in no way weakens its force; all it does is to explain why institutions are unwilling to take the difficult steps they need to take if they are to become quality educating institutions. To what can the situation be compared? Perhaps to an ailing individual who prefers slowly to die than to lose a limb in the service of recovering a healthful life.

This said, I want to suggest that although it is probably realistic to think that an institution that seriously works towards the articulation of a guiding vision that is more than a cliche will threaten and perhaps alienate some of its members, the losses may be less significant than one might imagine. Moreover, there will be significant compensations, one of them being the relief and the excitement experienced by significant sub-groups that there is finally room to think alone and together about basic questions -- questions concerning what as Jews we stand for and believe in, and what we would view as a meaningful Jewish life for our children. A community that wrestles in a

serious way with the ideal outcome of Jewish education for its children is also a community struggling to find its own answers concerning the nature and significance of Jewish existence - a struggle that would be welcomed by many, even as it is resisted by others.

It must, however, be conceded that the amount of diversity represented in typical Jewish congregations and educating institutions makes the challenge of developing shared, compelling, and clear visions not a little daunting. Individuals maintain memberships in such institutions for varied reasons that often have very little to do with the institutions' formal ideologies, with the result that we live in a Jewish universe in which institutions A, B, and C each has a varied membership representing the same cross-section, rather than each of them having a discrete ideological identity. While it would be unwise to under-estimate the progress that could be made by an institution willing to tackle the problem of vision in a thoughtful way that is sensitive to the views and anxieties of the membership, it may be that sociological realities just alluded to - that is, the extent of diversity represented in typical institutions - will render it all but impossible to arrive at compelling visions that can guide the educational process.

If this is true, and if we also acknowledge the critical need for quality education in our present circumstances, perhaps we need to be thinking about radical structural alternatives to the way we have organized education in the American Jewish community. If it is unrealistic to think that an institution featuring a highly diverse population can go through a process that will lead it to crystallize a single vision that can guide its educational efforts, perhaps we have to begin thinking about creating an organizational universe in the Jewish community that will encourage like-minded individuals to gravitate towards educational institutions that reflect their shared convictions.

We might, for example, look to some of the voucher- or choice-plans that have been bandied about in recent discussions of general education. At present, membership in a congregation affords one the right to send one's children to that congregation's educational program -- a program that tries to be responsive to the diversity of the institution's constituency. Consider, however, a different possibility: suppose that membership in any congregation in a community would afford one the right to educate one's child in any of several educating institutions found in the community, and that an effort was made to ensure that each of these institutions represented a discrete ideological orientation. The effect of such a policy might well be to draw individuals with similar ideological orientations into the same educational environment, making it possible to organize

education around a vision that could elicit the enthusiastic support of the population it serves. I don't mean to suggest that dissolving the currently strong tie between congregation and congregational school is unproblematic or ultimately wise; but it may be that routes like this which seriously disrupt existing patterns need to be given a serious hearing if Jewish educating institutions are to become more effective than many now are.

Is it wise? Consider, now, a second set of objections to the proposal that we organize Jewish education around compelling visions of a meaningful Jewish existence. The thrust of these objections is that even if we could do so, it would not necessarily be desirable.

One variant of this objection views the effort to organize educational efforts around visions of the ideal product of a Jewish education as an assault on the autonomy of the student. A vision-guided institution, an institution organized down to its very details along the lines of a particular vision, is a kind of "total institution" which does not offer the child an opportunity to taste alternative forms of a meaningful Jewish life.

There is more than one way to respond to this objection. One of them, which I will not enter into now, concerns a tendency within a certain species of liberalism to resist passing on to the young any substantive ideas concerning the good life -- except those values, attitudes, and dispositions that will enable the young to choose their own way of life and to be respectful of the liberty of others. As Richard Hare and others have argued, however, there need be no real contradiction between initiating the young into a particular form of life and meaningfully equipping them with the tools for autonomous choice. Indeed, the former may be a condition of the latter.

This last point may be especially true in our own time. A serious autonomous choice between a well-developed form of Jewish existence and various alternative implicit in everyday life in modern, or post-modern, Western culture may only be possible if children encounter and have a real opportunity to taste an approach to Jewish existence that is more than a miscellany of customs, vague sentiments, and slogans. But in our own situation it is unlikely that they will encounter such an approach unless educational institutions set themselves up to systematically embody one or another such vision of a meaningful Jewish existence. Given the world in which the students live, the result will not be indoctrination but genuine choice.

This answer may not satisfy the liberal - or, since I continue to consider myself a liberal, what I would call the doctrinaire liberal. In the name of the individual's autonomy, that person will argue that educational institutions must set

themselves the challenge of equipping the young to choose from among a variety of competing images of a meaningful Jewish existence, rather than seeking to initiate them into any one of them.

In principle, I believe there is nothing wrong with this ideal as a guide to education. In practice, however, it is a difficult educational ideal to implement meaningfully - especially given the time- and resource-constraints that characterize Jewish education today. To undertake this approach meaningfully it is insufficient for educator and students to stand above a mix of alternatives and to scrutinize them from afar; for under these circumstances each would remain superficially understood and appreciated. A meaningful decision concerning a particular form of Jewish life requires a measure of appreciation "from the inside". Thus, an educational system organized around the principle that the young should make their own choices as between different forms of Jewish existence would need to offer serious opportunities for in-depth acquaintance, and even for a significant taste, of more than one of them. Since this is hard enough to accomplish with even a single approach to Jewish existence, the odds are that the approach recommended would turn out to be superficial in its representation of the alternatives, such that the learners would not come away satisfied with any of them

There is also a third response to what I have described as the doctrinaire-liberal objection. This response denies the premiss of the objection which asserts that a vision-guided school is necessarily totalistic in its character. To speak of a guiding Jewish vision for an institution is to say nothing concerning comprehensive the vision is to be. While it is true that a vision might be very detailed in its characterization of the good life to be striven for, it might also be very open-ended. A vision organized around the idea that the heart of Jewish life is the encounter with a certain body of texts might be non-specific concerning almost everything else.

Consider, now, a second variant of the objection that says that it is unwise to organize education around particular visions of a meaningful Jewish existence. According to this objection, the educational challenge is not to draw the child into a particular form of Jewish existence, but to respond to the child's developmental and other needs in ways that further the child's Jewish growth. So busy are educators passing on what they think is important, that they routinely failure to address the most fundamental needs of the students, including the need for candid, authentic encounters among students and between them and the educators. To respond to the child's needs and authentic concerns in a meaningful way in a Jewish setting, and to do so in ways expand the child's Jewish understandings and self-understandings and that communicate to the child that Jewish

tradition can address his or her needs in meaningful ways, is quite a sufficient challenge.

I am in many ways very sympathetic to the spirit of this objection, understood as a critique of the way education is often conducted -- that is, of an approach to education that bypasses the living concerns and questions of children in order to prepare them to become certain kinds of adults. But in no way do I view the positive view that informs this objection as incompatible with the position I have staked out. On the contrary, the very notion of expanding the child's Jewish understandings and self-understandings, or of stimulating Jewish growth, tacitly invokes some understanding of what, Jewishly speaking, it means to live well or fully. Moreover, a conception of where one hopes the student will be at the end of the educational process need not be used to suppress the child's needs but to interpret them and to suggest ways of responding to them. There is not in the end an irreducible incompatibility between having a guiding vision and responding authentically to the learner's living concerns.

CONCLUSION

It is no secret that the widespread interest and financial support that Jewish education has recently enjoyed have their origins in anxiety concerning Jewish continuity. I leave it to others to consider whether educational interventions have the power to change the trend-lines. What I do want to suggest is that if education can make a difference, it will be because it has led its clientele to a vivid appreciation of the ways in which active participation in the life of the Jewish People offers rich opportunities for spiritual, social, and intellectual growth. But if education is to do this, it must go beyond a pareve offering of skills, information or even "positive experiences". It is imperative that educating institutions courageously move beyond this kind of vague neutrality and declare themselves for particular visions of a meaningful Jewish existence, which they will use as a basis for organizing the educational experience of the young. Only if and when educating institutions offer students, both young and old, entree into forms of Jewish existence that they w

FROM: Barry, 73321,1221
TO: Nessa Rapoport, 74671,3370
DATE: 2/1/96 8:57 AM

Re: Copy of: your paper

---------- Forwarded Message ----------

From: Barry, 73321,1221
TO: Danny Pekarsky, INTERNET:PEKARSKY@mail.soemadison.wisc.edu
DATE: 1/30/96 10:07 AM

RE: Copy of: your paper

Hi Danny,

I finally got to read your draft-- here are a few reactions:

1. I liked it and of course I knew a good deal of this approach from hearing you give presentations of this sort!

2. Because it is a "translation" of your speech, I think you need to smooth out and focus the tone somewhat. At times it is academic; at times it is chatty; at times it is hortatory ("powerful visions is the need of the hour!")

3. There is much too much of the "In this paper I am goirg to do this"; "In the next section I will argue. . . ." kind of thing. Just do it and build some little transitions, rather than all this announcing.

4. You need to put in the footnote references.

5. There is some choppiness. Like the line "the evidence from general education"-- what's that doing there? Is it a subheading or is it left over from some other version.

6. A few specifics:
a) You might want to clarify "vision" vs. "Mission";
b) I would drop "Ha-Rav" from Soleveitchik in a paper of this sort;
c) in the section when you talk about evaluation, I recall a reference from Adam to some major project that failed in its evaluation because of its lack of goals-- you could reference that.
d) I think you might want to cut out A Time to Act business because in that crowd this might be read as a cije pr move.

7. Finally: where does Fox fit into this? You mention Greenberg, which ties this to Educated Jew-- wouldn't Fox be pissed if he felt this was taking advantage of his work without a mention. But how do you do that? I think you need to talk to Alan about this.

8. I think this is very easy to fix; you may have done it already! Good job!

Barry

By the way, a student of mine mentioned one of these vision guys to me: Marvin Weissboard.

Ever heard of him? He said there are books by him, and an article in Journal for Applied Behavioral Sciences; Winter, 1992.

THE PLACE OF VISION IN JEWISH EDUCATIONAL REFORM

Daniel Pekarsky

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INTRODUCTION

Recent claims concerning the place of vision and goals in the process of Jewish educational reform have given rise to a number of questions concerning whether in fact attention to such matters is really that important. The purpose of the present discussion is to make the case for vision systematically and to respond to some likely objections.

In their influential book THE SHOPPING MALL HIGH SCHOOL, Arthur Powell et. al. develop a devastating critique of the American high school. At the heart of this critique is the suggestion that, as an institution, the high school has suffered from what might be called "a failure of nerve". It has been singularly unable or unwilling to declare for any particular conception of what the process of education should be fundamentally about, with the result that what happens is not shaped by any coherent set of organizing principles which will give the enterprise a sense of direction. In their own words:

> There is one last, unhappy reason that educators have not pointed to certain misdirections in the current crop of reforms: one cannot point to an indirect direction without some sense of the correct one. But American shcoolpeople have been singularly unable to think of an educational purpose they should not embrace...Secondary educators have tried to solve the problem of competing purposes by accepting all of them,

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and by building an institution that would accommodate the result.

Unfortunately, the flip side of the belief that all directions are correct is the belief that no direction is incorrect -- which is a sort of intellectual bankruptcy. Those who work in secondary education have little sense of an agenda for studies. There is only a long list of subjects to be studied...But there is no answer to the query, Why these and not others? Approaching things this way has made it easy to avoid arguments and decisions about purpose, both of which can be troublesome -- especially in our divided and contentious society.

Powell et. al. conclude:

High schools are unlikely to make marked improvement...until there is a much clearer sense of what is most important to teach and learn, and why, and how it can best be done.[1]

The analysis of the high school found in THE SHOPPING MALL HIGH SCHOOL applies very aptly to large numbers of Jewish educating institutions. Like the high schools described by

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[1] Powell, A.G., Farrar, E., and Cohen D. K., THE SHOPPING MALL HIGH SCHOOL, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1985, pp. 305-306.

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Powell et. al., these institutions drift along, unguided by any compelling sense of purpose.[2] To the extent that there are guiding ideals, they tend to be so vague as to give very little direction and to call forth little enthusiasm. What these slogan-like ideals do succeed in doing - and this is no mean achievement - is to give a multiplicity of individuals, representing very different beliefs, the illusion that "We are one!", that they can all participate in the same social and educational community. But, as I will argue in this paper, the price paid for the failure to affirm a larger purpose that goes beyond vague rhetoric is that the enterprise of educating is rendered significantly less effective than it might be if educational institutions were animated by powerful visions of the kinds human beings and/or community that need to be cultivated.

As just suggested, by "vision" I am referring to an image or conception of the kind of human being and/or community that the educational process is to bring into being. "Visions" in this sense represent what might be called "existential visions" in that they identify what Jewish existence at its best in its social and/or individual dimensions looks like. Existential visions are to be found not only implicit in the social life of Jewish communities throughout the ages but also in writings of such diverse thinkers as Ahad Ha-Am, Martin Buber, Maimonides,

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[2] For a lucid discussion of this point, see Seymour Fox, "Towards a General Theory of Jewish Education," in David Sidorsky (Ed.), THE FUTURE OF THE AMERICAN JEWISH COMMUNITY, Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1973, pp. 260-271.

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Joseph B. Soloveitchik, and so on. Notice that an existential vision can be more or less filled-in. That is, it might consist of a thick, ordered constellation of attitudes, skills, understandings, and dispositions; or it might be limited to a particular attitude or way of approaching the world (and the skills and understandings that make this possible). There is no need to assume, then, that a vision is coextensive with a way of life.

"Existential vision" in the sense just articulated is to be distinguished from what I would call an "institutional vision" -- an image or conception of what an educational institution at its best should look like. To speak of an educating institution as "a caring community" or as "a community organized around serious study of basic texts" is to refer to an "institutional vision", where the vision identifies the fundamental organizing principles of institutional life. Though having an "institutional vision" is no doubt important, I want to argue that ultimately the worthwhileness of any institutional vision depends on its being anchored in an adequate existential vision. The reason for this is as simple is the old adage that "form follows function:" educational arrangements must be judged by their capacity to lead students towards those individual and social states of being - those constellations of attitude, knowledge, skill, and disposition - that are the raison d'etre of the enterprise. An adequate institutional vision is one that shows promise of optimizing progress towards the existential vision that

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undergirds the entire enterprise.[3]

Before entering into an account of the place of vision in education, I want to stress that a belief in the importance of vision does not entail any particular approach to the development of vision. On this matter there are many different views. There are some who may believe that such a process begins with, or at some stage requires, an activity called "visioning". There are others who believe that explicit attempts to formulate a guiding vision should not come until after there have been extensive small-scale problem-solving efforts that engage varied stake holders in new ways and effectively transform the institution's culture.[4] Still others might feel that progress towards vision is best assured not by some publicly announced effort in this direction but by approaching in the right spirit the challenges that arise in the institution's day to day life. Which, if any, of these views is meritorious is a matter of great importance to those who believe that educating institutions need to become more vision-guided; but I want to stress at the outset that this paper takes no stand on these questions.

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[3] Noteworthy in this connection is Fred Newmann's "Linking Restructuring to Authentic Student Achievement," PHI DELTA KAPPAN, February 1991, Volume 72, Number 6, pp. 458-463. Here Newmann argues that attempts to restructure educational institutions without careful attention to the purposes that these institutions are intended to serve are seriously ill-conceived; for it is precisely these purposes that need to guide the direction of restructuring efforts. See especially p. 499.

[4] See, in this connection, Michael Fullan, CHANGE FORCES, New York: Falmer Press, 1993, pp. 67-68.

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THE BENEFITS OF VISION

Jewish education can be enriched by guiding existential visions (which I shall henceforth simply refer to as "visions") in more than one way. Three such ways are discussed below.

To have a vision of the kind of person and/or community that is to be nurtured through the educational process is to have a powerful tool for making basic educational decisions. In Jewish, as in general education, educational goals often have a kind of arbitrary character. In general education, we may laud "creativity"; in Jewish education, we may speak of the importance of "Love of Israel" or "Identification with the Jewish People;" but if one asks why these things are important, or even what they mean, it is apparent that they are often slogans without much intellectual content or justificatory foundation. The moment, however, educational goals are grounded in a conception of the kind of Jewish human being one hopes to cultivate, the situation changes dramatically. To the extent that this conception is one that we strongly believe in, educational goals that flow from this ideal have a twofold power they rarely have. First, the desirability of achieving them is readily understood; second, insofar as they are interpreted by the larger vision, they lose their character as "slogans" and acquire a determinate intellectual content.

An example may help to illustrate these points. "Love of Israel" is on its face very vague as an educational goal: it is

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unclear what "Israel" refers to (Is it the land? Is it the State?); it is unclear by virtue of what Israel is worthy of our love; and it is unclear how such love is to be expressed. But this situation changes dramatically when "love of Israel" is understood as an element in a particular understanding of Judaism and of a meaningful Jewish existence. "Love of Israel" as interpreted by Martin Buber will no doubt be different from "Love of Israel" as understood by Rosenzweig, Ahad Ha-Am, or Soloveitchik. Viewed through the lens of any of these outlooks, it will be clear why and in what sense Israel is to be loved, how such love is to be expressed, and what understandings, skills, attitudes, and behaviors are requisite for appropriately participating in such love. What a moment ago had been an empty slogan now becomes an educational goal rich with intellectual, moral, and affective content -- the kind of goal that can give genuine direction to one's effort to educate.

A related point is this. To the extent that the human characteristics identified by educational goals are all anchored in a vision of the kind of person one hopes to educate, not only their relative importance but also their relationship to one another becomes readily apparent. Thus, for Professor Moshe Greenberg, love of learning Torah, "love of the fulfillment of the commandments between man and God," "acceptance of the Torah as a guide in the area of interpersonal morality," and "a relationship to the Jewish people in all the lands of their dispersion" are all educational goals. But to have access to the

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vision that underlies these educational goals is to have the key that interprets each of them and explains how they are interrelated; it is, specifically, to understand that the encounter with the text is the existential source of these other goals, the foundation out of which the understanding of and commitment to them emerges.[5]

To have a powerful vision of the kind of person one hopes to nurture is, then, to have a rich source of well-articulated educational goals; and such goals, in turn, become a basis for educational decisions across a variety of areas. Consider, for example, the problem of personnel. There is much talk concerning the need for high quality, well-trained educators. But what it means for an educator to be "high quality" and "well-trained" itself depends substantially on one's conception of the desired outcome of the educational process. The kinds of knowledge, commitments, attitudes, and skills the educator needs to have will differ depending on whether one is guided by Heschel's, or Maimonides', or Ahad Ha-Am's vision of an appropriately educated Jewish human being. Thus, to commit oneself to a particular vision is to have a powerful tool in the selection of educational personnel, in the organization of inservice education, in the activity of supervision, and so forth. Analogous points can be made concerning curriculum, admissions policies, and the

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[5] Moshe Greenberg, "We Were as Those Who Dream: A Portrait of the Ideal Product of an Ideal Jewish education," unpublished manuscript, soon to be published by The Mandel Institute for the Advanced Study of Jewish Education.

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organization of the social environment. In each case, to have a clear sense of what, educationally speaking, one hopes to achieve through the educational process affords lay and professional educational leaders as well as front-line educators an extraordinarily powerful tool in educational deliberations. It is, incidentally, a corollary of this analysis that a guiding vision is not just a desideratum along with high quality personnel and curriculum; rather, a guiding vision is indispensable in understanding what quality personnel and curricula are.

Having a guiding vision and a set of educational goals anchored in this vision facilitates serious educational evaluation. Evaluation in the most important sense is an attempt to judge whether an institution is succeeding in accomplishing its fundamental purposes; and evaluation in this sense is important because, properly done, it enables policy-makers and practitioners to revisit existing patterns of practice with an eye towards improvement. But if it is to play this role, evaluation requires the identification of clear but meaningful educational goals: clearly defined but low-level goals, such as the ability to sight-read a page of Prayer book Hebrew, may be measurable and important but do not rise to the level of guiding educational purposes; one can be successful in attaining them without being successful in the larger sense - that is, without succeeding in cultivating those qualities of mind and heart that

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are at the heart of the enterprise. On the other hand, goals like "Love of Text Study", which seem to point to basic educational priorities, are often too vague to permit meaningful evaluation of our efforts to achieve them. What is needed are educational goals which are both clear enough to allow for real evaluation but also meaningfully tied to the institution's raison d'etre, so that the answer to the question, "Why is it important for the students to be successful relative to this goal?" could be readily answered to everyone's satisfaction. A guiding vision offers this critical mix of specificity and existential power.

There is a need to introduce contemporary Jews to powerful visions of Jewish existence. During many historical periods, day-to-day experience in the family and the community sufficed to acquaint children with and to initiate them into meaningful forms of Jewish existence that enabled them to navigate their way through the world as Jews. During such periods, formal educating institutions could content themselves with supplementing this powerful informal education by passing on to the young particular skills and bodies of knowledge; it was not necessary for these institutions to take on the responsibility of presenting and initiating the young into richly meaningful forms of Jewish existence.

But our own age is very different. It is an era in which the young are no longer reared in environments saturated with Jewish rhythms, beliefs, and customs; and one can no longer count

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on informal socialization to assure the young's emergence as adults with a strong understanding of themselves as Jews. Indeed, many of them grow up with scant understanding of things Jewish, and certainly with little sense of the ways in which a life organized around Jewishly grounded understandings, activities, and values can answer some of their most fundamental needs as human beings. For human beings raised under such circumstances, human beings who are surrounded with a variety of images of the good life emanating from a multitude of quarters, remaining Jewish is no longer a destiny but a choice. And it is a choice the young are unlikely to make unless they meet up with spiritually, morally, and existentially compelling images of Jewish existence. It is a major job of educating institutions to put before the Jews of our generation these kinds of images. Not to do so, to continue, instead, with an ill-thought-out and superficial diet of "this and that", is to reinforce the message that flows from other quarters -- namely, that there is little or no reason to look to the Jewish universe in our search for existential and spiritual meaning.

What I am suggesting is that for Jewish educating institutions to be guided by compelling visions is important not just for general reasons that would apply to general education as well, but also because of our particular social circumstances. It is important for contemporary Jews to encounter powerful visions of a meaningful Jewish existence -- visions that in different ways address our basic needs for meaning, for a sense

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of place and time. Educational institutions organized around such visions are not only better organized educating institutions; they are responsive to present-day needs.

The evidence from general education. Thus far, I have offered three general reasons for thinking that being organized around powerful visions of a meaningful Jewish existence will greatly enhance efforts at Jewish education. As the aforementioned references to the writings of Powell et al. and Newmann suggest, the proposed linkage between a sense of vision and educational effectiveness is not an idiosyncratic hypothesis, but reflects the considered view of some deeply thoughtful members of the educational community at large. There is also a measure of empirical support for this view which is worthy of attention.

Consider, in particular, Smith and O'Day's study of reform efforts in general education. The authors begin by observing the depressing results of most such efforts. Though there have been a flurry of reforms,

> evaluations of the reforms indicate only minor changes in the typical school, either in the nature of classroom practices or in achievement outcomes. For the most part, the processes and content of instruction in the public school classrooms of today are little

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different from what they were in 1980 or 1970.[6]

Such findings do not, however, lead Smith and O'Day towards skepticism concerning the potential benefits of educational reform. The problem is not, they suggest, that educational reform is incapable of making a difference in educational outcomes but that most reform efforts have failed to focus on the right kinds of variables. To understand what the right kinds of variables are, they further suggest, we need to look at what characterizes educational institutions which, according to research, are effective. When Smith and O'Day turn to this research, they identify a number of variables, including "a fairly stable staff, made up of enthusiastic and caring teachers who have a mastery both of the subject matter of the curriculum and a of a variety of pedagogies for teaching it." But among the elements of effective schools that they cite, pride of place goes to what we have been calling vision. They write:

> Beyond - or perhaps underlying - these resources available to the student, the most effective schools maintain a schoolwide vision or mission, and common instructional goals which tie the content, structure, and resources of the school together into an effective and unified whole (Coleman and Hoffer, 1987, Purkey and

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[6] M.S. Smith and J. O'Day, "Systemic School Reform." In S.H. Fuhrman and B. Malen (Eds.), THE POLITICS OF CURRICULUM AND TESTING, p. 234.

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> Smith, 1983). The school mission provides the criteria and rationale for the selection of curriculum materials, the purposes and the nature of school-based professional development, and the interpretation and use of student assessment. The particulars of the vision will differ from school to school, depending on the local context...However, if the school is to be successful in promoting active student involvement in learning, depth of understanding, and complex thinking - major goals of the reform movement - its vision must focus on teaching and learning rather than, for example, on control and discipline as in many schools today. In fact, the very need for special attention to control and discipline may be mitigated considerably by the promotion of successful and engaging learning experiences.[7]

In other words, as against those who argue for a focus on "practical matters" like higher salaries, better facilities, more inservice education, Smith and O'Day defend the need for educating institutions and those who would reform them to step back and focus their energies on a question which sounds suspiciously philosophical: namely, what is our fundamental mission as an educating institution? What kind of a person possessed of what skills, dispositions, and attitudes should we

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[7] Smith and O'Day, p. 235.

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be trying to nurture? To arrive at answers to such questions which will be compelling to the institution's key stake holders is to take a - perhaps the - decisive step forward on the road to institutional self-renewal.

RESPONDING TO TWO OBJECTIONS

In this section I want to address two major objections to the position that I have been staking out. One of them pertains to the feasibility of the proposal, and the other to its wisdom.

Is it feasible? Among those who admit that to have a guiding vision can be invaluable for an educating institution, some will nonetheless urge that in our present social circumstances it is unrealistic to expect Jewish educating institutions to arrive at guiding visions that will at once be shared, clear enough to guide practice, and sufficiently compelling to elicit genuine enthusiasm. The problem is that the constituencies served by many congregations and free-standing Jewish educating institutions are so diverse that it will be impossible to arrive at a shared vision that will be anything more than "Motherhood" or "Apple Pie." That is, only vague slogans will have the power to unite the various sub-groups that make up typical Jewish educating institutions outside of the ultra-Orthodox community; and the attempt to forge a vision that goes beyond this will inevitably push to the margins some of these sub-groups. For a number of reasons, the leadership of

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many institutions are unwilling to undertake a course of action that will lead to this kind of marginalization and alienation. Loss of membership could have unacceptable economic consequences; and there is sometimes the fear that marginalized families who withdraw may end up providing their children no Jewish education at all.

While it is hard to deny that this concern has some foundation in reality, it would also be a mistake to underestimate the progress that could be made by an institution willing to tackle the problem of vision in a thoughtful way that is sensitive to the views and anxieties of the membership. And while it may be true that any such process will probably be threatening to some groups, there are likely to be significant groups that will be relieved and excited finally to be wrestling in a serious way with questions concerning the nature and significance of Jewish existence -- especially if this effort shows promise of helping to revitalize the institution's educational program. More generally, it may be a mistake to let our fears concerning the consequences of trying to work towards greater clarity of vision prematurely paralyze efforts to do so.

But while such considerations might lead to a somewhat more cautious formulation of the difficulties and risks for an institution associated with taking on a vision-agenda, they do not suffice to undermine this worrisome set of concerns. While carefully conceived efforts to work with existing institutions featuring diverse sub-groups need to be undertaken, it may in the

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end turn out that the extent of diversity represented in typical institutions will render it very difficult to arrive at powerful, shared visions that can guide the educational process.

If this is true, and if we also acknowledge the critical need for quality education in our present circumstances, perhaps we need to be thinking about radical structural alternatives to the way we have organized education in the American Jewish community. If it is unrealistic to think that an institution featuring a highly diverse population can go through a process that will lead it to crystallize a single vision that can guide its educational efforts, perhaps we have to begin thinking about creating an organizational universe in the Jewish community that will encourage like-minded individuals to gravitate towards educational institutions that reflect their shared convictions.

We might, for example, look to some of the voucher- or choice-plans that have been bandied about in recent discussions of general education. At present, membership in a congregation affords one the right to send one's children to that congregation's educational program -- a program that tries to be responsive to the diversity of the institution's constituency. Consider, however, a different possibility: suppose that membership in any congregation in a community would afford one the right to educate one's child in any of several educating institutions found in the community, and that an effort was made to ensure that each of these institutions represented a distinctive ideological orientation. The effect of such a policy

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might well be to draw individuals with similar ideological orientations into the same educational environment, making it possible to organize education around a vision that could elicit the enthusiastic support of the population it serves. I don't mean to suggest that dissolving the currently strong tie between congregation and congregational school is unproblematic or ultimately wise; but I do want to suggest that if we are create substantially more vision-informed Jewish educating institutions than we now tend to have, we may well need to give serious consideration to routes which disrupt existing patterns.

Is it wise? Consider, now, a second set of objections to the proposal that we organize Jewish education around compelling visions of a meaningful Jewish existence. The thrust of these objections is that even if we could do so, it would not necessarily be desirable.

One variant of this objection views the effort to organize educational efforts around visions of the ideal product of a Jewish education as an assault on the autonomy of the student. A vision-guided institution, an institution organized down to its very details along the lines of a particular vision, is a kind of "total institution" which does not offer the child an opportunity to taste and decide among alternative forms of a meaningful Jewish life.

There is more than one way to respond to this objection. One

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of them, which I will not develop in depth now, takes issue with a tendency within a certain species of liberalism to resist passing on to the young any substantive ideas concerning the good life -- except those values, attitudes, and dispositions that will enable the young to choose their own way of life and to be respectful of the liberty of others. As Richard Hare and others have argued, however, there need be no real contradiction between initiating the young into a particular form of life and meaningfully equipping them with the tools for autonomous choice. Indeed, the former may be a condition of the latter.

This last point may be especially true in our own time. A serious autonomous choice between a well-developed form of Jewish existence and various alternatives implicit in everyday life in modern, or post-modern, Western culture may only be possible if children encounter and have a real opportunity to taste an approach to Jewish existence that is more than a miscellany of customs, vague sentiments, and slogans. But in our own situation it is unlikely that they will encounter such an approach unless educational institutions set themselves up to systematically embody one or another such vision of a meaningful Jewish existence. Given the world in which the students live, the result will not be indoctrination but genuine choice.

This answer may not satisfy some species of liberals. In the name of the individual's autonomy, such individuals will argue that educational institutions must set themselves the challenge of equipping the young to choose from among a variety of

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competing images of a meaningful Jewish existence, rather than seeking to initiate them into any one of them.

In principle, I believe there is nothing wrong with this ideal as a guide to education. In practice, however, it is a difficult educational ideal to implement meaningfully - especially given the time- and resource-constraints that characterize Jewish education today. To undertake this approach meaningfully it is insufficient for educator and students to stand above a mix of alternatives and to scrutinize them from afar; for under these circumstances each would remain superficially understood and appreciated. A meaningful decision concerning a particular form of Jewish life requires a measure of appreciation "from the inside". Thus, an educational system organized around the principle that the young should make their own choices among different forms of Jewish existence would need to offer serious opportunities for in-depth acquaintance, and even for a significant taste, of more than one of them. Since this is hard enough to accomplish with even a single approach to Jewish existence, the odds are that the approach recommended would turn out to be superficial in its representation of the alternatives, such that the learners would not come away satisfied with any of them.

Consider, now, a very different reason for thinking it unwise to organize education around specific visions of a meaningful Jewish existence. According to this objection, when

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educators view their role as preparing the child for some future state of being, they tend not to do justice to the child's immediate needs, concerns, and interests; but it is precisely these needs, concerns, and interests that are the springboard to genuine education. The educational challenge, say the critics of relying on a guiding vision, is not to draw the child ever closer to a predesignated form of Jewish existence, but to respond to the child's developmental and other needs in ways that further the child's Jewish growth. To respond to the child's needs and authentic concerns in a meaningful way in a Jewish setting, and to do so in ways that expand the child's Jewish understandings and self-understandings and that communicate to the child that Jewish tradition can address his or her needs in meaningful ways, is quite a sufficient challenge.

I am in many ways very sympathetic to the spirit of this objection, understood as a critique of an approach to education that bypasses the living concerns and questions of children in order to prepare them to become certain kinds of adults. But in no way do I view the positive view that informs this objection as incompatible with the position I have staked out. Among other things, a vision of what Judaism is and a conception of where one hopes the student will be at the end of the educational process need not be used to suppress the child's needs but to interpret them and to suggest ways of responding to them.[8] There is not

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[8] See in this connection Dewey's THE CHILD AND THE CURRICULUM, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956. Here Dewey discusses the ways in which an in-depth understanding of

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in the end an irreducible incompatibility between having a guiding vision and responding authentically to the learner's living concerns.

CONCLUSION

It is no secret that the widespread interest and financial support that Jewish education has recently enjoyed have their origins in anxiety concerning Jewish continuity. If education is to impact positively on this troubling problem, it will be because it has led its clientele to a vivid appreciation of the ways in which Judaism and Jewish life offer rich opportunities for spiritual, social, and intellectual growth. But if education is to succeed in this effort, it must go beyond a parve offering of skills, information or even "positive experiences". It is imperative that educating institutions courageously move beyond this kind of vague neutrality and declare themselves for particular visions of a meaningful Jewish existence, which they will use as a basis for organizing the educational experience of the young. Only if and when educating institutions offer students, both young and old, entree into forms of Jewish existence that they will recognize to be existentially,

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the existing adult civilization ought - and ought not - to inform the process of education. Dewey decidedly rejects the notion that one should think of education as a step by step process of transmitting, piece by piece elements of this adult civilization. Rather, he recommends that educators use their understanding of this civilization as a lens through which to interpret the capacities, skills, and interests of the child, and to suggest ways in which these characteristics can be built upon and directed.

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intellectually, and spiritually meaningful, will education be responsive to our present predicament. It goes without saying that when educating institutions organize themselves around such visions, they will also become educationally more serious and thoughtful learning environments.

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THE PLACE OF VISION IN JEWISH EDUCATIONAL REFORM

Daniel Pekarsky

INTRODUCTION

Educators and supporters of education are often impatient with larger philosophical questions. Proccupied with pressing problems that already require more than the limited time and energy they have available, it may well feel to them like a distraction to give thought to basic questions concerning the larger purposes that the educational process is meant to serve. This view, however, is mistaken. Attention to such questions is not a frill but an urgent imperative. There is little of more practical value than the possession of an inspiring vision that can inform the educational process. This is the basic thesis that will be developed in this paper.[1]

In their influential book THE SHOPPING MALL HIGH SCHOOL, Arthur Powell et. al. develop a devastating critique of the American high school. At the heart of this critique is the suggestion that, as an institution, the high school has been suffering from what might be called "a failure of nerve". It has been singularly unable or unwilling to declare for any particular conception of what the process of education should be fundamentally about, with the result that what happens is not shaped by any coherent set of organizing principles which will give the enterprise a sense of direction. In their own words:

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[1] I want to acknowledge the contribution of Daniel Marom and Seymour Fox of the Mandel Institute's Educated Jew Project to the development of this paper. Many ideas herein expressed were profoundly influenced by our ongoing and continuing conversation.

> There is one last, unhappy reason that educators have not pointed to certain misdirections in the current crop of reforms: one cannot point to an indirect direction without some sense of the correct one. But American shcoolpeople have been singularly unable to think of an educational purpose they should not embrace...Secondary educators have tried to solve the problem of competing purposes by accepting all of them, and by building an institution that would accommodate the result.
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> Unfortunately, the flip side of the belief that all directions are correct is the belief that no direction is incorrect -- which is a sort of intellectual bankruptcy. Those who work in secondary education have little sense of an agenda for studies. There is only a long list of subjects to be studied...But there is no answer to the query, Why these and not others? Approaching things this way has made it easy to avoid arguments and decisions about purpose, both of which can be troublesome -- especially in our divided and contentious society.

Powell et. al. conclude:

> High schools are unlikely to make marked improvement...until there is a much clearer sense of

what is most important to teach and learn, and why, and how it can best be done.[2]

The analysis of the high school found in THE SHOPPING MALL HIGH SCHOOL applies very aptly to large numbers of Jewish educating institutions. Like the high schools described by Powell et. al., these institutions drift along, unguided by any compelling sense of purpose.[3] To the extent that there are guiding ideals, they tend to be so vague as to give very little direction and to call forth little enthusiasm. What these slogan-like ideals do succeed in doing - and this is no mean achievement - is to give a multiplicity of individuals, representing very different beliefs, the illusion that "We are one!", that they can all participate in the same social and educational community. But the price paid for the failure to affirm a larger purpose that goes beyond vague rhetoric is that the enterprise of educating is rendered significantly less effective than it might be if educational institutions were animated by powerful visions of the kinds human beings and/or community that need to be cultivated.

As just suggested, by "vision" I am referring to an image or conception of the kind of human being and/or community that the educational process is to bring into being. "Visions" in this

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[2] Powell, A.G., Farrar, E., and Cohen D. K., THE SHOPPING MALL HIGH SCHOOL, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1985, pp. 305-306.

[3] For a lucid discussion of this point, see Seymour Fox, "Towards a General Theory of Jewish Education," in David Sidorsky (Ed.), THE FUTURE OF THE AMERICAN JEWISH COMMUNITY, Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1973, pp. 260-271.

sense represent what might be called "existential visions" in that they identify what Jewish existence at its best in its social and/or individual dimensions looks like. Existential visions are to be found not only implicit in the social life of Jewish communities throughout the ages but also in writings of such diverse thinkers as Ahad Ha-Am, Martin Buber, Maimonides, Joseph B. Soloveitchik, and so on. Notice that an existential vision can be more or less filled-in: it might consist of a thick, ordered constellation of attitudes, skills, understandings, and dispositions; or it might be limited to a particular attitude or way of approaching the world (and the skills and understandings that make this possible). There is no need to assume, then, that a vision is coextensive with a way of life.

"Existential vision" in the sense just articulated is to be distinguished from an "institutional vision" -- an image or conception of what an educational institution at its best should look like. When we speak of an educating institution as "a caring community" or as "a community organized around serious study of basic texts", we are identifying an "institutional vision" that identifies the fundamental organizing principles of institutional life. Though having an institutional vision is no doubt important, the worthwhileness of any institutional vision ultimately depends on its being anchored in an adequate existential vision. The reason for this is as simple is the old adage that "form follows function:" educational arrangements must

be judged by their capacity to lead students towards those individual and social states of being - those constellations of attitude, knowledge, skill, and disposition - that are the raison d'etre of the enterprise. An adequate institutional vision is one that shows promise of optimizing progress towards the existential vision that undergirds the entire enterprise.[4]

THE BENEFITS OF VISION

Jewish education can be enriched by guiding existential visions (which I shall henceforth simply refer to as "visions") in at least three ways. The first pertains to the special predicament of American Jews at the end of the 20th century. The other two reflect general educational considerations that have a more universal application and do not assume this problematic predicament.

There is a need to introduce contemporary Jews to powerful visions of Jewish existence. During many historical periods, day-to-day experience in the family and the community sufficed to acquaint children with and to initiate them into meaningful forms

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[4] Noteworthy in this connection is Fred Newmann's "Linking Restructuring to Authentic Student Achievement," PHI DELTA KAPPAN, February 1991, Volume 72, Number 6, pp. 458-463. Here Newmann argues that attempts to restructure educational institutions without careful attention to the purposes that these institutions are intended to serve are seriously ill-conceived; for it is precisely these purposes that need to guide the direction of restructuring efforts. See especially p. 499.

of Jewish existence that enabled them to navigate their way through the world as Jews. During such periods, formal educating institutions could content themselves with supplementing this powerful informal education by passing on to the young particular skills and bodies of knowledge; it was not necessary for these institutions to take on the responsibility of presenting and initiating the young into richly meaningful forms of Jewish existence.

But our own age is very different. It is an era in which the young are no longer reared in environments saturated with Jewish rhythms, beliefs, and customs; and one can no longer count on informal socialization to assure the young's emergence as adults with a strong understanding of themselves as Jews. Indeed, many of them grow up with scant understanding of things Jewish, and certainly with little sense of the ways in which a life organized around Jewishly grounded understandings, activities, and values can answer some of their most fundamental needs as human beings. For human beings raised under such circumstances, human beings who are surrounded with a variety of images of the good life emanating from a multitude of quarters, remaining Jewish is no longer a destiny but a choice. And it is a choice the young are unlikely to make unless they meet up with spiritually, morally, and existentially compelling images of Jewish existence.[5] It is a major job of educating institutions

[5] The formulation of the Jewish community's predicament that is articulated in this and the preceding paragraph is indebted to A TIME TO ACT, pp. .

to put before the Jews of our generation these kinds of images. Not to do so, to continue instead with an ill-thought-out and superficial diet of "this and that", is to reinforce the message that flows from other quarters -- namely, that there is little or no reason to look to the Jewish universe in our search for existential and spiritual meaning.

To summarize: it is important for contemporary Jews to encounter powerful visions of a meaningful Jewish existence -- visions that in different ways address our basic needs for meaning, for a sense of place and time. Educational institutions have the potential to respond to this pressing social need by organized themnselves around such visions and offering their clients an in depth opportunity to encounter and appreciate them. This said, it needs to be added that organizing our educational efforts around compelling visions of the kinds of human beings we hope to cultivate also makes good educational sense on more general grounds. Two of these grounds are discussed below.

To have a vision of the kind of person and/or community that is to be nurtured through the educational process is to have a powerful tool for making basic educational decisions. In Jewish, as in general education, educational goals often have a kind of arbitrary character. In general education, we may laud "creativity"; in Jewish education, we may speak of the importance of "Love of Israel" or "Identification with the Jewish People;" but if one asks why these things are important, or even what they mean, it is apparent that they are often slogans without much

intellectual content or justificatory foundation. The moment, however, educational goals are grounded in a conception of the kind of Jewish human being one hopes to cultivate, the situation changes dramatically. When this conception is one that we strongly believe in, educational goals that flow from this ideal acquire a twofold power they rarely have. First, the desirability of achieving these goals is readily understood; second, when they are interpreted by the larger vision, they lose their character as "slogans" and acquire a determinate intellectual content.

An example may help to illustrate these points. "Love of Israel" is on its face very vague as an educational goal: it is unclear what "Israel" refers to (Is it the land? Is it the State?); it is unclear by virtue of what Israel is worthy of our love; and it is unclear how such love is to be expressed. But this situation changes dramatically when "love of Israel" is understood as an element in a particular understanding of Judaism and of a meaningful Jewish existence. "Love of Israel" as interpreted by Martin Buber will no doubt be different from "Love of Israel" as understood by Rosenzweig, Ahad Ha-Am, or Soloveitchik. Viewed through the lens of any of these outlooks, it will be clear why and in what sense Israel is to be loved, how such love is to be expressed, and what understandings, skills, attitudes, and behaviors are requisite for appropriately participating in such love. What a moment ago had been an empty slogan now becomes an educational goal rich with intellectual,

moral, and affective content -- the kind of goal that can give genuine direction to one's effort to educate.

A related point is this. When the human characteristics identified by educational goals are all anchored in a vision of the kind of person one hopes to educate, not only their relative importance but also their relationship to one another becomes readily apparent. Thus, for Professor Moshe Greenberg, love of learning Torah, "love of the fulfillment of the commandments between man and God," "acceptance of the Torah as a guide in the area of interpersonal morality," and "a relationship to the Jewish people in all the lands of their dispersion" are all educational goals. But to have access to the vision that underlies these educational goals is to have the key that interprets each of them and explains how they are inter-related; it is, specifically, to understand that the encounter with the text is the existential source of these other goals, the foundation out of which the understanding of and commitment to them emerges.[6]

To have a powerful vision of the kind of person one hopes to nurture is, then, to have a rich source of well-articulated educational goals; and such goals, in turn, become a basis for educational decisions across a variety of areas. Consider, for example, the problem of personnel. There is much talk concerning

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[6] Moshe Greenberg, "We Were as Those Who Dream: A Portrait of the Ideal Product of an Ideal Jewish education," unpublished manuscript, soon to be published by The Mandel Institute for the Advanced Study of Jewish Education.

the need for high quality, well-trained educators. But what it means for an educator to be "high quality" and "well-trained" itself depends substantially on one's conception of the desired outcome of the educational process. The kinds of knowledge, commitments, attitudes, and skills the educator needs to have will differ depending on whether one is guided by Heschel's, or Maimonides', or Ahad Ha-Am's vision of an appropriately educated Jewish human being. Thus, to commit oneself to a particular vision is to have a powerful tool in the selection of educational personnel, in the organization of inservice education, in the activity of supervision, and so forth. Analogous points can be made concerning curriculum, admissions policies, and the organization of the social environment. In each case, to have a clear sense of what one hopes to achieve through the educational process affords lay and professional educational leaders as well as front-line educators an extraordinarily powerful tool in educational deliberations. It is, incidentally, a corollary of this analysis that a guiding vision is not just a desideratum along with high quality personnel and curriculum; rather, a guiding vision is indispensable in understanding what quality personnel and curricula are.[7]

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[7] The discussion in this section will be misleading if it leaves the impression that educating institutions must choose from among a menu of predesignated visions (each associated with a "great thinker") the one that is appropriate for it. Nothing could be further from the truth. What a menu of competing visions can offer a community, however, is an opportunity to clarify its own guiding vision through a process of struggling with the perspectives and insights at work in a number of very different views.

Having a guiding vision and a set of educational goals anchored in this vision facilitates serious educational evaluation. Evaluation in the most important sense is an attempt to judge whether an institution is succeeding in accomplishing its fundamental purposes; and evaluation in this sense is important because, properly done, it enables policy-makers and practitioners to revisit existing patterns of practice with an eye towards improvement. But if it is to play this role, evaluation requires the identification of clear but meaningful educational goals: clearly defined but low-level goals, such as the ability to sight-read a page of Prayer book Hebrew, may be measurable and important but do not rise to the level of guiding educational purposes; one can be successful in attaining them without being successful in the larger sense - that is, without succeeding in cultivating those qualities of mind and heart that are at the heart of the enterprise. On the other hand, goals like "Love of Text Study", which seem to point to basic educational priorities, are often too vague to permit meaningful evaluation of our efforts to achieve them. What is needed are educational goals which are both clear enough to allow for real evaluation but also meaningfully tied to the institution's raison d'etre, so that the answer to the question, "Why is it important for the students to be successful relative to this goal?" could be readily answered to everyone's satisfaction. A guiding vision offers this critical mix of specificity and existential power.

The evidence from general education. Thus far, I have offered three general reasons for thinking that being organized around powerful visions of a meaningful Jewish existence will greatly enhance efforts at Jewish education. As the aforementioned references to the writings of Powell et al. and Newmann suggest, the proposed linkage between a sense of vision and educational effectiveness is not an idiosyncratic hypothesis, but reflects the considered view of some deeply thoughtful members of the educational community at large. There is also a measure of empirical support for this view which is worthy of attention.

Consider, in particular, Smith and O'Day's study of reform efforts in general education. The authors begin by observing the depressing results of most such efforts. Though there have been a flurry of reforms,

> evaluations of the reforms indicate only minor changes in the typical school, either in the nature of classroom practices or in achievement outcomes. For the most part, the processes and content of instruction in the public school classrooms of today are little different from what they were in 1980 or 1970.[8]

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[8] M.S. Smith and J. O'Day, "Systemic School Reform." In S.H. Fuhrman and B. Malen (Eds.), THE POLITICS OF CURRICULUM AND TESTING, p. 234.

Such findings do not, however, lead Smith and O'Day towards skepticism concerning the potential benefits of educational reform. The problem is not, they suggest, that educational reform is incapable of making a difference in educational outcomes but that most reform efforts have failed to focus on the right kinds of variables. To understand what the right kinds of variables are, they further suggest, we need to look at what characterizes educational institutions which, according to research, are effective. When Smith and O'Day turn to this research, they identify a number of variables, including "a fairly stable staff, made up of enthusiastic and caring teachers who have a mastery both of the subject matter of the curriculum and a of a variety of pedagogies for teaching it." But among the elements of effective schools that they cite, pride of place goes to what we have been calling vision. They write:

> Beyond - or perhaps underlying - these resources available to the student, the most effective schools maintain a schoolwide vision or mission, and common instructional goals which tie the content, structure, and resources of the school together into an effective and unified whole (Coleman and Hoffer, 1987, Purkey and Smith, 1983). The school mission provides the criteria and rationale for the selection of curriculum materials, the purposes and the nature of school-based professional development, and the interpretation and

> use of student assessment. The particulars of the vision will differ from school to school, depending on the local context...However, if the school is to be successful in promoting active student involvement in learning, depth of understanding, and complex thinking - major goals of the reform movement - its vision must focus on teaching and learning rather than, for example, on control and discipline as in many schools today. In fact, the very need for special attention to control and discipline may be mitigated considerably by the promotion of successful and engaging learning experiences.[9]

In other words, as against those who argue for a focus on "practical matters" like higher salaries, better facilities, more inservice education, Smith and O'Day defend the need for educating institutions and those who would reform them to step back and focus their energies on a question which sounds suspiciously philosophical: namely, what is our fundamental mission as an educating institution? What kind of a person possessed of what skills, dispositions, and attitudes should we be trying to nurture? To arrive at answers to such questions which will be compelling to the institution's key stake holders is to take a - perhaps <u>the</u> - decisive step forward on the road to institutional self-renewal.

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[9] Smith and O'Day, p. 235.

RESPONDING TO TWO OBJECTIONS

In this section, two major objections to the position staked out above are addressed. One of them pertains to the feasibility of the proposal, and the other to its wisdom.

Is it feasible? Among those who admit that to have a guiding vision can be invaluable for an educating institution, some will nonetheless urge that in our present social circumstances it is unrealistic to expect Jewish educating institutions to arrive at guiding visions that will at once be shared, clear enough to guide practice, and sufficiently compelling to elicit genuine enthusiasm. The problem is that the constituencies served by many congregations and free-standing Jewish educating institutions are so diverse that it will be impossible to arrive at a shared vision that will be anything more than "Motherhood" or "Apple Pie." That is, only vague slogans will have the power to unite the various sub-groups that make up typical Jewish educating institutions outside of the ultra-Orthodox community; and the attempt to forge a vision that goes beyond this will inevitably push to the margins some of these sub-groups. For a number of reasons, the leadership of many institutions are unwilling to undertake a course of action that will lead to this kind of marginalization and alienation. For example, loss of membership could have unacceptable economic consequences; and there is sometimes the fear that marginalized families who withdraw may end up providing their children no

Jewish education at all.

While it is hard to deny that this concern has some foundation in reality, it would also be a mistake to underestimate the progress that could be made by an institution willing to tackle the problem of vision in a thoughtful way that is sensitive to the views and anxieties of the membership. And while it may be true that any such process will probably be threatening to some groups, there are likely to be significant groups that will be relieved and excited finally to be wrestling in a serious way with questions concerning the nature and significance of Jewish existence -- especially if this effort shows promise of helping to revitalize the institution's educational program. More generally, it may be a mistake to let our fears concerning the consequences of trying to work towards greater clarity of vision prematurely paralyze efforts to do so.

But while such considerations might lead to a somewhat more cautious formulation of the institutional difficulties and risks associated with a decision to tackle the problem of vision, they do not suffice to dissolve this worrisome set of concerns. While carefully conceived efforts to work with existing institutions featuring diverse sub-groups need to be undertaken, it may in the end turn out that the extent of diversity represented in typical institutions will render it very difficult to arrive at powerful, shared visions that can guide the educational process.

If this is true, and if we also acknowledge the critical need for quality education in our present circumstances, perhaps

we need to be thinking about radical structural alternatives to the way we have organized education in the American Jewish community. If it is unrealistic to think that an institution featuring a highly diverse population can go through a process that will lead it to crystallize a single vision that can guide its educational efforts, perhaps we have to begin thinking about creating an organizational universe in the Jewish community that will encourage like-minded individuals to gravitate towards educational institutions that reflect their shared convictions.

We might, for example, look to some of the voucher- or choice-plans that have been bandied about in recent discussions of general education. At present, membership in a congregation affords one the right to send one's children to that congregation's educational program -- a program that tries to be responsive to the diversity of the institution's constituency. Consider, however, a different possibility: suppose that membership in any congregation in a community would afford one the right to educate one's child in any of several educating institutions found in the community, and that an effort was made to ensure that each of these institutions represented a distinctive ideological orientation. The effect of such a policy might well be to draw individuals with similar ideological orientations into the same educational environment, making it possible to organize education around a vision that could elicit the enthusiastic support of the population it serves. I don't claim that dissolving the currently strong tie between

congregation and congregational school is unproblematic or necessarily wise; but I do want to suggest that if we are create substantially more vision-informed Jewish educating institutions than are now typical, we may well need to give serious consideration to routes which disrupt existing patterns.

Is it wise? Consider, now, a second set of objections to the proposal that we organize Jewish education around compelling visions of a meaningful Jewish existence. The thrust of these objections is that even if we could do so, it would not necessarily be desirable.

One variant of this objection views the effort to organize educational efforts around visions of the ideal product of a Jewish education as an assault on the autonomy of the student. A vision-guided institution, an institution organized down to its very details along the lines of a particular vision, is a kind of "total institution" which does not offer the child an opportunity to taste and decide among alternative forms of a meaningful Jewish life.

There is more than one way to respond to this objection. One of them takes issue with a tendency within a certain species of liberalism to resist passing on to the young any substantive ideas concerning the good life -- except those values, attitudes, and dispositions that will enable the young to choose their own way of life and to be respectful of the liberty of others. As

Richard Hare and others have argued, however, there need be no real contradiction between initiating the young into a particular form of life and meaningfully equipping them with the tools for autonomous choice. Indeed, the former may be a condition of the latter.

This last point may be especially true in our own time. As intimated earlier, a serious autonomous choice between a well-developed form of Jewish existence and various alternatives implicit in everyday life in modern, or post-modern, Western culture may only be possible if children encounter and have a real opportunity to taste an approach to Jewish existence that is more than a miscellany of customs, vague sentiments, and slogans. But in our own situation it is unlikely that they will encounter such an approach unless educational institutions set themselves up to systematically embody one or another such vision of a meaningful Jewish existence. Given the world in which the students live, the result will not be indoctrination but genuine choice.

This answer may not satisfy some species of liberals. In the name of the individual's autonomy, such individuals will argue that educational institutions must set themselves the challenge of equipping the young to choose from among a variety of competing images of a meaningful Jewish existence, rather than seeking to initiate them into any one of them.

In principle, I believe there is nothing wrong with this ideal as a guide to education. In practice, however, it is a

difficult educational ideal to implement meaningfully - especially given the time- and resource-constraints that characterize Jewish education today. To undertake this approach meaningfully it is insufficient for educator and students to stand above a mix of alternatives and to scrutinize them from afar; for under these circumstances each would remain superficially understood and appreciated. A meaningful decision concerning a particular form of Jewish life requires a measure of appreciation "from the inside". Thus, an educational system organized around the principle that the young should make their own choices among different forms of Jewish existence would need to offer serious opportunities for in-depth acquaintance, and even for a significant taste, of more than one of them. Since this is hard enough to accomplish with even a single approach to Jewish existence, the odds are that the approach recommended would turn out to be superficial in its representation of the alternatives, such that the learners would not come away satisfied with any of them.

Consider, now, a very different reason for thinking it unwise to organize education around specific visions of a meaningful Jewish existence. According to this objection, when educators view their role as preparing the child for some future state of being, they tend not to do justice to the child's immediate needs, concerns, and interests; but it is precisely these needs, concerns, and interests that are the springboard to

genuine education. The educational challenge, say these critics, is not to draw the child ever closer to a predesignated form of Jewish existence, but to respond to the child's developmental and other needs in ways that further the child's Jewish growth. To respond to the child's needs and authentic concerns in a meaningful way in a Jewish setting, and to do so in ways that expand the child's Jewish understandings and self-understandings and that communicate to the child that Jewish tradition can address his or her needs in meaningful ways, is quite a sufficient challenge.

I am in many ways very sympathetic to the spirit of this objection, understood as a critique of an approach to education that bypasses the living concerns and questions of children in order to prepare them to become certain kinds of adults. But in no way do I view the positive view that informs this objection as incompatible with the position I have staked out. Among other things, a vision of what Judaism is and a conception of where one hopes the student will be at the end of the educational process need not be used to suppress the child's needs but to interpret them and to suggest ways of responding to them.[10] There is not

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[10] See in this connection Dewey's THE CHILD AND THE CURRICULUM, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956. Here Dewey discusses the ways in which an in-depth understanding of the existing adult civilization ought - and ought not - to inform the process of education. Dewey decidedly rejects the notion that one should think of education as a step by step process of transmitting, piece by piece elements of this adult civilization. Rather, he recommends that educators use their understanding of this civilization as a lens through which to interpret the capacities, skills, and interests of the child, and to suggest ways in which these characteristics can be built upon and

in the end an irreducible incompatibility between having a guiding vision and responding authentically to the learner's living concerns.

CONCLUSION

It is no secret that the widespread interest and financial support that Jewish education has recently enjoyed have their origins in anxiety concerning Jewish continuity. If education is to impact positively on this troubling problem, it will be because it has led its clientele to a vivid appreciation of the ways in which Judaism and Jewish life offer rich opportunities for spiritual, social, and intellectual growth. But if education is to succeed in this effort, it must go beyond a parve offering of skills, information or even "positive experiences". It is imperative that educating institutions courageously move beyond this kind of vague neutrality and declare themselves for particular visions of a meaningful Jewish existence, which they will use as a basis for organizing the educational experience of the young. Only if and when educating institutions offer students, both young and old, entree into forms of Jewish existence that they will recognize to be existentially, intellectually, and spiritually meaningful, will education be responsive to our present predicament. It goes without saying that when educating institutions organize themselves around such visions, they will also become educationally more serious and

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directed.

thoughtful learning environments.

In closing,it must be stressed that a belief in the importance of vision does not entail any particular approach to the development of vision. On this matter there are many different views. There are some who may believe that such a process begins with, or at some stage requires, an activity called "visioning". There are others who believe that explicit attempts to formulate a guiding vision should not come until after there have been extensive small-scale problem-solving efforts that engage varied stake holders in new ways and effectively transform the institution's culture.[11] Still others might feel that progress towards vision is best assured not by some publicly announced effort in this direction but by approaching in the right spirit the challenges that arise in the institution's day to day life. And, as noted above, there will be others who urge that the amount of diversity found in many typical institutions is so substantial that it will be impossible to arrive at a vision that will simultaneously be shared and inspiring, and that therefore the attempt to nurture the growth of vision-guided institutions must focus on strategies that will encourage new kinds of institutions to come into being. Which, if any of these views is meritorious, in general or in particular social contexts, is a matter of great educational importance. Attention to this matter must be a principal focus of our

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[11] See, in this connection, Michael Fullan, CHANGE FORCES, New York: Falmer Press, 1993, pp. 67-68.

energies if we are, in John Dewey's phrase, to find our way out of educational confusion.

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id MAA01542; Mon, 15 Apr 1996 12:20:55 -0400
Received: from mail.soemadison.wisc.edu by borden.doit.wisc.edu;
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Date: Mon, 15 Apr 1996 11:19:00 -600
Subject: Vision paper
X-Gateway: iGate, (WP Office) vers 4.04m - 1032
MIME-Version: 1.0
Message-Id: <31727747.CF87.2636.000@mail.soemadison.wisc.edu>
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Here's a revised draft that takes into account a number of your points; missing still, though, is a more detailed treatment of the "Israel" example. Let me know what you think.

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THE PLACE OF VISION IN JEWISH EDUCATIONAL REFORM

Daniel Pekarsky

INTRODUCTION

Educators and supporters of education are often impatient with larger philosophical questions, Proccupied with pressing problems that already require more than the limited time and energy they have ~~available, it may well feel to them like a distraction to give thought to basic questions concerning the larger purposes that the educational process is meant to serve. This view, however, is mistaken. Attention to such questions is not a frill but an urgent imperative. There is little of more practical value than the possession of an inspiring vision that can inform the educational process. This is the basic thesis that will be developed in this paper.~~

In their influential book THE SHOPPING MALL HIGH SCHOOL, Arthur Powell et. al. develop a devastating critique of the American high school. At the heart of this critique is the suggestion that, as an institution, the high school has been suffering from ~~what might be called~~ "a failure of nerve". ~~It has~~ been singularly unable or unwilling to declare for any particular conception of what the process of education should be fundamentally about, with the result ~~that~~ what happens is not shaped by ~~any~~ coherent set of organizing principles ~~which~~ will give the enterprise a sense of direction. In their own words:

> There is one last, unhappy reason that educators have not pointed to certain misdirections in the current crop of reforms: one cannot point to an indirect direction without some sense of the correct one. But American ~~sh~~coolpeople have been singularly unable to think of an educational purpose they should not embrace...Secondary educators have tried to solve the problem of competing purposes by accepting all of them, and by building an institution that would accommodate the result.
>
> Unfortunately, the flip side of the belief that all directions are correct is the belief that no direction

(4 dots?)

Which can seem overly abstract.

They may think that to focus on issues of vision and the larger purposes of education are a distraction.

In fact, there is nothing more practical than an inspiring vision.

(I think you need to explain — If true — that the book is evaluating/discussion the "past reform" high school.)

(The high school itself can't "declare." Who is the real subject of this sentence?)

Those educators have

is incorrect -- which is a sort of intellectual bankruptcy. Those who work in secondary education have little sense of an agenda for studies. There is only a long list of subjects to be studied...But there is no answer to the query, Why these and not others? Approaching things this way has made it easy to avoid arguments and decisions about purpose, both of which can be troublesome -- especially in our divided and contentious society.

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Powell et. al. conclude:

> High schools are unlikely to make marked improvement...until there is a much clearer sense of what is most important to teach and learn, and why, and how it can best be done.

The analysis of the high school found in THE SHOPPING MALL HIGH SCHOOL applies very aptly to ~~large numbers~~ of Jewish educating institutions. Like the high schools described by Powell et. al., these institutions drift along, unguided by any compelling sense of purpose. To the extent that there are guiding ideals, they tend to be so vague as to give very little direction and to call forth little enthusiasm. What these slogan-like ideals do succeed in doing - and this is no mean achievement - is to give a ~~multiplicity of individuals~~, representing very different beliefs, the illusion that "We are one!", that they can all participate in the same social and educational community. But the price paid for the failure to affirm a larger purpose that goes beyond vague rhetoric is that the enterprise of educating is rendered significantly less effective than it might be if educational institutions were animated by powerful visions of the kinds human beings and/or community that need to be cultivated.

many

(give an example: "Make kids feel good about being Jewish."

range of people

(do you mean parents or kids?)

(simplify the rhetoric: Give the sentence a human subject.)

~~As just suggested,~~ by "vision" I am referring to an ~~image or conception of the kind of human being and/or community that the educational process is to bring into being~~. "Visions" in this sense represent what might be called "existential visions" in that they identify what Jewish existence at its best in its social and/or individual dimensions looks like. Existential visions are to be found not only implicit in the social life of Jewish communities throughout the ages but also in writings of such diverse thinkers as Ahad Ha-Am, Martin Buber, Maimonides, Joseph B. Soloveitchik, and so on. Notice that an existential vision can be more or less filled-in: it might consist of a thick, ordered constellation of attitudes, skills, understandings, and dispositions; or it might be limited to a particular attitude or way of approaching the world (and the skills and understandings that make this possible). There is no need to assume, then, that a vision is coextensive with a way of life.

answer to the question: "What kind of Jewish human being is meant th...?

"Existential vision" in the sense just articulated is to be distinguished from an "institutional vision" -- an image or conception of what an educational institution at its best should

look like. When we speak of an educating institution as "a caring community" or as "a community organized around serious study of basic texts", we are identifying an "institutional vision" that identifies the fundamental organizing principles of institutional life. Though having an institutional vision is no doubt important, the worthwhileness of any institutional vision ultimately depends on its being anchored in an adequate existential vision. The reason for this is as simple is the old adage that "form follows function:" educational arrangements must be judged by their capacity to lead students towards those individual and social states of being - those constellations of attitude, knowledge, skill, and disposition - that are the raison d'etre of the enterprise. An adequate institutional vision is one that shows promise of optimizing progress towards the existential vision that undergirds the entire enterprise.

THE BENEFITS OF VISION

Jewish education can be enriched by guiding existential visions (which I shall henceforth simply refer to as "visions") in at least three ways. The first pertains to the special predicament of American Jews at the end of the 20th century. The other two reflect general educational considerations that have a more universal application and do not assume this problematic predicament.

There is a need to introduce contemporary Jews to powerful visions of Jewish existence. During many historical periods, day-to-day experience in the family and the community sufficed to acquaint children with and to initiate them into meaningful forms of Jewish existence that enabled them to navigate their way through the world as Jews. During such periods, formal educating institutions could content themselves with supplementing this powerful informal education by passing on to the young particular skills and bodies of knowledge; it was not necessary for these institutions to take on the responsibility of presenting and initiating the young into richly meaningful forms of Jewish existence.

But our own age is very different. It is an era in which the young are no longer reared in environments saturated with Jewish rhythms, beliefs, and customs; and one can no longer count on informal socialization to assure the young's emergence as adults with a strong understanding of themselves as Jews. Indeed, many of them grow up with scant understanding of things Jewish, and certainly with little sense of the ways in which a life organized around Jewishly grounded understandings, activities, and values can answer some of their most fundamental needs as human beings. For human beings raised under such circumstances, human beings who are surrounded with a variety of images of the good life emanating from a multitude of quarters, remaining Jewish is no longer a destiny but a choice. And it is a choice the young are unlikely to make unless they meet up with

spiritually, morally, and existentially compelling images of Jewish existence. It is a major job of educating institutions to put before the Jews of our generation these kinds of images. Not to do so, to continue instead with an ill-thought-out and superficial diet of "this and that", is to reinforce the message that flows from other quarters -- namely, that there is little or no reason to look to the Jewish universe in our search for existential and spiritual meaning.

To summarize: it is important for contemporary Jews to encounter powerful visions of a meaningful Jewish existence -- visions that in different ways address our basic needs for meaning, for a sense of place and time. Educational institutions have the potential to respond to this pressing social need by organized themnselves around such visions and offering their clients an in depth opportunity to encounter and appreciate them. This said, it needs to be added that organizing our educational efforts around compelling visions of the kinds of human beings we hope to cultivate also makes good educational sense on more general grounds. Two of these grounds are discussed below.

To have a vision of the kind of person and/or community that is to be nurtured through the educational process is to have a powerful tool for making basic educational decisions. In Jewish, as in general education, educational goals often have a kind of arbitrary character. In general education, we may laud "creativity"; in Jewish education, we may speak of the importance of "Love of Israel" or "Identification with the Jewish People;" but if one asks why these things are important, or even what they mean, it is apparent that they are often slogans without much intellectual content or justificatory foundation. The moment, however, educational goals are grounded in a conception of the kind of Jewish human being one hopes to cultivate, the situation changes dramatically. When this conception is one that we strongly believe in, educational goals that flow from this ideal acquire a twofold power they rarely have. First, the desirability of achieving these goals is readily understood; second, when they are interpreted by the larger vision, they lose their character as "slogans" and acquire a determinate intellectual content.

An example may help to illustrate these points. "Love of Israel" is on its face very vague as an educational goal: it is unclear what "Israel" refers to (Is it the land? Is it the State?); it is unclear by virtue of what Israel is worthy of our love; and it is unclear how such love is to be expressed. But this situation changes dramatically when "love of Israel" is understood as an element in a particular understanding of Judaism and of a meaningful Jewish existence. "Love of Israel" as interpreted by Martin Buber will no doubt be different from "Love of Israel" as understood by Rosenzweig, Ahad Ha-Am, or Soloveitchik. Viewed through the lens of any of these outlooks, it will be clear why and in what sense Israel is to be loved, how such love is to be expressed, and what understandings, skills, attitudes, and behaviors are requisite for appropriately

participating in such love. What a moment ago had been an empty slogan now becomes an educational goal rich with intellectual, moral, and affective content -- the kind of goal that can give genuine direction to one's effort to educate.

A related point is this. When the human characteristics identified by educational goals are all anchored in a vision of the kind of person one hopes to educate, not only their relative importance but also their relationship to one another becomes readily apparent. Thus, for Professor Moshe Greenberg, love of learning Torah, "love of the fulfillment of the commandments between man and God," "acceptance of the Torah as a guide in the area of interpersonal morality," and "a relationship to the Jewish people in all the lands of their dispersion" are all educational goals. But to have access to the vision that underlies these educational goals is to have the key that interprets each of them and explains how they are inter-related; it is, specifically, to understand that the encounter with the text is the existential source of these other goals, the foundation out of which the understanding of and commitment to them emerges.

To have a powerful vision of the kind of person one hopes to nurture is, then, to have a rich source of well-articulated educational goals; and such goals, in turn, become a basis for educational decisions across a variety of areas. Consider, for example, the problem of personnel. There is much talk concerning the need for high quality, well-trained educators. But what it means for an educator to be "high quality" and "well-trained" itself depends substantially on one's conception of the desired outcome of the educational process. The kinds of knowledge, commitments, attitudes, and skills the educator needs to have will differ depending on whether one is guided by Heschel's, or Maimonides', or Ahad Ha-Am's vision of an appropriately educated Jewish human being. Thus, to commit oneself to a particular vision is to have a powerful tool in the selection of educational personnel, in the organization of inservice education, in the activity of supervision, and so forth. Analogous points can be made concerning curriculum, admissions policies, and the organization of the social environment. In each case, to have a clear sense of what one hopes to achieve through the educational process affords lay and professional educational leaders as well as front-line educators an extraordinarily powerful tool in educational deliberations. It is, incidentally, a corollary of this analysis that a guiding vision is not just a desideratum along with high quality personnel and curriculum; rather, a guiding vision is indispensable in understanding what quality personnel and curricula are.

Having a guiding vision and a set of educational goals anchored in this vision facilitates serious educational evaluation. Evaluation in the most important sense is an attempt to judge whether an institution is succeeding in accomplishing its fundamental purposes; and evaluation in this

sense is important because, properly done, it enables policy-makers and practitioners to revisit existing patterns of practice with an eye towards improvement. But if it is to play this role, evaluation requires the identification of clear but meaningful educational goals: clearly defined but low-level goals, such as the ability to sight-read a page of Prayer book Hebrew, may be measurable and important but do not rise to the level of guiding educational purposes; one can be successful in attaining them without being successful in the larger sense - that is, without succeeding in cultivating those qualities of mind and heart that are at the heart of the enterprise. On the other hand, goals like "Love of Text Study", which seem to point to basic educational priorities, are often too vague to permit meaningful evaluation of our efforts to achieve them. What is needed are educational goals which are both clear enough to allow for real evaluation but also meaningfully tied to the institution's raison d'etre, so that the answer to the question, "Why is it important for the students to be successful relative to this goal?" could be readily answered to everyone's satisfaction. A guiding vision offers this critical mix of specificity and existential power.

The evidence from general education. Thus far, I have offered three general reasons for thinking that being organized around powerful visions of a meaningful Jewish existence will greatly enhance efforts at Jewish education. As the aforementioned references to the writings of Powell et al. and Newmann suggest, the proposed linkage between a sense of vision and educational effectiveness is not an idiosyncratic hypothesis, but reflects the considered view of some deeply thoughtful members of the educational community at large. There is also a measure of empirical support for this view which is worthy of attention.

Consider, in particular, Smith and O'Day's study of reform efforts in general education. The authors begin by observing the depressing results of most such efforts. Though there have been a flurry of reforms,

> evaluations of the reforms indicate only minor changes in the typical school, either in the nature of classroom practices or in achievement outcomes. For the most part, the processes and content of instruction in the public school classrooms of today are little different from what they were in 1980 or 1970.

Such findings do not, however, lead Smith and O'Day towards skepticism concerning the potential benefits of educational reform. The problem is not, they suggest, that educational reform is incapable of making a difference in educational outcomes but that most reform efforts have failed to focus on the right kinds of variables. To understand what the right kinds of variables are, they further suggest, we need to look at what

characterizes educational institutions which, according to research, are effective. When Smith and O'Day turn to this research, they identify a number of variables, including "a fairly stable staff, made up of enthusiastic and caring teachers who have a mastery both of the subject matter of the curriculum and a of a variety of pedagogies for teaching it." But among the elements of effective schools that they cite, pride of place goes to what we have been calling vision. They write:

> Beyond - or perhaps underlying - these resources available to the student, the most effective schools maintain a schoolwide vision or mission, and common instructional goals which tie the content, structure, and resources of the school together into an effective and unified whole (Coleman and Hoffer, 1987, Purkey and Smith, 1983). The school mission provides the criteria and rationale for the selection of curriculum materials, the purposes and the nature of school-based professional development, and the interpretation and use of student assessment. The particulars of the vision will differ from school to school, depending on the local context...However, if the school is to be successful in promoting active student involvement in learning, depth of understanding, and complex thinking - major goals of the reform movement - its vision must focus on teaching and learning rather than, for example, on control and discipline as in many schools today. In fact, the very need for special attention to control and discipline may be mitigated considerably by the promotion of successful and engaging learning experiences.

In other words, as against those who argue for a focus on "practical matters" like higher salaries, better facilities, more inservice education, Smith and O'Day defend the need for educating institutions and those who would reform them to step back and focus their energies on a question which sounds suspiciously philosophical: namely, what is our fundamental mission as an educating institution? What kind of a person possessed of what skills, dispositions, and attitudes should we be trying to nurture? To arrive at answers to such questions which will be compelling to the institution's key stake holders is to take a - perhaps the - decisive step forward on the road to institutional self-renewal.

RESPONDING TO TWO OBJECTIONS

In this section, two major objections to the position staked out above are addressed. One of them pertains to the feasibility of the proposal, and the other to its wisdom.

Is it feasible? Among those who admit that to have a guiding vision can be invaluable for an educating institution,

some will nonetheless urge that in our present social circumstances it is unrealistic to expect Jewish educating institutions to arrive at guiding visions that will at once be shared, clear enough to guide practice, and sufficiently compelling to elicit genuine enthusiasm. The problem is that the constituencies served by many congregations and free-standing Jewish educating institutions are so diverse that it will be impossible to arrive at a shared vision that will be anything more than "Motherhood" or "Apple Pie." That is, only vague slogans will have the power to unite the various sub-groups that make up typical Jewish educating institutions outside of the ultra-Orthodox community; and the attempt to forge a vision that goes beyond this will inevitably push to the margins some of these sub-groups. For a number of reasons, the leadership of many institutions are unwilling to undertake a course of action that will lead to this kind of marginalization and alienation. For example, loss of membership could have unacceptable economic consequences; and there is sometimes the fear that marginalized families who withdraw may end up providing their children no Jewish education at all.

While it is hard to deny that this concern has some foundation in reality, it would also be a mistake to underestimate the progress that could be made by an institution willing to tackle the problem of vision in a thoughtful way that is sensitive to the views and anxieties of the membership. And while it may be true that any such process will probably be threatening to some groups, there are likely to be significant groups that will be relieved and excited finally to be wrestling in a serious way with questions concerning the nature and significance of Jewish existence -- especially if this effort shows promise of helping to revitalize the institution's educational program. More generally, it may be a mistake to let our fears concerning the consequences of trying to work towards greater clarity of vision prematurely paralyze efforts to do so.

But while such considerations might lead to a somewhat more cautious formulation of the institutional difficulties and risks associated with a decision to tackle the problem of vision, they do not suffice to dissolve this worrisome set of concerns. While carefully conceived efforts to work with existing institutions featuring diverse sub-groups need to be undertaken, it may in the end turn out that the extent of diversity represented in typical institutions will render it very difficult to arrive at powerful, shared visions that can guide the educational process.

If this is true, and if we also acknowledge the critical need for quality education in our present circumstances, perhaps we need to be thinking about radical structural alternatives to the way we have organized education in the American Jewish community. If it is unrealistic to think that an institution featuring a highly diverse population can go through a process that will lead it to crystallize a single vision that can guide its educational efforts, perhaps we have to begin thinking about creating an organizational universe in the Jewish community that

will encourage like-minded individuals to gravitate towards educational institutions that reflect their shared convictions.

We might, for example, look to some of the voucher- or choice-plans that have been bandied about in recent discussions of general education. At present, membership in a congregation affords one the right to send one's children to that congregation's educational program -- a program that tries to be responsive to the diversity of the institution's constituency. Consider, however, a different possibility: suppose that membership in any congregation in a community would afford one the right to educate one's child in any of several educating institutions found in the community, and that an effort was made to ensure that each of these institutions represented a distinctive ideological orientation. The effect of such a policy might well be to draw individuals with similar ideological orientations into the same educational environment, making it possible to organize education around a vision that could elicit the enthusiastic support of the population it serves. I don't claim that dissolving the currently strong tie between congregation and congregational school is unproblematic or necessarily wise; but I do want to suggest that if we are create substantially more vision-informed Jewish educating institutions than are now typical, we may well need to give serious consideration to routes which disrupt existing patterns.

Is it wise? Consider, now, a second set of objections to the proposal that we organize Jewish education around compelling visions of a meaningful Jewish existence. The thrust of these objections is that even if we could do so, it would not necessarily be desirable.

One variant of this objection views the effort to organize educational efforts around visions of the ideal product of a Jewish education as an assault on the autonomy of the student. A vision-guided institution, an institution organized down to its very details along the lines of a particular vision, is a kind of "total institution" which does not offer the child an opportunity to taste and decide among alternative forms of a meaningful Jewish life.

There is more than one way to respond to this objection. One of them takes issue with a tendency within a certain species of liberalism to resist passing on to the young any substantive ideas concerning the good life -- except those values, attitudes, and dispositions that will enable the young to choose their own way of life and to be respectful of the liberty of others. As Richard Hare and others have argued, however, there need be no real contradiction between initiating the young into a particular form of life and meaningfully equipping them with the tools for autonomous choice. Indeed, the former may be a condition of the latter.

This last point may be especially true in our own time. As intimated earlier, a serious autonomous choice between a well-

developed form of Jewish existence and various alternatives implicit in everyday life in modern, or post-modern, Western culture may only be possible if children encounter and have a real opportunity to taste an approach to Jewish existence that is more than a miscellany of customs, vague sentiments, and slogans. But in our own situation it is unlikely that they will encounter such an approach unless educational institutions set themselves up to systematically embody one or another such vision of a meaningful Jewish existence. Given the world in which the students live, the result will not be indoctrination but genuine choice.

This answer may not satisfy some species of liberals. In the name of the individual's autonomy, such individuals will argue that educational institutions must set themselves the challenge of equipping the young to choose from among a variety of competing images of a meaningful Jewish existence, rather than seeking to initiate them into any one of them.

In principle, I believe there is nothing wrong with this ideal as a guide to education. In practice, however, it is a difficult educational ideal to implement meaningfully - especially given the time- and resource-constraints that characterize Jewish education today. To undertake this approach meaningfully it is insufficient for educator and students to stand above a mix of alternatives and to scrutinize them from afar; for under these circumstances each would remain superficially understood and appreciated. A meaningful decision concerning a particular form of Jewish life requires a measure of appreciation "from the inside". Thus, an educational system organized around the principle that the young should make their own choices among different forms of Jewish existence would need to offer serious opportunities for in-depth acquaintance, and even for a significant taste, of more than one of them. Since this is hard enough to accomplish with even a single approach to Jewish existence, the odds are that the approach recommended would turn out to be superficial in its representation of the alternatives, such that the learners would not come away satisfied with any of them.

Consider, now, a very different reason for thinking it unwise to organize education around specific visions of a meaningful Jewish existence. According to this objection, when educators view their role as preparing the child for some future state of being, they tend not to do justice to the child's immediate needs, concerns, and interests; but it is precisely these needs, concerns, and interests that are the springboard to genuine education. The educational challenge, say these critics, is not to draw the child ever closer to a predesignated form of Jewish existence, but to respond to the child's developmental and other needs in ways that further the child's Jewish growth. To respond to the child's needs and authentic concerns in a meaningful way in a Jewish setting, and to do so in ways that expand the child's Jewish understandings and self-understandings

and that communicate to the child that Jewish tradition can address his or her needs in meaningful ways, is quite a sufficient challenge.

I am in many ways very sympathetic to the spirit of this objection, understood as a critique of an approach to education that bypasses the living concerns and questions of children in order to prepare them to become certain kinds of adults. But in no way do I view the positive view that informs this objection as incompatible with the position I have staked out. Among other things, a vision of what Judaism is and a conception of where one hopes the student will be at the end of the educational process need not be used to suppress the child's needs but to interpret them and to suggest ways of responding to them. There is not in the end an irreducible incompatibility between having a guiding vision and responding authentically to the learner's living concerns.

CONCLUSION

It is no secret that the widespread interest and financial support that Jewish education has recently enjoyed have their origins in anxiety concerning Jewish continuity. If education is to impact positively on this troubling problem, it will be because it has led its clientele to a vivid appreciation of the ways in which Judaism and Jewish life offer rich opportunities for spiritual, social, and intellectual growth. But if education is to succeed in this effort, it must go beyond a parve offering of skills, information or even "positive experiences". It is imperative that educating institutions courageously move beyond this kind of vague neutrality and declare themselves for particular visions of a meaningful Jewish existence, which they will use as a basis for organizing the educational experience of the young. Only if and when educating institutions offer students, both young and old, entree into forms of Jewish existence that they will recognize to be existentially, intellectually, and spiritually meaningful, will education be responsive to our present predicament. It goes without saying that when educating institutions organize themselves around such visions, they will also become educationally more serious and thoughtful learning environments.

In closing,it must be stressed that a belief in the importance of vision does not entail any particular approach to the development of vision. On this matter there are many different views. There are some who may believe that such a process begins with, or at some stage requires, an activity called "visioning". There are others who believe that explicit attempts to formulate a guiding vision should not come until after there have been extensive small-scale problem-solving efforts that engage varied stake holders in new ways and effectively transform the institution's culture. Still others might feel that progress towards vision is best assured not by some publicly announced effort in this direction but by approaching in the right spirit the challenges that arise in the

institution's day to day life. And, as noted above, there will be others who urge that the amount of diversity found in many typical institutions is so substantial that it will be impossible to arrive at a vision that will simultaneously be shared and inspiring, and that therefore the attempt to nurture the growth of vision-guided institutions must focus on strategies that will encourage new kinds of institutions to come into being. Which, if any of these views is meritorious, in general or in particular social contexts, is a matter of great educational importance. Attention to this matter must be a principal focus of our energies if we are, in John Dewey's phrase, to find our way out of educational confusion.

TO: Danny, INTERNET:PEKARSKY@mail.soemadison.wisc.edu

Re: vision

i've just sent your draft to kathy green, who will be writing a journalistic essay on the harvard institute for us. i'm also about to send it to bill novak as a backdrop for ramah. i do think that when you've finished it it will be extraordinarily useful, so don't drop the ball! (have explained to both that it's preliminary.)

also, in addition to the mandel inst. note i suggested, i was thinking to myself that it would be a great contribution to point out that this subject is not exactly dominating the discourse in general education and to suggest that this is a place that jews could make a real contribution. that's a little blunt, but you get what i mean. when you told me how few citations there were, i thought that was worth highlighting for our readers.

i'm in harvard tues. and wed. will i see you? maybe we could take this the next step. (i'm itching to get it polished and out there, as you can see!)

nessa

TO: Danny, INTERNET:PEKARSKY@mail.soemadison.wisc.edu

Re: Vision

After I get Bill Novak the next incarnation of work on Ramah, your paper is next on my lineup. My goal, if you can forgive the term, is to have it done in time for the June steering committee meeting and, more important, an advanced mailing for the July seminar!

Just to let you know I haven't forgotten.

Nessa

TO: Marom, Internet:Mandel@hujivms.bitnet
CC: Danny, INTERNET:PEKARSKY@mail.soemadison.wisc.edu

Re: Dan P's paper

Hi, Danny! I am about to begin editing Dan's paper on "The Place of Vision in Jewish Educational Reform" for a general audience. I understand you have some comments on the paper. Since they will (obviously) have bearing on whatever I do, could you please send them to Dan/me by Wed. May 15, my deadline for starting my work?

Thanks, and looking forward to seeing you soon. Regards to Juliet.

Nessa

FROM: INTERNET:marom@vms.huji.ac.il, INTERNET:marom@vms.huji.ac.il
TO: Nessa Rapoport, 74671,3370
DATE: 5/17/96 8:47 AM

Re: Hi Nesalee!

Sender: marom@vms.huji.ac.il
Received: from VMS.HUJI.AC.IL (vms.huji.ac.il [128.139.4.12]) by arl-img-4.compuserve.com (8.6.10/5.950515)
id IAA14623; Fri, 17 May 1996 08:37:00 -0400
From: <marom@vms.huji.ac.il>
Message-Id: <199605171237.IAA14623@arl-img-4.compuserve.com>
Received: by HUJIVMS (HUyMail-V7b); Fri, 17 May 96 15:37:36 +0200
Received: by HUJIVMS via SMTP(128.139.9.55) (HUyMail-V7b);
Fri, 17 May 96 15:34:11 +0200
Date: Fri, 17 May 96 15:34 +0200
MIME-Version: 1.0
Content-Type: text/plain
Content-Transfer-Encoding: 7bit
Subject: Hi Nesalee!
To: 74671.3370@compuserve.com
X-Mailer: SPRY Mail Version: 04.00.06.17

Hi Nessalee:

Sorry I have not responded more quickly to your queries. I do have much to share with you, regarding Danny's paper, latest Agnon installment (I will fax it to you), kitchen piece, and summer seminar. Probably would be better on the phone. Can you suggest a time for next week when I could phone you for a half an hour?

Shabbat Shalom

Danny

<---- End Forwarded Message ---->

TO: INTERNET:marom@vms.huji.ac.il, INTERNET:marom@vms.huji.ac.il

Re: Hi Danny-boy!

So happy to hear from you. How about 10 my time on Wed. am? It would be 5 pm for you. Is that all right? If you want 9:30, let me know. I have a lunch date that day, so am not available after 7 pm your time.

Keep your ears open for a nice three-bedroom apt. in or close to Old Katamon. The entire mishpachah + in-laws arrives on July 19. I know Nina's on the case, but sometimes things come up in conversation.

I really look forward to working with you--in person, too.

Nessa

TO: Alan, 73321,1220

Re: The paper

Alan, here is the note I just received from Dan, re his "vision" paper. I also spoke to Marom. Marom and I agreed that he would give Dan P. his comments this weekend. Dan has indicated his openness. We would then finalize over the summer, and disseminate as needed. Marom was promoting the "internal document" theory, and I was telling him that I was not a supporter of the "top secret" approach to these matters. It was part of a longer conversation about the role of documents and their limitations--and how no single paper can encompass an entire issue; therefore, send it forth, and do many documents for different purposes. That's the update so far. I'll fill you in as needed. This message from Dan P. seems to indicate that the situation has been defused. We shall see.

Nessa
---------- Forwarded Message ----------

From: "Dan Pekarsky", INTERNET:pekarsky@mail.soemadison.wisc.edu
TO: Nessa Rapoport, 74671,3370
DATE: 5/22/96 4:44 PM

RE: The paper

Sender: pekarsky@mail.soemadison.wisc.edu
Received: from audumla.students.wisc.edu (students.wisc.edu [144.92.104.66]) by arl-img-3.compuserve.com (8.6.10/5.950515)
id QAA04757; Wed, 22 May 1996 16:31:36 -0400
Received: from mail.soemadison.wisc.edu by audumla.students.wisc.edu;
id PAA75920; 8.6.9W/42; Wed, 22 May 1996 15:31:32 -0500
From: "Dan Pekarsky" <pekarsky@mail.soemadison.wisc.edu>
Reply-To: pekarsky@mail.soemadison.wisc.edu
To: 74671.3370@compuserve.com
Date: Wed, 22 May 1996 15:29:00 -600
Subject: The paper
X-Gateway: iGate, (WP Office) vers 4.04m - 1032
MIME-Version: 1.0
Message-Id: <31A37984.CF87.0809.000@mail.soemadison.wisc.edu>
Content-Type: TEXT/PLAIN; Charset=US-ASCII
Content-Transfer-Encoding: 7BIT

Well, I talked with Seymour about my paper. 1) He said he he had show it to Scheffler and they thought it was good. He indicated that it dovetailed nicely with what he and Scheffler have been working on. 2) He made no substantive suggestions, but did indicate his interest in having me cite a couple of pieces he (and in in one case Scheffler) had worked on. 2) He also said he had some suggestions about what he characterized as "attribution" which he said he would send along to me. 3) He took note of the fact that I quoted precisely the same passages from folks like Cohen and O'Day as he did, but didn't seem overly concerned about this. I expressed a willingness to edit certain quotes out if need be, but he seemed to feel no need for this.

Subject to my being responsive to the concerns he'd voiced, he didn't see a problem with our using the paper this summer.

Talk to you soon.

AMERICAN JEWISH ARCHIVES

1 copy
OK
Mat

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Ismar Schorsch
David Teutsch
Isadore Twersky
Bennett Yanowitz

Executive Director
Alan Hoffmann

July 9, 1996

Dear Goals Seminar Participants:

Enclosed is a draft of a paper that articulates some of the basic assumptions that guide the Goals Project. This paper draws heavily on the paper by Seymour Fox that you have already received and other articles that he has written over the years (see footnote 1 for some examples). Please try to read this essay in preparation for our first session.

We would also like to request that you send us a short (roughly four sentence) bio that we can include in the binder that will be given to participants at the beginning of the seminar. If you are in the United States, please fax it to Sarah Feinberg c/o CIJE in New York (212-532-2646). If you are in Israel, please fax it to me c/o the Mandel Institute in Jerusalem (02-567-1416).

Daniel Marom or I will try to be in touch with each of you by phone prior to the seminar to deal with any last minute concerns. In the meantime, all the best.

Sincerely,

Daniel

Daniel Pekarsky

15 East 26th Street, New York, NY 10010-1579 • Phone: (212)532-2360 • Fax: (212)532-2646

JUL. -09. 96(TUE) 13:58 C. I. J. E TEL:532 2646 532 2646 P. 002

THE PLACE OF VISION IN JEWISH EDUCATIONAL REFORM

Daniel Pekarsky

WORKING DRAFT
NOT FOR CIRCULATION

INTRODUCTION

Educators and supporters of education are often impatient with larger philosophical questions. Preoccupied with pressing problems that already require more than the limited time and energy they have available, it may well feel to them like a distraction to give thought to basic questions concerning the larger purposes that the educational process is meant to serve. This view, however, is mistaken. Attention to such questions is not a frill but an urgent imperative. There is little of more practical valuc than the possession of an inspiring vision that can inform the educational process. This is the basic thesis that will be developed in this paper.[1]

In their influential book THE SHOPPING MALL IIIGH SCHOOL, Arthur Powell et. al. develop a devastating critique of the American high school. At the heart of this critique is the suggestion that, as an institution, the high school has been suffering from what might be called "a failure of nerve". It has been singularly unable or unwilling to declare for any particular conception of what the process of education should be fundamentally about, with the result that what happens is not shaped by any coherent set of organizing principles which will give the enterprise a sense of direction. In their own words:

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[1]This paper has been influenced by ideas articulated over the last decade by Seymour Fox. Some were presented in his course on Jewish Education at the Jerusalem Fellows' Program, as well as in various talks and papers within the framework of the Mandel Institute's "Educated Jew" project. Others emerged in my deliberations with him and his associate, Daniel Marom. See, for example, Seymour Fox: "The Educated Jew: A Guiding Principle for Jewish Education," (1991); Seymour Fox and Israel Scheffler: "Jewish Education and Jewish Continuity: Prospects and Limitations" (in press); and Daniel Marom: "Developing Visions for Education: Rationale, Content and Comments on Methodology" (1994). These ideas will also appear in a forthcoming Mandel Institute book on alternative conceptions of Jewish education: "Visions of Learning: Variant Conceptions of an Ideal Jewish Education" (forthcoming).

> There is one last, unhappy reason that educators have not pointed to certain misdirections in the current crop of reforms: one cannot point to an incorrect direction without some sense of the correct one. But American school people have been singularly unable to think of an educational purpose they should not embrace...Secondary educators have tried to solve the problem of competing purposes by accepting all of them, and by building an institution that would accommodate the result.
>
> Unfortunately, the flip side of the belief that all directions are correct is the belief that no direction is incorrect -- which is a sort of intellectual bankruptcy. Those who work in secondary education have little sense of an agenda for studies. There is only a long list of subjects to be studied...But there is no answer to the query, Why these and not others? Approaching things this way has made it easy to avoid arguments and decisions about purpose, both of which can be troublesome -- especially in our divided and contentious society.

Powell et. al. conclude:

> High schools are unlikely to make marked improvement...until there is a much clearer sense of what is most important to teach and learn, and why, and how it can best be done.[2]

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[2]Powell, A.G., Farrar, E., and Cohen D. K., THE SHOPPING MALL HIGH SCHOOL, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1985, pp. 305-306.

The analysis of the high school found in THE SHOPPING MALL HIGH SCHOOL applies very aptly to large numbers of Jewish educating institutions. Like the high schools described by Powell et. al., these institutions drift along, unguided by any compelling sense of purpose.[3] To the extent that there are guiding ideals, they tend to be so vague as to give very little direction and to call forth little enthusiasm. What these slogan-like ideals do succeed in doing - and this is no mean achievement - is to give a multiplicity of individuals, representing very different beliefs, the illusion that "We are one!", that they can all participate in the same social and educational community. But the price paid for the failure to affirm a larger purpose that goes beyond vague rhetoric is that the enterprise of educating is rendered significantly less effective than it might be if educational institutions were animated by powerful visions of the kinds human beings and/or community that need to be cultivated.

As just suggested, by "vision" I am referring to an image or conception of the kind of human being and/or community that the educational process is to bring into being. "Visions" in this sense represent what might be called "existential visions" in that they identify what Jewish existence at its best in its social and/or individual dimensions looks like. Existential visions are to be found not only implicit in the social life of Jewish communities throughout the ages but also in writings of such diverse thinkers as Ahad Ha-Am, Martin Buber, Maimonides, Joseph B. Soloveitchik, and so on. Notice that an existential vision can be more or less filled-in: it might consist of a thick, ordered constellation of attitudes, skills, understandings, and dispositions; or it

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[3]For a lucid discussion of this point, see Seymour Fox, "Towards a General Theory of Jewish Education," in David Sidorsky (Ed.), THE FUTURE OF THE AMERICAN JEWISH COMMUNITY, Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1973, pp. 260-271.

might be limited to a particular attitude or way of approaching the world (and the skills and understandings that make this possible). There is no need to assume, then, that a vision is coextensive with a way of life.

"Existential vision" in the sense just articulated is to be distinguished from an "institutional vision" -- an image or conception of what an educational institution at its best should look like. When we speak of an educating institution as "a caring community" or as "a community organized around serious study of basic texts", we are identifying an "institutional vision" that identifies the fundamental organizing principles of institutional life. Though having an institutional vision is no doubt important, the worthwhileness of any institutional vision ultimately depends on its being anchored in an adequate existential vision. The reason for this is as simple as the old adage that "form follows function:" educational arrangements must be judged by their capacity to lead students towards those individual and social states of being - those constellations of attitude, knowledge, skill, and disposition - that are the raison d'etre of the enterprise. An adequate institutional vision is one that shows promise of optimizing progress towards the existential vision that undergirds the entire enterprise.[4]

THE BENEFITS OF VISION

Jewish education can be enriched by guiding existential visions (which I shall henceforth

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[4]Noteworthy in this connection is Fred Newmann's "Linking Restructuring to Authentic Student Achievement," PHI DELTA KAPPAN, February 1991, Volume 72, Number 6, pp. 458-463. Here Newmann argues that attempts to restructure educational institutions without careful attention to the purposes that these institutions are intended to serve are seriously ill-conceived; for it is precisely these purposes that need to guide the direction of restructuring efforts. See especially p. 459.

simply refer to as "visions") in at least three ways. The first pertains to the special predicament of American Jews at the end of the 20th century. The other two reflect general educational considerations that have a more universal application and do not assume this problematic predicament.

There is a need to introduce contemporary Jews to powerful visions of Jewish existence. During many historical periods, day-to-day experience in the family and the community sufficed to acquaint children with and to initiate them into meaningful forms of Jewish existence that enabled them to navigate their way through the world as Jews. During such periods, formal educating institutions could content themselves with supplementing this powerful informal education by passing on to the young particular skills and bodies of knowledge; it was not necessary for these institutions to take on the responsibility of presenting and initiating the young into richly meaningful forms of Jewish existence.

But our own age is very different. It is an era in which the young are no longer reared in environments saturated with Jewish rhythms, beliefs, and customs; and one can no longer count on informal socialization to assure the young's emergence as adults with a strong understanding of themselves as Jews. Indeed, many of them grow up with scant understanding of things Jewish, and certainly with little sense of the ways in which a life organized around Jewishly grounded understandings, activities, and values can answer some of their most fundamental needs as human beings. For human beings raised under such circumstances, human beings who are surrounded with a variety of images of the good life emanating from a multitude of quarters, remaining Jewish is no longer a destiny but a choice. And it is a choice the young are unlikely to make unless they meet up with spiritually, morally, and existentially compelling images of

Jewish existence.[5] It is a major job of educating institutions to put before the Jews of our generation these kinds of images. Not to do so, to continue instead with an ill-thought-out and superficial diet of "this and that", is to reinforce the message that flows from other quarters -- namely, that there is little or no reason to look to the Jewish universe in our search for existential and spiritual meaning.

To summarize: it is important for contemporary Jews to encounter powerful visions of a meaningful Jewish existence -- visions that in different ways address our basic needs for meaning, for a sense of place and time. Educational institutions have the potential to respond to this pressing social need by organizing themselves around such visions and offering their clients an in-depth opportunity to encounter and appreciate them. This said, it needs to be added that organizing our educational efforts around compelling visions of the kinds of human beings we hope to cultivate also makes good educational sense on more general grounds. Two of these grounds are discussed below.

To have a vision of the kind of person and/or community that is to be nurtured through the educational process is to have a powerful tool for making basic educational decisions. In Jewish as in general education, educational goals often have a kind of arbitrary character. In general education, we may laud "creativity"; in Jewish education, we may speak of the importance of "Love of Israel" or "Identification with the Jewish People;" but if one asks why these things are important, or even what they mean, it is apparent that they are often slogans without much intellectual content or justificatory foundation. The moment, however,

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[5]The formulation of the Jewish community's predicament that is articulated in this and the preceding paragraph is indebted to A TIME TO ACT, pp. 25-30.

educational goals are grounded in a conception of the kind of Jewish human being one hopes to cultivate, the situation changes dramatically. When this conception is one that we strongly believe in, educational goals that flow from this ideal acquire a twofold power they rarely have. First, the desirability of achieving these goals is readily understood; second, when they are interpreted by the larger vision, they lose their character as "slogans" and acquire a determinate intellectual content.

An example may help to illustrate these points. "Love of Israel" is on its face very vague as an educational goal: it is unclear what "Israel" refers to (Is it the land? Is it the State?); it is unclear by virtue of what Israel is worthy of our love; and it is unclear how such love is to be expressed. But this situation changes dramatically when "love of Israel" is understood as an element in a particular understanding of Judaism and of a meaningful Jewish existence. "Love of Israel" as interpreted by Martin Buber will no doubt be different from "Love of Israel" as understood by Rosenzweig, Ahad Ha-Am, or Soloveitchik. Viewed through the lens of any of these outlooks, it will be clear why and in what sense Israel is to be loved, how such love is to be expressed, and what understandings, skills, attitudes, and behaviors are requisite for appropriately participating in such love. What a moment ago had been an empty slogan now becomes an educational goal rich with intellectual, moral, and affective content -- the kind of goal that can give genuine direction to one's effort to educate.

A related point is this. When the human characteristics identified by educational goals are all anchored in a vision of the kind of person one hopes to educate, not only their relative importance but also their relationship to one another becomes readily apparent. Thus, for Professor Moshe Greenberg, love of learning Torah, "love of the fulfillment of the

commandments between man and God," "acceptance of the Torah as a guide in the area of interpersonal morality," and "a relationship to the Jewish people in all the lands of their dispersion" are all educational goals. But to have access to the vision that underlies these educational goals is to have the key that interprets each of them and explains how they are inter-related; it is, specifically, to understand that the encounter with the text is the existential source of the desiderata identified by the other goals, the foundation out of which the understanding of and commitment to them emerges.[6]

To have a powerful vision of the kind of person one hopes to nurture is, then, to have a rich source of well-articulated educational goals; and such goals, in turn, become a basis for educational decisions across a variety of areas. Consider, for example, the problem of personnel. There is much talk concerning the need for high quality, well-trained educators. But what it means for an educator to be "high quality" and "well-trained" itself depends substantially on one's conception of the desired outcome of the educational process. The kinds of knowledge, commitments, attitudes, and skills the educator needs to have will differ depending on whether one is guided by Heschel's, or Maimonides', or Ahad Ha-Am's vision of an appropriately educated Jewish human being. Thus, to commit oneself to a particular vision is to have a powerful tool in the selection of educational personnel, in the organization of in service education, in the activity of supervision, and so forth.

Analogous points can be made concerning curriculum, admissions policies, and the

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[6]Moshe Greenberg, "We Were as Those Who Dream: A Portrait of the Ideal Product of an Ideal Jewish education," unpublished manuscript, soon to be published by The Mandel Institute for the Advanced Study of Jewish Education.

organization of the social environment. In each case, to have a clear sense of what one hopes to achieve through the educational process affords lay and professional educational leaders as well as front-line educators an extraordinarily powerful tool in educational deliberations. It is, incidentally, a corollary of this analysis that a guiding vision is not just a desideratum along with high quality personnel and curriculum; rather, a guiding vision is indispensable in understanding what quality personnel and curricula are.[7]

Having a guiding vision and a set of educational goals anchored in this vision facilitates serious educational evaluation. Evaluation in the most important sense is an attempt to judge whether an institution is succeeding in accomplishing its fundamental purposes; and evaluation in this sense is important because, properly done, it enables policy-makers and practitioners to revisit existing patterns of practice with an eye towards improvement. But if it is to play this role, evaluation requires the identification of clear but meaningful educational goals: clearly defined but low-level goals, such as the ability to sight-read a page of Prayer book Hebrew, may be measurable and important but do not rise to the level of guiding educational purposes; one can be successful in attaining them without being successful in the larger sense - that is, without succeeding in cultivating those qualities of mind and heart that are at the center of the enterprise. On the other band, goals like "Love of Text Study", which seem to point to basic educational priorities, are often too vague to permit meaningful evaluation of our efforts to

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[7]The discussion in this section will be misleading if it leaves the impression that educating institutions must choose from among a menu of predesignated visions (each associated with a "great thinker") the one that is appropriate for it. Nothing could be further from the truth. What a menu of competing visions can offer a community, however, is an opportunity to clarify its own guiding vision through a process of struggling with the perspectives and insights at work in a number of very different views.

achieve them. What is needed are educational goals which are both clear enough to allow for real evaluation but also meaningfully tied to the institution's raison d'etre, so that the answer to the question, "Why is it important for the students to be successful relative to this goal?" could be readily answered to everyone's satisfaction. A guiding vision offers this critical mix of specificity and existential power.

The evidence from general education. Thus far, I have offered three general reasons for thinking that being organized around powerful visions of a meaningful Jewish existence will greatly enhance efforts at Jewish education. As the aforementioned references to the writings of Powell et al. and Newmann suggest, the proposed linkage between a sense of vision and educational effectiveness is not an idiosyncratic hypothesis, but reflects the considered view of some deeply thoughtful members of the educational community at large. There is also a measure of empirical support for this view which is worthy of attention.

Consider, in particular, Smith and O'Day's study of reform efforts in general education. The authors begin by observing the depressing results of most such efforts. Though there have been a flurry of reforms,

> evaluations of the reforms indicate only minor changes in the typical school, either in the nature of classroom practices or in achievement outcomes. For the most part, the processes and content of instruction in the public school classrooms of today are little different from what they were in 1980 or 1970.[8]

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[8]M.S. Smith and J. O'Day, "Systemic School Reform." In S.H. Fuhrman and B. Malen (Eds.), THE POLITICS OF CURRICULUM AND TESTING, p. 234.

Such findings do not, however, lead Smith and O'Day towards skepticism concerning the potential benefits of educational reform. The problem is not, they suggest, that educational reform is incapable of making a difference in educational outcomes but that most reform efforts have failed to focus on the right kinds of variables. To understand what the right kinds of variables are, they further suggest, we need to look at what characterizes those educational institutions which, according to research, are effective. When Smith and O'Day turn to this research, they identify a number of variables, including "a fairly stable staff, made up of enthusiastic and caring teachers who have a mastery both of the subject matter of the curriculum and a of a variety of pedagogies for teaching it." But among the elements of effective schools that they cite, pride of place goes to what we have been calling vision. They write:

> Beyond - or perhaps underlying - these resources available to the student, the most effective schools maintain a schoolwide vision or mission, and common instructional goals which tie the content, structure, and resources of the school together into an effective and unified whole (Coleman and Hoffer, 1987, Purkey and Smith, 1983). The school mission provides the criteria and rationale for the selection of curriculum materials, the purposes and the nature of school-based professional development, and the interpretation and use of student assessment. The particulars of the vision will differ from school to school, depending on the local context...However, if the school is to be successful in promoting active student involvement in learning, depth of understanding, and complex thinking - major goals of the reform movement - its vision must focus on teaching and

> learning rather than, for example, on control and discipline as in many schools today. In fact, the very need for special attention to control and discipline may be mitigated considerably by the promotion of successful and engaging learning experiences.[9]

In other words, as against those who argue for a focus on "practical matters" like higher salaries, better facilities, more in service education, Smith and O'Day defend the need for educating institutions and those who would reform them to step back and focus their energies on a question which sounds suspiciously philosophical: namely, what is our fundamental mission as an educating institution? What kind of a person possessed of what skills, dispositions, and attitudes should we be trying to nurture? To arrive at answers to such questions which will be compelling to the institution's key stake holders is to take a - perhaps the - decisive step forward on the road to institutional self-renewal.

RESPONDING TO TWO OBJECTIONS

In this section, two major objections to the position staked out above are addressed. One of them pertains to the feasibility of the proposal, and the other to its wisdom.

Is it feasible? Among those who admit that to have a guiding vision can be invaluable for an educating institution, some will nonetheless urge that in our present social circumstances it is unrealistic to expect Jewish educating institutions to arrive at guiding visions that will at

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[9]Smith and O'Day, p. 235.

once be shared, clear enough to guide practice, and sufficiently compelling to elicit genuine enthusiasm. The problem is that the constituencies served by many congregations and free-standing Jewish educating institutions are so diverse that it will be impossible to arrive at a shared vision that will be anything more than "Motherhood" or "Apple Pie." That is, only vague slogans will have the power to unite the various sub-groups that make up typical Jewish educating institutions outside of the ultra-Orthodox community; and the attempt to forge a vision that goes beyond this will inevitably push to the margins some of these sub-groups. For a number of reasons, the leaders of many institutions are unwilling to undertake a course of action that will lead to this kind of marginalization and alienation. For example, loss of membership could have unacceptable economic consequences; and there is sometimes the fear that marginalized families who withdraw may end up providing their children no Jewish education at all.

While it is hard to deny that this concern has some foundation in reality, it would also be a mistake to underestimate the progress that could be made by an institution willing to tackle the problem of vision in a thoughtful way that is sensitive to the views and anxieties of the membership. And while it may be true that any such process will probably be threatening to some groups, there are likely to be significant groups that will be relieved and excited finally to be wrestling in a serious way with questions concerning the nature and significance of Jewish existence -- especially if this effort shows promise of helping to revitalize the institution's educational program. More generally, it may be a mistake to let our fears concerning the consequences of trying to work towards greater clarity of vision prematurely paralyze efforts to do so.

But while such considerations might lead to a somewhat less shrill formulation of the institutional difficulties and risks associated with a decision to tackle the problem of vision, they do not suffice to dissolve this worrisome set of concerns. While carefully conceived efforts to work with existing institutions featuring diverse sub-groups need to be undertaken, it may in the end turn out that the extent of diversity represented in typical institutions will render it very difficult to arrive at powerful, shared visions that can guide the educational process.

If this is true, and if we also acknowledge the critical need for quality education in our present circumstances, perhaps we need to be thinking about radical structural alternatives to the way we have organized education in the American Jewish community. If it is unrealistic to think that an institution featuring a highly diverse population can go through a process that will lead it to crystallize a single vision that can guide its educational efforts, perhaps we have to begin thinking about creating an organizational universe in the Jewish community that will encourage like-minded individuals to gravitate towards educational institutions that reflect their shared convictions.

We might, for example, look to some of the voucher- or choice-plans that have been bandied about in recent discussions of general education. At present, membership in a congregation affords one the right to send one's children to that congregation's educational program -- a program that tries to be responsive to the diversity of the institution's constituency. Consider, however, a different possibility: suppose that membership in any congregation in a community would afford one the right to educate one's child in any of several educating institutions found in the community, and that an effort was made to ensure that each of these institutions represented a distinctive ideological orientation. The effect of such a policy might

well be to draw individuals with similar ideological orientations into the same educational environment, making it possible to organize education around a vision that could elicit the enthusiastic support of the population it serves. I don't claim that dissolving the currently strong tie between congregation and congregational school is unproblematic or necessarily wise; but I do want to suggest that if we are to create substantially more vision-informed Jewish educating institutions than are now to be found, we may well need to give serious consideration to routes which disrupt existing patterns.

Is it wise? Consider, now, a second set of objections to the proposal that we organize Jewish education around compelling visions of a meaningful Jewish existence. The thrust of these objections is that even if we could do so, it would not necessarily be desirable.

One variant of this objection views the effort to organize educational efforts around visions of the ideal product of a Jewish education as an assault on the autonomy of the student. According to this objection, a vision-guided institution, an institution organized down to its very details along the lines of a particular vision, is a kind of "total institution" which does not offer the child an opportunity to taste and decide among alternative forms of a meaningful Jewish life.

There is more than one way to respond to this objection. One of them takes issue with a tendency within a certain species of liberalism to resist passing on to the young any substantive ideas concerning the good life -- except those values, attitudes, and dispositions that will enable the young to choose their own way of life and to be respectful of the liberty of others. As Richard Hare and others have argued, however, there need be no real contradiction between initiating the young into a particular form of life and meaningfully equipping them with the tools for autonomous choice. Indeed, the former may be a condition of the latter.

This last point may be especially true in our own time. As intimated earlier, a serious autonomous choice between a well-developed form of Jewish existence and various alternatives implicit in everyday life in modern, or post-modern, Western culture may only be possible if children encounter and have a real opportunity to taste an approach to Jewish existence that is more than a miscellany of customs, vague sentiments, and slogans. But in our own situation it is unlikely that they will encounter such an approach unless educational institutions set themselves up to systematically embody one or another such vision of a meaningful Jewish existence. Given the world in which the students live, the result will not be indoctrination but genuine choice.

This answer may not satisfy some species of liberals. In the name of the individual's autonomy, such individuals will argue that educational institutions must set themselves the challenge of equipping the young to choose from among a variety of competing images of a meaningful Jewish existence, rather than seeking to initiate them into any one of them.

In principle, I believe there is nothing wrong with this ideal as a guide to education. In practice, however, it is a difficult educational ideal to implement meaningfully - especially given the time- and resource-constraints that characterize Jewish education today. To undertake this approach meaningfully it is insufficient for educator and students to stand above a mix of alternatives and to scrutinize them from afar; for under these circumstances each would remain superficially understood and appreciated. A meaningful decision concerning a particular form of Jewish life requires a measure of appreciation "from the inside". Thus, an educational system organized around the principle that the young should make their own choices among different forms of Jewish existence would need to offer serious opportunities for in-depth acquaintance, and even for a significant taste, of more than one of them. Since this is hard enough to

accomplish with even a single approach to Jewish existence, the odds are that the approach recommended would turn out to be superficial in its representation of the alternatives, such that the learners would not come away satisfied with any of them.

Consider, now, a very different reason for thinking it unwise to organize education around specific visions of a meaningful Jewish existence. According to this objection, when educators view their role as preparing the child for some future state of being, they tend not to do justice to the child's immediate needs, concerns, and interests; but it is precisely these needs, concerns, and interests that are the springboard to genuine education. The educational challenge, say these critics, is not to draw the child ever closer to a predesignated form of Jewish existence, but to respond to the child's developmental and other needs in ways that further the child's Jewish growth. To respond to the child's needs and authentic concerns in a meaningful way in a Jewish setting, and to do so in ways that expand the child's Jewish understandings and self-understandings and that communicate to the child that Jewish tradition can address his or her needs in meaningful ways, is quite a sufficient challenge.

I am in many ways very sympathetic to the spirit of this objection, understood as a critique of an approach to education that bypasses the living concerns and questions of children in order to prepare them to become certain kinds of adults. But in no way do I view the positive view that informs this objection as incompatible with the position I have staked out. Among other things, a vision of what Judaism is and a conception of where one hopes the student will be at the end of the educational process need not be used to suppress the child's needs but to

interpret them and to suggest ways of responding to them.[10] There is not in the end an irreducible incompatibility between having a guiding vision and responding authentically to the learner's living concerns.

CONCLUSION

It is no secret that the widespread interest and financial support that Jewish education has recently enjoyed have their origins in anxiety concerning Jewish continuity. If education is to impact positively on this troubling problem, it will be because it has led its clientele to a vivid appreciation of the ways in which Judaism and Jewish life offer rich opportunities for spiritual, social, and intellectual growth. But if education is to succeed in this effort, it must go beyond a parve offering of skills, information or even "positive experiences". It is imperative that educating institutions courageously move beyond this kind of vague neutrality and declare themselves for particular visions of a meaningful Jewish existence, which they will use as a basis for organizing the educational experience of the young. Only if and when educating institutions offer students, both young and old, entree into forms of Jewish existence that they will recognize to be existentially, intellectually, and spiritually meaningful, will education be responsive to our present predicament. It goes without saying that when educating institutions organize

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[10]See in this connection Dewey's THE CHILD AND THE CURRICULUM, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956. Here Dewey discusses the ways in which an in-depth understanding of the existing adult civilization ought - and ought not - to inform the process of education. Dewey decidedly rejects the notion that one should think of education as a step by step process of transmitting, piece by piece elements of this adult civilization. Rather, he recommends that educators use their understanding of this civilization as a lens through which to interpret the capacities, skills, and interests of the child, and to suggest ways in which these characteristics can be built upon and directed.

themselves around such visions, they will also become educationally more serious and thoughtful learning environments.

In closing, it must be stressed that a belief in the importance of vision does not entail any particular approach to the development of vision. On this matter there are many different views. There are some who may believe that such a process begins with, or at some stage requires, an activity called "visioning". There are others who believe that explicit attempts to formulate a guiding vision should not come until after there have been extensive small-scale problem-solving efforts that engage varied stake holders in new ways and effectively transform the institution's culture.[11] Still others might feel that progress towards vision is best assured not by some publicly announced effort in this direction but by approaching in the right spirit the challenges that arise in the institution's day to day life. And, as noted above, there will be others who urge that the amount of diversity found in many typical institutions is so substantial that it will be impossible to arrive at a vision that will simultaneously be shared and inspiring, and that therefore the attempt to nurture the growth of vision-guided institutions must focus on strategies that will encourage new kinds of institutions to come into being. Which, if any, of these views is meritorious, in general or in particular social contexts, is a matter of great educational importance. Attention to this matter must be a principal focus of our energies if we are, in John Dewey's phrase, to find our way out of educational confusion.

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[11]See, in this connection, Michael Fullan, CHANGE FORCES, New York: Falmer Press, 1993, pp. 67-68.

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Nessa Rapoport, 74671,3370
Barry, 73321,1221
Alan, 73321,1220
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DATE: 1/2/97 4:03 PM

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id QAA19940; Thu, 2 Jan 1997 16:02:45 -0500
Received: from mail.soemadison.wisc.edu by post.soemadison.wisc.edu (SMI-8.6/SMI-SVR4)
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I need advice about how to proceed with this possibility. Should I publish the "Vision" I gave last summer in the journal, as is proposed in the attached letter that I'm forwarding to you -- or just wait til we put something out ourselves as a CIJE piece? Perhaps we should do both.

I'd be interested in your thoughts.
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Content-Transfer-Encoding: 7BIT

Date: 01/02/1997 01:42 pm (Thursday)
Subject: publication possibility

To: Presenters of Papers at the 1996 Workshop on Research in Jewish Education.

FROM: Barry, 73321,1221
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Nessa Rapoport, 74671,3370
DATE: 1/22/97 9:20 PM

Re: goals publication

Hi

Danny you asked the following:

"I need advice about how to proceed with this possibility. Should I publish the "Vision" I gave last summer in the journal, as is proposed in the attached letter that I'm forwarding to you -- or just wait til we put something out ourselves as a CIJE piece? Perhaps we should do both."

My feeling is that it's good for cije to get stuff published about our work,EVEN THOUGH this Journal is not so great. I think the real question (for Nessa too) is are we going to also publish it separately and if so does that preclude submitting it to JEWISH EDUCATION?

barry

From: Michael Zeldin and Stuart Schoenfeld

Date:

Re: Special Issue of The Journal of Jewish Education

The Journal of Jewish Education, which is now under the editorship of Dr.Bernard Ducoff, is expanding its publication of research. We are pleased to inform you that the Research Networkhas reached an agreement that authors of papers presented at the 1996 Research Network Workshop are invited to submit their papers for review, with the intention that a special issue of the journal will be composed of articles based on these papers. Authors are encouraged, where appropriate, to revise their papers based on feedback from the conference, before submission. Papers should be no longer than 20 double spaced pages.

Those who wish to submit papers should do so by February 15. Papers should be in the scholarly style of The American Association for the Study of Education. Please note that papers will be reviewed and that this communication is NOT an offer of pubication.

Papers in Israel should be sent to

Prof. Stuart Schoenfeld
c/o Melton Centre for Jewish Education in the Diaspora
Hebrew University
Jerusalem

Papers in America should be sent to

Prof. Michael Zeldin
Rhea Hirsch School Of Education
Hebrew Union College
3077 University Avenue
Los Angeles, Ca 90007

The network executive is pleased that, while many of the papers presented at previous network conferences have been published, we now have the opportunity to publish a group of papers together. We hope that this will mark the beginning of a tradition of publishing papers from Network Conferences in a single volume each year.

If you have questions, please email either Michael (ZELDIN@BCF.USC.EDU) or Stuart (MSSCHOEN@PLUTO.MSCC.HUJI.AC.IL).

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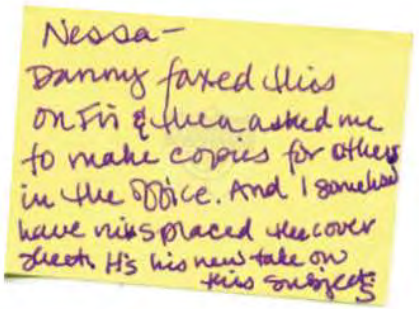
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Danny faxed this
on Fri & Thea asked me
to make copies for others
in the office. And I somehow
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sheet. It's his new take on
this subject.

VISION AND EDUCATION

Daniel Pekarsky

need two examples for each idea - pref. jewish & secular
See p. 15

Introduction. While virtually nobody challenges the assumption that education, both general and Jewish, is in need of reform, controversy surrounds the question, "What does adequate education look like - and how do we get there?" Among the many responses to this question is one that gives pride of place to the concept of vision, and it is this answer that I propose to examine in this paper. "Vision", it is argued, operates as a kind of Aristotelian telos: not only does it specify the direction of reform, it also, if taken seriously, pulls practice in its direction. Below I argue that while the case for taking vision seriously is very strong, its power as a tool for enhancing the quality of education depends on understandings and distinctions which are often ignored in favor of more simplistic understandings of what vision is, how it arises, and the role it plays in the life of an institution.[1]

too weak

- how do you define 'Vision'? p 6?

earlier in paper?

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[1] I want to acknowledge at the outset that my discussion of these matters has been richly influenced by ideas articulated over many years by Professor Seymour Fox. Some were presented in his course on Jewish education at the Jerusalem Fellows Program, as well as in various talks and papers developed under the auspices of the Mandel Institute's "Educated Jew Project". Others emerged in my deliberations with him and his associate, Daniel Marom. See, for example, Seymour Fox, "Toward a General Theory of Jewish Education," in David Sidorsky, ed., THE FUTURE OF THE AMERICAN JEWISH COMMUNITY, 1973; Seymour Fox, "The Educated Jew: A Guiding Principle for Jewish Education" (1991); Seymour Fox and Israel Scheffler, "Jewish Education and Jewish Continuity: Prospects and Limitations," and Daniel Marom, "Developing Visions for Education: Rationale, Content, and Comments on Methodology" (1994).

Locating vision in educational planning and practice. In more than one of the Dialogues, Socrates is mocked by his interlocutors for his and other philosophers' preoccupation with ideas. As captured by Euripides in THE CLOUDS, philosophers are viewed as luftmenschen, engaged in reflections that have little to do with the real world in which human beings strive to survive and to flourish. Careful attention to ideas, it is suggested, has little to offer us in our quest for a better life down here.

Certainly this idea resonates strongly with modern, Western sensibilities. We associate progress not with philosophical reflection but with the practical know-how that has produced tools and ways of doing things that have transformed the face of the earth. We, too, are likely to be impatient with more philosophical types who ask us to step back and think in a studied way about the why's and wherefore's of what we do. It seems like a distraction from the important things that need to get done. Certainly, this tendency is very pronounced among educators. Bombarded by many more demands than they can reasonably respond to and faced with daily challenges that often feel impossible, they are typically hungry for new techniques to teach this or that, to manage a group of students, to create a sense of community in a classroom or a school, or to increase SAT scores; but limited energy and skepticism conspire to make them far less eager to step back and reflect on the basic aims of the enterprise they are engaged in.

how do we know this?

That this is a serious mistake has been affirmed by a growing chorus of voices that recognize that there is a much deeper source of organizational inefficiency than a failure to adopt powerful management techniques, or of poor teaching than a failure to adopt the latest pedagogical wisdom. This deeper source of waste is often the failure to have developed a powerful vision, a clear conception of what it is one is trying to accomplish. In the absence of such a vision, organizational patterns, curriculum, and other critical dimensions of an institution's life are dictated by tradition, by fad, or by the idiosyncratic ideas of particular players; and under such circumstances, it is predictable that the result will be a kind of hodge-podge of practices, many of which may be at cross-purposes. With a clear vision of what one is trying to achieve, on the other hand, the educator has a powerful tool for deciding how best to allocate scarce resources and how to shape the physical and social environment in a thoughtful and systematic way.

A superb example of the way clarity of vision can enhance effectiveness comes from a recent and widely cited study of the phenomenal growth of Willow Creek Church outside Chicago.[2] Deeply committed to the church's religious mission, and concerned about the many individuals who seemed reluctant to come through the church's doors, the leaders of this church decided to do

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[2] James Mellado. Harvard Business School Case entitled "Willow Creek Community Church", Harvard College, 1991.

everything they could, consistent with the church's religious mission, to bring these outsiders in. After doing careful research designed to clarify why people stay away, they set about systematically -- and, it turned out, very effectively -- adapting church practices to what they were learning. Of particular interest is the following: when the research suggested that the symbol of the Cross made potential attendees uncomfortable, the leadership decided to remove the symbol of the Cross from Sanctuary in which religious services were held. It would be a mistake to view this move as either pandering or manipulation. Rather, it illustrates how clarity of vision enables an institution to distinguish between what is essential and inessential, between basic purposes and strategy, in a way that powerfully serves its purposes. For the leadership of the Willow Creek Church, the essence of the Christian message is not the Cross but the ideas which the Cross points to and, in some communities, calls forth. But where the symbol, which is ultimately a tool for invoking the message, interferes with receiving the message, it can reasonably be cast aside -- even though, for people not wholly clear on what the essence of Christianity is (or who subscribe to a different conception of Christianity), this might seem to border on sacrilege.[3]

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[3] As my colleague Barry Holtz points out, while instructive, this example maps imperfectly onto Jewish religious life. The reason for this is that, at least within traditional Judaism, the relationship between religious ritual and symbolism, on the one hand, and religious insight and experience, on the other cannot be reduced to means/end or strategy/mission; on the contrary, qua Halacha, the ritual acts and the objects they involve are themselves invested with inherent religious significance and cannot simply be cast aside if they don't seem "to work". While

you don't say how for those who don't kn + case (cross wasn't + only thing)

As this example illustrates, clarity of vision can prove an indispensable tool in educational planning; and recent attention to the importance of vision is salutary. At the same time, the discourse surrounding this subject is often contaminated by serious misconceptions and by a failure to make a number of essential distinctions. Attention to these matters is critical if the movement to take vision seriously in education is not to be counter-productive; several of them are addressed below.

1. Institutional visions and existential visions.

Discussions of vision are often weakened by a failure to distinguish between what I will call existential and institutional visions. An institutional vision is a conception of what, at its best, an institution is like. When someone describes an educational environment as "a learning community" or a "caring community", or a "community dedicated to Tikkun Olam", this person is identifying an institutional vision. An existential vision, on the other hand, is [a conception of the kind of human being an educational institution is hoping to cultivate, a conception of the ideal graduate or community of graduates.]

Holtz's point is important, it does not entirely undermine the applicability of the Willow Creek example to Jewish contexts; for it is not uncommon for practices which do not have the status of Halacha to be treated as though they were sacred and inviolable even when they may subvert rather than help realize institutional purposes.

The distinction between institutional and existential visions is important because, I submit, in an educational context institutional visions need to be driven by existential visions. As Fred Newmann has argued[4], educational reformers sometimes talk as though there are institutional forms that are inherently worthwhile, whereas in fact educational forms need themselves to be evaluated against a higher standard -- namely, the kind of human being and community that the institution hopes to cultivate through the process of education. The question ought not to be, "What is an exemplary educational environment?", but, rather, "What is an exemplary educational environment in view of our aspiration to bring us closer to a certain kind of community and/or to cultivate certain kinds of human beings?"[5]

By this I do not intend to suggest that it is necessarily a mistake to approach the question of vision in an educating community by starting with the question, "What would the educational environment of our dreams look like?", for it may be that this question concerning institutional vision will have the power to elicit imaginative responses that will ultimately lead

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[4] Fred Newmann, "Linking Restructuring to Authentic Student Achievement," PHI DELTA KAPPAN, February 1991, Volume 72, Number 6, pp. 458 - 463.

[5] The point is analogous to Dewey's suggestion that it is a mistake to regard any particular curriculum or educational environment as inherently educative. It all depends, he urges, on the needs and capacities of the person being taught. In light of our own analysis, we would add that it also depends on what our aspirations are. See EXPERIENCE AND EDUCATION, Ch. 2, "Criteria of Experience."

to thoughtful reflection concerning the institution's guiding existential vision. But I do mean to suggest that, insofar as we are talking about education, the justification of a particular kind of environment (or institutional vision) ultimately needs to be anchored in a conception of the kind of human being and community that it is designed to give rise to.

2. A vision is not a statement but an informing idea that is [shared, clear, and compelling.]

As is well known, typically what are called "visions" turn out to be statements written down on paper which are then ignored, except perhaps on ceremonial occasions or in public relations efforts. But it is a misnomer to call such statements "visions". At best, such a statement is a capsule summary, or record, of a vision that is at work in the institution. The real vision, that is, is an idea, a conception, that suffuses the life of the institution, giving it [coherence, direction, and meaning.]

A vision in this sense has three characteristics: first, it is shared by critical stake holders.[6] Second, these stake holders find the vision compelling: a vision that does not call forth the enthusiasm of the participants and stimulate them to action is not, at least for these participants, a genuine vision.

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[6] While this paper's limited focus precludes attention to questions concerning the basis for designating "the critical stake holders", this is a very important matter.

Finally, an adequate vision must be clear and concrete enough to offer genuine guidance in making educational decisions -- for this, after all, is a substantial part of the raison d'etre for having an informing vision. As an example, to say that we are committed to an ideal of "life-long learning" will not give us much guidance as an institution until we have specified the kind of learning we have in mind: is it the kind of "learning from experience" that Dewey has in mind, or a life-long love affair with "Great Books" understood as particular kind of encounter, or some other kind of learning? Only if we provide ourselves with this kind of specificity, will we be in a position to identify the kinds of skills, sensibilities, attitudes, and understandings we should be cultivating and the kinds of experiential or literary texts than will prove apt vehicles for this cultivation.[7]

Before leaving the subject visions that are "shared, clear, and compelling", it needs to be stressed that the fact that these three adjectives can live happily together within two quotation marks does not mean that they always live happily together in the real world. While the probability of a happy marriage is quite high to the extent that the major constituencies that make up the institution represent a community of outlook and aspiration, the

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[7] While essential, this point concerning the need for clarity of vision should not be taken to imply that such clarity suffices to determine educational arrangements. It does so only in conjunction with a host of other assumptions concerning such varied matters as the nature of human growth and motivation, available resources, and the nature of the community in which the institution and its clientele are situated.

more heterogeneous these constituencies are the more difficult it will be to achieve a vision that is simultaneously shared, compelling, and clear. Typically, the tendency is to sacrifice clarity and concreteness for rhetoric that is so general that everyone can assent to it. While this has the advantage of circumventing divisive disagreements, it has the disadvantage of leaving the institution with a vision that is too vague to offer much concrete guidance or to call forth much enthusiasm.[8]

3. A commitment to the importance of vision is not reducible to a commitment to a specific set of activities called "visioning".

When it is urged that educating institutions need to be informed by compelling visions, it is often assumed that this entails guided activities, sometimes referrred to as "visioning", which lead to having a vision. This visioning-process is sometimes viewed as an intensive process requiring a day or two of serious work, and sometimes as a more long-term process.

Not a footnote
s 'how' question
either longer
or not at all

[8] This should not be heard as a recommendation that an institution at this stage of vagueness should immediately proceed to specify its vision more concretely. To recommend this would betray lack of sensitivity to the delicate balance that exists among the various groups that make up an institution and of the role sometimes played by vagueness in enabling them to share in a common life. To force clarification of an institution's guiding vision at the wrong time and in the wrong way could prove devastating. On the other hand, normal anxiety concerning the possible dangers of pushing for greater clarity is pathological to the extent that it shuts off in advance the possibility of discovering a well-timed, well-conceived, and fruitful way to reduce vagueness to a point where it is less crippling to the process of education.

Either way, the assumption is that it is made up of a series of activities that in the end give rise to having a vision which will then guide future efforts.

While activities expressly designed to arrive at a shared vision may sometimes contribute to its achievement, it needs to be stressed that the link between "visioning" and "vision" is much weaker than is often thought. In the first place, some institutions may have a compelling vision without ever having gone through a process of visioning. In the second place, it is far from clear that any such set of activities will always or even usually suffice to give rise to a vision in the strong sense I have specified. In the third place, it may be that the best way for an institution to arrive at a clear, shared, and compelling vision is through a process that is much more indirect than what is typically associated with visioning. As Michael Fullan has observed, an institution needs to be in a particular readiness-state to tackle the problem of vision explicitly and frontally, a state that presupposes a set of cultural norms that themselves only arise over a period of time; often, the best way for an institution to move towards a compelling existential or institutional vision may be to begin with addressing a variety of less daunting problems in ways that bring colleagues to work and think together in new ways.[9]

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[9] See Michael Fullan, CHANGE FORCES, (New York: Falmer Press, 1993), esp. pp. 28 ff.

There are, incidentally, some who would offer a more radical objection to the suggestion that educating institutions work towards a powerful vision through any kind of visioning-exercises. Their objection is grounded not just in beliefs about the ineffectiveness of such exercises, but in a deeper pessimism concerning our ability - through any recognized interventions - to stimulate greater vision-drivenness in problematic institutions. Those holding this view might argue that the way for a community to achieve vision-driven institutions is to give up the effort to change its existing institutions, and, instead, to establish two mechanisms: the first, a mechanism that encourages the emergence of a variety of institutions, each organized around a different vision; and the second, a mechanism that allows educators and students to self-select into these institutions based on the appeal of a particular vision.

Confusing; drop it (you know more than this paper can show) objections section or: they'll discover this in the effort to define their vision

4. <u>Informed</u> values-clarification.

While, as just suggested, the process of becoming more vision-driven cannot be reduced to a set of activities associated with "visioning", it is fair to say that the process of becoming more vision-driven does involve efforts to reflect on the institution's why's and wherefore's. Certainly the hope is that over time the institution's members will grow increasing clear concerning what they are committed to. It is therefore critical that an institution struggling to become more fully vision-driven

provide its members, both individually and collectively, with opportunities to step back and clarify what it is they think they are committed to.

It is, however, important to add that this process of clarifying the stake holders' commitments should go beyond exercises designed to surface their existing, if as yet unarticulated, beliefs. Two additional inputs will enrich the process of individual and institutional self-clarification. One of these inputs is critical questioning. As even a cursory look at Socratic dialogues will suggest, the success of Socrates in stimulating his interlocutors to develop more adequate views depends not just on his ability to elicit their existing systems of beliefs but also on his posing questions which stimulate internal doubt concerning the credibility, implications, and internal consistency of theses articulated belief-systems. Those who would help an educating institution strive for a more adequate vision could learn much from his example: there may be many occasions on which an individual charged with helping an institution develop or refine its vision can fruitfully play the role of a Socratic gadfly.[10]

elab.; this presumes a very educated audience

A second way of turning the process of values-clarification into a more deeply informed process is through infusing it with

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[10] I am indebted to Professor Israel Scheffler for the suggestion, voiced in the context of a Mandel Institute/CIJE consultation, that the individual facilitating an institution's efforts to become more vision-driven sometimes plays the role of a Socratic gadfly.

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the views of individuals who have ruminated long and hard about the questions at hand; for the encounter with such views has the potential to raise the participants' understanding of what is at stake.[11] This point is actually a presupposition of much that goes on in teaching. As an example, if I am interested in my students developing a rich understanding of what is entailed by a commitment to cultivate autonomous persons, I certainly will encourage them to unearth their existing views on what it means to be autonomous. But I will also insist that they encounter the views of a range of thinkers (including Plato, Kant, Rousseau, Dostoyevsky's Grand Inquisitor, A.S. Neill, and John Dewey) who can illuminate the question at hand. In insisting on this, my working assumption is not that their own views need to resemble any one of these thinkers, but that the encounter with the ideas of such thinkers will challenge and deepen their own thinking. Analogous considerations apply to institutions seeking to clarify their own identities. It goes without saying that finding ways - contexts, strategies, formulations - to introduce such intellectual inputs so that they awaken thought rather than occasioning either slavish acceptance or the feeling that attending to them is a distraction from serious business is a

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[11] This is one of the seminal insights at the heart of the Mandel Institute's "Educated Jew" Project, a project which has sponsored the development of powerful and competing visions of an educated Jew, visions which can be used to stimulate deep reflection among a variety of constituencies concerning the aims of Jewish education. These writings will be published in an important Mandel Institute volume entitled, "VISIONS OF LEARNING: VARIANT CONCEPTIONS OF AN IDEAL JEWISH EDUCATION" (forthcoming).

difficult challenge. [12]

5. The dialectic of vision and practice.

There is a dangerous tendency to think of a vision as something which, once developed, becomes a fixed template used to make all decisions, large or small. Like any set of principles, the ideas at work in an educational vision evolve - are re-interpreted, qualified, and revised in various ways - in the course of trying to apply them to ever-changing situations that offer new challenges and opportunities. A living vision can perhaps best be compared to the U.S. Constitution: over more than two centuries the vision articulated there has been shaped and reshaped in numerous ways, in part by the Congress (in framing new Amendments) and largely by the Courts, which have been charged with having to interpret the language of the original vision under circumstances sometimes unimagined by the original framers. There is thus an on-going interaction between vision and practice: whereas the vision gives direction to practice, practice serves to interpret and correct the vision. Through this process, both vision and practice continue to be enriched and

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[12] To be fair, it should be noted that leaders of the values-clarification movement urge practitioners of what they call values-clarification to do more than elicit from those they work with what they already believe. Their questions are designed to encourage their clients to reflect on the implications of their commitments and on the genuineness of their commitment to them; but this process stops far short of the kind of critical questioning encouraged by a more Socratic guide; and it does not involve introducing the student to competing views that have promise of deepening his/her understanding of what is at stake. See Sidney Simon, et. al., VALUES AND TEACHING.

remain living.

6. The continuum of means and ends.

In speaking of a continuum of means and ends, John Dewey intended to suggest the multitude of ways in which means and ends inter-penetrate, with the one shading into and even becoming the other. While this is not the occasion to recall Dewey's account in its totality, it is pertinent to remember his suggestion that instead of thinking of the present as a means of realizing some distant future end, we would do well to think of the future end that we set before us as itself a means of making the immediate present more meaningful. Applied to the question of vision, Dewey's point would seem to be this: the function of a vision is to give those who embrace it an invaluable tool (a means) for making sense of and organizing the present, for turning present activity into a richly meaningful activity. A vision that is incapable of giving order, direction, and meaning to present activity (or, as Dewey would say, of liberating this activity) is a problematic vision.

7. Visions are not necessarily systematically articulated.

A corollary of the preceding points is that an institution's informing vision need not have been explicitly articulated to be effective. To believe otherwise is to confuse the presence of a belief or conception with its articulation. Language provides an

instructive example. Our speech is informed by and conforms to a variety of grammatical rules even though we have never stopped to articulate them and, more strongly, even though we may be incapable of articulating them. Similarly, in institutional life, various principles and convictions may be shaping day-to-day life and decisions without anybody having stopped to systematically articulate what these informing ideas are.[13] Borrowing from a tradition in the field of curriculum, we might describe such a vision as "a vision-in-use" to distinguish it from the institution's "official vision".

Some of the most interesting educating institutions the world has known have had a strong vision-in-use but no official or explicit vision. Certain fundamental ideas concerning the character of an educated person were tacitly accepted and taken for granted by the institution's supporting constituencies, and they provided criteria for determining educational priorities and other educational decisions. Attention to vision-in-use or tacit visions serves to remind us that explicitly formulated visions do not necessarily arise and are not necessarily useful, except under certain social circumstances. [Perhaps it is only when an institution has lost its sense of direction, and all that remains is a miscellany of practices not tied together by anything of larger significance, that it becomes important to work towards an

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[13] The writings of Michael Oakshott (for example, RATIONALISM IN POLITICS) and Michael Polanyi (for example, PERSONAL KNOWLEDGE) offer numerous examples of this point in a variety of fields.

articulated vision.

8. "Vision-driven" is not equivalent to "totalitarian" or "indoctrinatory".

Phrases like "vision-driven institution" suggest something sinister to some people. Is not, so the concern gets expressed, an institution systematically organized down to its very details around a particular conception of what is important or of what human beings at their best are like a totalitarian or indoctrinatory institution?

The answer to this question is that there is no simple and intrinsic relationship between an institution's being vision-driven and its being indoctrinatory.[14] For one thing, one can readily imagine an educating institution organized around a vision of human beings as autonomous, or self-determining individuals. Social forms, physical organization, norms, hiring and admissions policies, etc. would all be shaped with an eye towards nurturing human beings who are open-minded and who think for themselves in both theoretical and practical matters.

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[14] Of course, much depends here on what one means by "indoctrination", a subject about which much has been written. See, for example, I. Snook, ed., THE CONCEPT OF INDOCTRINATION, and I. Snook, INDOCTRINATION AND EDUCATION. Those concerned with the indoctrinatory character of vision-driven institutions seemed to be troubled by their sense that such institutions aim to induct their members into a particular way of life in ways that by-pass their rationality. As I suggest in the main body of the paper, there is nothing intrinsic to vision-driven institutions which makes them especially vulnerable to this charge. But this is a matter that may merit more attention.

Secondly, whether a vision-driven institution is indoctrinatory depends substantially on the social context in which it is embedded. For children growing up in families and communities that are ~~actively~~ Jewish in only a very attenuated way, a Jewish summer camp or a Day School that is systematically organized around a particular vision of Jewish life does not indoctrinate students in that way of life; rather, it gives them a deep appreciation of a way of life that is very different from they have known, a taste that would be impossible were the camp or school not organized in this way.[15] Under such circumstances, the vision-driven character of the institution serves not to indoctrinate its clientele but -- the very opposite!! - to enrich the living options from which they will make life-choices.

Conclusion. Quality education is the product of a multitude of circumstances, some of which are potentially under our control and many of which are not. What I have been referring to as a guiding existential vision is one of those essential elements which, more than many others, is potentially at least substantially under our control. But attention to vision is likely to bear fruit only to the extent that it is accompanied by a subtle and differentiated understanding of what vision is and how it figures in the educational process, as well as by the kind of critical thinking and sound judgment that will illuminate the

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[15] For an excellent discussion of the genesis and character of Camp Ramah as a vision-driven institution, see Seymour Fox, (forthcoming).

content and implications of particular visions. The importance of such judgment and thinking points us to one of many reasons why those seeking to reform existing educating institutions or to establish new ones will always need people like Ackie. more on him

Unfortunately, they are all-too-rare.

Downe

Nessie,
This is next draft.

VISION AND EDUCATION

Daniel Pekarsky

Introduction

While virtually nobody challenges the assumption that education, both general and Jewish, is in need of reform, controversy surrounds the question, "What does an adequate education look like - and what do we need to do to make it a reality?" Among the many responses to this question is one that gives pride of place to the concept of vision. "Vision", it is argued, operates as a kind of Aristotelian telos: not only does it specify the right direction of reform, it also, if taken seriously, pulls practice in this direction. But while the case for taking vision seriously is, as I argue in the first part of this paper, very strong, its power as a tool for enhancing the quality of education depends on understandings and distinctions which are often ignored in favor of more simplistic understandings of what vision is, how it arises, and the role it can play in the life of an educating institution.[1]

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[1] At the outset I want to acknowledge that my thinking on these matters has been richly influenced by ideas articulated over many years by Professor Seymour Fox in varied venues that include his course on Jewish education at the Jerusalem Fellows Program and various other talks and papers. Other ideas emerged in my deliberations both with him and his associate, Daniel Marom. See, for example, Seymour Fox, þToward a General Theory of Jewish Education,þ in David Sidorsky, ed., THE FUTURE OF THE AMERICAN JEWISH COMMUNITY (New York: Basic Books, 1973); Seymour Fox, þThe Educated Jew: A Guiding Principle for Jewish Educationþ (Internal Mandel Institute Document, 1991); Seymour Fox and Israel Scheffler, þJewish Education and Jewish Continuity: Prospects and Limitations,þ (Jerusalem: Mandel Institute, 1996)

Not for Circulation

Locating vision in educational planning and practice

In more than one of the early Platonic Dialogues, Socrates is mocked by his interlocutors for his and other philosophers' preoccupation with ideas. Similarly, in THE CLOUDS, Euripides portrays philosophers as useless human beings engaged in reflections that have little to do with the real world in which people strive to survive and flourish. Careful attention to ideas, it is suggested, has little to contribute to our quest for a better life down here.

Certainly this idea resonates strongly with modern, Western sensibilities. Today progress is associated not with philosophical reflection but with the practical know-how that has produced tools and ways of doing things that have transformed the face of the earth. Like many of Socrates' contemporaries, many of us, too, tend to be impatient with philosophical types who ask us to step back and think in a detached way about the why's and wherefore's of what we do. It seems like a distraction from the so-called important things that need to get done. Certainly, this tendency is very pronounced among educators. Bombarded by many more demands than they can reasonably respond to and faced with daily challenges that often feel impossible, they are

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and Daniel Marom, þDeveloping Visions for Education: Rationale, Content, and Comments on Methodologyþ (Internal Mandel Institute Document, 1994). See also Seymour Fox and Israel Scheffler, with the assistance of Daniel Marom, eds., VISIONS OF LEARNING: VARIANT CONCEPTIONS OF AN EDUCATED JEW (Jerusalem: Mandel Institute, forthcoming). I also want to thank Haim Marantz for his thoughtful comments on an earlier draft of this paper.

typically hungry for new techniques that will enhance their ability to teach this or that, to manage a group of students, to create a sense of community in a classroom or a school, or to increase their students' SAT scores; but limited energy and skepticism conspire to make them far less eager to step back and reflect on the basic aims of the enterprise they are engaged in.

That this is a serious mistake has been affirmed by a growing chorus of voices that recognize that there is much more to organizational inefficiency than simply a failure to adopt powerful management techniques, and that poor teaching is often more than a failure to adopt the latest pedagogical wisdom. This deeper source of waste, I want to suggest, is often the failure to have developed a powerful vision, a clear conception, of what it is one is trying to accomplish. In the absence of such a vision, organizational patterns, curriculum, and other critical dimensions of an educating institution's life are dictated by tradition, by fad, or by the idiosyncratic ideas of particular players. Under such circumstances, it is predictable that the result will be a kind of hodge-podge of practices, many of which may be at cross-purposes with each other. In contrast, the educator who possesses a clear vision of what he or she is trying to achieve has the benefit of an invaluable tool for deciding how best to allocate scarce resources and how to shape the physical and social environment of his or her institution in a systematic way.

A superb example of the way clarity of vision can enhance effectiveness comes from a recent study of the phenomenal growth of Willow Creek Church outside Chicago.[2] Deeply committed to the church's religious mission, and concerned about the many individuals who were reluctant to come through the church's doors, the leaders of this church decided to do everything they could, consistent with the church's religious mission, to bring these outsiders into their fold. They began by inquiring carefully into why people stayed away from their church, and then they set about systematically -- and, it turned out, very effectively --adapting church practices to what they had learned. Of particular interest is the following: when the research suggested that the symbol of the Cross made potential attendees uncomfortable, the leadership decided to remove the symbol of the Cross from Sanctuary in which religious services were held. It would be a mistake to view this move as either pandering or manipulation. Rather, it illustrates how the leadership's clarity of vision enabled them to distinguish between what is essential for their institution and what is inessential, between basic purposes and strategy. For the leadership of the Willow Creek Church, the essence of the Christian message is not the Cross but the ideas which the Cross points to and, in some communities, calls forth. But where the symbol, which is ultimately a tool for invoking the message, interferes with

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[2] James Mellado. Harvard Business School Case entitled "Willow Creek Community Church", Harvard College, 1991.

receiving the message, it can reasonably be cast aside -- even though, for people not wholly clear on what the essence of Christianity is (or who subscribe to a different conception of Christianity), this might seem to border on sacrilege.[3]

As this example illustrates, clarity of vision can prove an indispensable tool in educational planning; and recent attention to the importance of vision in education is salutary. At the same time, some of what has been said and written on this subject is contaminated by serious misconceptions and by a failure to make a number of essential distinctions; in what follows I draw attention to some of these important matters.

1. Institutional visions and existential visions.

Discussions of vision are often weakened by a failure to distinguish between what I shall call existential and

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[3] As my colleague Barry Holtz points out, while instructive, this example maps imperfectly onto Jewish religious life. The reason for this is that, at least within traditional Judaism, the relationship between religious ritual and symbolism, on the one hand, and religious insight and experience, on the other cannot be reduced to means/end or strategy/mission; on the contrary, qua Halacha, the ritualistic acts and the objects they involve are themselves invested with and express religious significance and cannot simply be cast aside if they don't seem "to work". While Holtz's point is important, it does not entirely undermine the applicability of the Willow Creek example to Jewish contexts; for it is not uncommon for practices which do not have the status of Halacha to be treated as though they were sacred and inviolable even when they may subvert rather than help realize institutional purposes.

institutional visions. An institutional vision is a conception of what, at its best, an institution is like. When someone describes an educational environment as "a learning community" or a "caring community", or a "community dedicated to Tikkun Olam", this person is identifying an institutional vision. An existential vision, on the other hand, is a conception of the kind of human being an educational institution is hoping to cultivate, a conception of its ideal graduate.

The distinction between institutional and existential visions needs to be drawn because, I submit, in an educational context institutional visions need to be (although they often are not) driven by existential visions. As Fred Newmann has argued[4], educational reformers sometimes talk as though there are institutional forms that are inherently worthwhile, whereas in fact educational forms need themselves to be evaluated against a higher standard -- namely, the kind of human being an institution hopes to cultivate through the process of education. The question ought not to be, "What is an exemplary educational environment?", but, rather, "What is an exemplary educational environment in view of our aspiration to cultivate certain kinds of human beings?"

By this I do not intend to suggest that it is necessarily a

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[4] Fred Newmann, "Linking Restructuring to Authentic Student Achievement," PHI DELTA KAPPAN, February 1991, Volume 72, Number 6, pp. 458 - 463.

mistake to approach the question of vision in an educating community by starting with the question, "What would the educational environment of our dreams look like?", for it may be that this question concerning institutional vision will have the power to elicit imaginative responses that will ultimately lead to thoughtful reflection concerning the institution's guiding existential vision. What I do mean to suggest is that, insofar as we are talking about education, the justification of a particular kind of environment (or institutional vision) ultimately needs to be anchored in a conception of the kind of human being that institution is trying to cultivate.

2. A vision is not a statement but an informing idea that is shared, clear, and compelling.

As is well known, typically what are called "visions" turn out to be statements written down on paper which are then ignored, except perhaps on ceremonial occasions or in public relations efforts. But it is a misnomer to call such statements "visions". At best, such statements are capsule summaries, or records, of visions that are at work in the institutions with which they are associated. The real visions are those ideas or conceptions, that suffuse the lives of different institutions, giving each of them its distinctive coherence, direction, and meaning.

A vision in this sense has three characteristics: first, it is shared by critical stake holders.[5] Second, these stake holders find the vision compelling: a vision that does not call forth the enthusiasm of the participants and stimulate them to action is not, at least for these participants, a genuine vision. Finally, an adequate vision must be clear and concrete enough to offer genuine guidance in making educational decisions -- for this, after all, is a substantial part of the raison d'etre for having an informing vision. To say, for example, that an institution is committed to an ideal of "life-long learning" will not give its critical stake holders much practical guidance until they have specified the kind of learning they have in mind: is it the kind of "learning from experience" that Dewey has in mind, or a life-long love affair with "the Great Books" understood as particular kind of encounter, or some other specific kind of learning? Only if they provide themselves with this kind of specificity, will they be in a position to identify the kinds of skills, sensibilities, attitudes, and understandings they should be cultivating and the kinds of experiential or literary texts than will prove apt vehicles for this cultivation.[6]

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[5] While this paper's limited focus precludes attention to questions concerning the basis for designating "the critical stake holders", this is a very important matter.

[6] While essential, this point concerning the need for clarity of vision should not be taken to imply that such clarity alone suffices to determine educational arrangements. It does so only in conjunction with a host of other assumptions concerning

Before leaving the subject visions that are "shared, clear, and compelling", it needs to be stressed that the fact that these three adjectives can live happily together within two quotation marks does not mean that they always live happily together in the real world. While the probability of a happy marriage is quite high to the extent that the major constituencies that make up the institution represent a community of outlook and aspiration, the more heterogeneous these constituencies are the more difficult it will be to achieve a vision that is at one and the same time shared, compelling, and clear. Typically, the tendency is to sacrifice clarity and concreteness for a form of rhetoric that is so general that everyone can assent to it. While this has the advantage of circumventing divisive disagreements, it has the disadvantage of leaving the institution with a vision that is too vague to offer much concrete guidance or to call forth much enthusiasm.[7]

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such varied matters as the nature of human growth and motivation, available resources, and the nature of the community in which the institution and its clientele are situated.

My understanding of this point - and, more generally, of the relationship between vision and educational practice - has been immensely deepened by Seymour Fox's identification of several distinct levels that mediate the interplay between vision and educational practice. See, for example, Seymour Fox with William Novak, VISION AT THE HEART (Mandel Institute and the Council for Initiatives in Jewish Education, 1997).

[7] This should not be heard as a recommendation that an institution at this stage of vagueness should immediately proceed to specify its vision more concretely. To recommend this would betray lack of sensitivity to the delicate balance that exists among the various groups that make up an institution and of the

3. A commitment to the importance of vision is not reducible to a commitment to a specific set of activities called "visioning".

When it is urged that educating institutions need to be informed by compelling visions, it is often assumed that this entails guided activities, sometimes referred to as "visioning", which lead to having a vision. This visioning-process is sometimes viewed as an intensive set of activities requiring a day or two of serious work, and sometimes as a more long-term process. Either way, the assumption is that it is made up of a series of activities that in the end give rise to a vision which will then both communicate to external constituencies what the institution is about and will guide future efforts to educate.

While activities expressly designed to arrive at a shared vision may sometimes contribute to its achievement, it needs to be stressed that the link between "visioning" and "vision" is much weaker than is often thought. In the first place, some institutions may have a compelling vision without ever having gone through a process of visioning. In the second place, it is

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role sometimes played by vagueness in enabling them to share in a common life. To force clarification of an institution's guiding vision at the wrong time and in the wrong way could prove devastating. On the other hand, normal anxiety concerning the possible dangers of pushing for greater clarity is pathological to the extent that it shuts off in advance the possibility of discovering a well-timed, well-conceived, and fruitful way to reduce vagueness to a point where it is less crippling to the process of education.

far from clear that any such set of activities will always or even usually suffice to give rise to a vision in the strong sense I have specified. In the third place, it may be that the best way for an institution to arrive at a clear, shared, and compelling vision is through a process that is much more indirect than what is typically associated with visioning. As Michael Fullan has observed, an institution needs to be in a particular readiness-state to tackle the problem of vision explicitly and frontally, a state that presupposes a set of cultural norms that themselves only arise over a period of time; often, the best way for an institution to move towards a compelling existential or institutional vision may simply be to begin with addressing a variety of less daunting problems in ways that bring colleagues to work and think together in new ways.[8]

There are, incidentally, some who would offer a more radical objection to the suggestion that educating institutions work towards a powerful vision through any kind of visioning-exercises. Their objection is grounded not just in beliefs about the ineffectiveness of such exercises, but in a deeper pessimism concerning our ability - through any recognized interventions - to stimulate greater vision-drivenness in problematic institutions. Some of those holding this view might well argue that the way for a community to achieve vision-driven

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[8] See Michael Fullan, CHANGE FORCES, (New York: Falmer Press, 1993), especially pp. 28 ff.

institutions is to give up the effort to change its existing institutions, and, instead, to establish two mechanisms: the first, a mechanism that encourages the emergence of a variety of institutions, each organized around a different vision; and the second, a mechanism that allows educators and students to self-select into these institutions based on the appeal of a particular vision.

4. *Informed* values-clarification.

While, as I just suggested, the process of becoming more vision-driven cannot be reduced to a set of activities associated with "visioning", it is fair to say that the process of becoming more vision-driven does involve efforts to reflect on the institution's why's and wherefore's. Certainly the hope is that over time the institution's members will grow increasing clear concerning what they are committed to. It is therefore critical that an institution struggling to become more fully vision-driven provide its members, both individually and collectively, with opportunities to step back and clarify what it is they think they are committed to.

It is, however, important to add that this process of clarifying the stake holders' commitments should go beyond exercises designed to surface their existing, if as yet

unarticulated, beliefs. Two additional inputs will enrich the process of individual and institutional self-clarification. One of these inputs is critical questioning. As even a cursory look at Socratic dialogues will suggest, the success of Socrates in stimulating his interlocutors to develop more adequate views depends not just on his ability to elicit their existing systems of beliefs but also on his posing questions which stimulate internal doubt concerning the credibility, implications, and internal consistency of theses articulated belief-systems. Those who would help an educating institution strive for a more adequate vision could learn much from his example: there may be many occasions on which an individual charged with helping an institution develop or refine its vision can fruitfully play the role of a Socratic gadfly.[9]

A second way of turning the process of values-clarification into a more deeply informed process is through infusing it with the views of individuals who have ruminated long and hard about the questions at hand; for the encounter with such views has the potential to raise the participants' understanding of what is at stake.[10] This point is actually a presupposition of much that

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[9] I am indebted to Professor Israel Scheffler for the suggestion, voiced in the context of a Mandel Institute/CIJE consultation, that the individual facilitating an institution's efforts to become more vision-driven sometimes plays the role of a Socratic gadfly.

[10] This is one of the seminal insights that inspired the Mandel Institute to encourage a range of leading Jewish thinkers to articulate powerful and competing visions of an educated Jew,

goes on in teaching. As an example, if I am interested in my students developing a rich understanding of what is entailed by a commitment to cultivate autonomous persons, I certainly will encourage them to unearth their existing views on what it means to be autonomous. But I will also insist that they encounter the views of a range of thinkers (including Plato, Kant, Rousseau, Dostoyevsky's Grand Inquisitor, A.S. Neill, and John Dewey) who can illuminate the question at hand. In insisting on this, my working assumption is not that their own views need to resemble any one of these thinkers, but that the encounter with the ideas of such thinkers will challenge and deepen their own thinking.

Analogous considerations apply to an institution seeking to clarify its own identity. Through the encounter with a range of powerful but very different perspectives on fundamental questions that bear on the institution's self-definition and mission, the deliberations of its stake holders may be deepened in important ways. If, for example, they are struggling to better understand their institution's declared commitment to pluralism, these stake holders will benefit from an encounter with powerful extant perspectives on pluralism that identify critical questions and

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visions which can be used to stimulate deep reflection among a variety of constituencies concerning the aims of Jewish education. These writings will be published in Seymour Fox and Israel Scheffler, with the assistance of Daniel Marom, eds., VISIONS OF LEARNING: VARIANT CONCEPTIONS OF AN IDEAL JEWISH EDUCATION, op. cit.

that articulate the moral and practical implications of different understandings of pluralism's nature, importance, and limits. Such perspectives offer the deliberators a richer understanding of what is at stake in their discussions than would be available to them through exclusive reliance on their seat-of-the-pants views on pluralism; and they are thereby empowered to make a more thoughtful and informed decision. It goes without saying that finding ways - contexts, strategies, formulations - to introduce external intellectual inputs so that they awaken thought rather than occasion either slavish acceptance or the feeling that attending to them is a distraction from serious business is a difficult challenge. [11]

5. The dialectic of vision and practice.

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[11] Those familiar with the educational movement that goes by the name of "Values Clarification", a movement dedicated to helping individuals clarify their values, will recognize that my discussion is tacitly if not explicitly critical of the approach to values-education at work in this movement; and the basis for this criticism is that this approach does not, in my opinion, go very far in the direction of helping its clients deepen their understanding of their value-commitments. To be fair, however, it should be noted that leaders of this movement urge educators to do more than elicit from their students or clients a superficial account of what they already believe. Their questions are designed to encourage their clients to reflect on the implications of their declared moral values and on the genuineness of their commitment to them; but this process stops far short of the kind of critical questioning encouraged by a more Socratic guide; and it does not require introducing their clients to new ideas that have promise of deepening their understanding of what is at stake in the selection or interpretation of a particular value. See Louis Raths, et. al., VALUES AND TEACHING (Columbus, OH: Charles E. Merrill Publishing Co., 1978).

There is a dangerous tendency to think of a vision as something which, once developed, becomes a fixed template used to make all decisions, large or small. Like any set of principles, the ideas at work in an educational vision evolve - are re-interpreted, qualified, and revised in various ways - in the course of trying to apply them to ever-changing situations that offer new challenges and opportunities. A living vision can perhaps best be compared to the U.S. Constitution: over more than two centuries the vision articulated there has been shaped and reshaped in numerous ways, in part by the Congress (in framing new Amendments) and largely by the Courts, which have been charged with having to interpret the language of the original vision under circumstances sometimes unimagined by the original framers. There is thus an on-going interaction between vision and practice: whereas the vision gives direction to practice, practice serves to interpret the vision. Through this process, both vision and practice continue to be enriched and remain living.

6. The continuum of means and ends.

In speaking of a continuum of means and ends, John Dewey sought to caution his readers against a simplistic and therefore dangerous interpretation of the means-end distinction. While it may be useful in some contexts to draw this distinction, it is in his view essential to remember that the relationship between them

is dialectical. While this is not the occasion to recall Dewey's account in its totality, it is pertinent to remember his suggestion that, in thinking about the relationship between the vision we hope to realize, on the one hand, and present realities (including the students, environing social conditions, and available resources), on the other hand, we should avoid viewing this present as a mere means in the service of achieving the end-state designated by the vision; for this perspective can readily lead to emptying the present of significance and vitality in the name of the future. As important as it may be to ask whether the way we propose to the organize the educational environment and the experiences of students in the present is congruent with our vision of the kind of future which we hope to bring into being through education, it is also critical to ask whether this vision is functioning to lend significance, order, and vitality to what we do in the present. More generally, as much as what we do in the present can be viewed as a means in the service of some desirable future end-state, it is also important to remember that this vision of the future can and should be used as a tool for rendering present activity rich with significance. A vision that is incapable of enlisting the energies and resources at our disposal in a pattern of activity that the participants find energizing and meaningful in the present is problematic as a guiding vision.

7. Visions are not necessarily systematically articulated.

A corollary of the preceding points is that an institution's informing vision need not have been explicitly articulated to be effective. To believe otherwise is to confuse the presence of a belief or conception with its articulation. Language provides an instructive example. Our speech is informed by and conforms to a variety of grammatical rules even though we have never stopped to articulate them and, more strongly, even though we may be incapable of articulating them. Similarly, in institutional life, various principles and convictions may be shaping day-to-life and decisions without anybody having stopped to systematically articulate what these informing ideas are.[12] Borrowing from a tradition in the field of curriculum, we might describe such a vision as "a vision-in-use" to distinguish it from the institution's "official vision".

Some of the most interesting educating institutions the world has known have had a strong vision-in-use but no official or explicit vision. Certain fundamental ideas concerning the character of an educated person were tacitly accepted and taken for granted by the institution's supporting constituencies, and

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[12] The writings of Michael Oakeshott (for example, RATIONALISM IN POLITICS (New York: Basic Books, 1962) and Michael Polanyi (for example, PERSONAL KNOWLEDGE (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962) offer numerous examples of this point in a variety of fields. It is noteworthy, as Haim Marantz reminds me, that Oakeshott and Polanyi go substantially beyond the assertion that institutions are often informed by visions that have not been systematically articulated; in their view, visions inevitably are richer and more complex than our ability to state them explicitly.

these provided them with criteria for determining educational priorities and other educational decisions. Attention to vision-in-use or tacit visions serves to remind us that explicitly formulated visions do not necessarily arise and are not necessarily useful, except under certain social circumstances. Perhaps it is only when an institution has lost its sense of direction, and all that remains is a miscellany of practices not tied together by anything of larger significance, that it becomes important to work towards an articulated vision.

8. "Vision-driven" is not equivalent to "totalitarian" or "indoctrinatory".

Phrases like "vision-driven institution" suggest something sinister to some people. Is not, so the concern gets expressed, an institution systematically organized down to its very details around a particular conception of what is important or of what human beings at their best are like a totalitarian or indoctrinatory institution?

The answer to this question is that there is no necessary relationship between an institution's being vision-driven and its being indoctrinatory.[13] For one thing, one can readily imagine an

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[13] Of course, much depends here on what one means by "indoctrination", a subject about which much has been written. See, for example, I. Snook, ed., THE CONCEPT OF INDOCTRINATION (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972). Those concerned with the indoctrinatory character of vision-driven institutions seemed

educating institution organized around a vision of human beings as autonomous, or self-determining individuals. Social forms, physical organization, norms, hiring and admissions policies, etc. would all be shaped with an eye towards nurturing human beings who are open-minded and who think for themselves in both theoretical and practical matters.

Secondly, whether a vision-driven institution is indoctrinatory depends substantially on the social context in which it is embedded. For children growing up in families and communities that are actively Jewish in only a very attenuated way, a Jewish summer camp or a Day School that is systematically organized around a particular vision of Jewish life does not indoctrinate students in that way of life; rather, it allows them to experience a way of life that is very different from they have known, a taste that would be impossible were the camp or school not organized in this way.[14] Under such circumstances, the vision-driven character of the institution serves not to indoctrinate its clientele but -- the very opposite!! - to enrich the living options from which they will make life-choices.

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to be troubled by their sense that such institutions aim to induct their members into a particular way of life in ways that by-pass their rationality. As I suggest in the main body of the paper, there is nothing intrinsic to vision-driven institutions which makes them especially vulnerable to this charge. But this is a matter that may merit more attention.

[14] For an excellent discussion of the genesis and character of Camp Ramah as a vision-driven institution, see Seymour Fox with William Novak, VISION AT THE HEART, op. cit.

Conclusion

Quality education is the product of a multitude of elements, some of which are potentially under our control and many of which are not. What I have been referring to as a guiding existential vision is one of those elements which, potentially at least, is substantially under our control. But attention to vision is likely to bear fruit only to the extent that it is accompanied by a subtle and differentiated understanding of what vision is and how it figures in the educational process, as well as by the kind of critical thinking and sound judgment that will illuminate the content and implications of particular visions. The importance of such judgment and thinking points us to one of many reasons why those seeking to reform existing educating institutions or to establish new ones will always need people like [redacted]. Unfortunately, they are all-too-rare.