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Day School Libraries

Educating the Educators

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Abstract: Research has confirmed that strong school libraries are linked to academic achievement. Yet, school librarians often confront significant difficulties in obtaining support from administrators. Thoughtful and informative programs to educate administrators demonstrate the vital educational role of the library and librarian in building a strong academic environment.

"The library is the barometer of the school. The better the library, the better the school." This is what Dr. Stuart Zweiter, Director of Jewish Education for the Diaspora at Bar Ilan University, told me a number of years ago. Research has confirmed his observation. "New studies have found a compelling link between academic achievement and strong school libraries."¹ And yet, one of the major problems librarians face is convincing administrators of the library's essential contribution to their educational goals. Nowhere is this more acutely felt than in the Jewish day schools. There are administrators who view the library as a luxury, an extra that is expendable when budgets are tight.

So how do we change their attitude? AJL ought to take responsibility for educating the educators. The following describes one attempt to do just that.

Over a decade ago, as Head Librarian of the Hedi Steinberg Library of Yeshiva University libraries, I approached another "member of the family," Rabbi Dr. Yitzhak Handel, currently Associate Dean of the Yeshiva University Azrieli Graduate School of Education and Administration, about presenting a program on the importance of the library in the Jewish day school. When he readily agreed, I invited top-notch AJL school librarians from the New York Metropolitan Area chapter to participate in a panel entitled: "The Library: A Dynamic Force in the School." The event took place at Yeshiva University, Midtown Center, on July 18, 1989. Students of the Summer Block Program – those studying for Masters or Doctoral degrees in Jewish education – were the captive audience; but other Azrieli students, as well as AJL members and Jewish educators, also attended.

The panelists enthusiastically described some of their activities, preparing bibliographies for teachers and students, teaching research skills to classes and helping teachers with class preparation. They also cited special projects such as: a mitzvah fair, a reading contest with prizes, author visits and library bulletin boards. School administrators and day school librarians benefited most from the presentation. The program spoke to their needs and gave them solid ideas. For education students with little or no field experience, the intent was to plant the idea in their minds—the minds of future educators and administrators—that the library is a critical school resource, which contributes appreciably to the success of their educational mission. Dr. Handel acknowledged "the significance and uses of the library as a major partner in the educative process," in his thank you note to the librarians for their "very professional and informative presentation." A copy of the letter was sent to each panelist's principal.²

I hosted such a program a number of times and each time we reached a new cycle of students. At the most recent meeting, we invited a principal to address the topic so that educators could hear from "one of their own" about the value of the library. This type of format can be repeated (and improved upon) in any institution of Jewish education.

This is not the only way to reach educators. There are even better ways. The school librarian can personally make an impact. The librarian wears many hats and one of them has to be "public relations." Proverbs 27:2 states, *yehalelkha zar ve-lo pikha* "Let another person praise you, and not your own mouth." To be humorous, some change the punctuation: *yehalelkha zar, ve-lo, pikha*. "Let another person praise you, and, if not, then do it yourself." Thus, if the teachers and administrators do not adequately appreciate the vital educational role of the library, then the librarian must personally enlighten them. He or she can approach the task informally – sharing information with teachers and principals, or through a school newspaper or bulletin board. Formally, one can make a presenta-

tion during in-service training. The librarian can demonstrate library resources and how he or she can help teachers with class preparation, student development, or teacher/librarian collaboration.

I can testify to how successful this type of program can be. Last year, before the beginning of the semester, I invited the administrators of Stern College for Women to a demonstration of the library's newly acquired databases. I was excited about our full-text capabilities, and I wanted to share that. It was essential to get the message across to deans of the college, academic advisors and guidance counselors so that they, in turn could transmit the information to students. My efforts were well rewarded when Assistant Dean of Students for Stern College, Mrs. Zeldia Braun, spoke about the library with great enthusiasm in her speech to the incoming freshmen.

Citywide programs can also be effective. Local principals' or educators' councils could sponsor workshops for their constituents regularly, even monthly. Most planners would welcome a fresh programming idea. A number of years ago, I spoke to the chairman of the Principal's Council of the New York Board of Jewish Education, and he was very receptive. He suggested submitting a proposal for a session.

Events on the national and international levels are also valuable. Pedagogic conventions should be a prime target for AJL. Some of our librarians participate in CAJE conventions, but the AJL role should be expanded further. A variety of courses for teachers and administrators take place over the summer, either in the United States or Israel. With a surge of interest in Jewish education and a growth of day schools, there arises a need for trained administrators. Consequently, there is a proliferation of leadership courses. For example, Yeshiva University sponsors an Intensive Training Program for prospective principals during two consecutive summers. Mindful of the dynamic role of the library in the day school, the director of ITP, Dr. Moshe Sokolow, invited me to discuss its resources with the attendees. There are other classes for teachers and administra-

tors that take place regularly. Torah U'Mesorah sponsors workshops every summer. I once approached their National Principals Association about presenting a session at their program and they encouraged AJL to send in a proposal. This, of course, should be submitted early in the academic year.

How should AJL proceed? It should create a position of Coordinator of Day School Outreach. This individual could identify all types of programs for educators that take place in the United States and Israel and prepare a generic plan that could be adapted to specific needs. In addition, this coordinator should submit proposals to national organizations sponsoring teacher/administrator training. The next step is to select dynamic librarians to organize workshops and then guide them in accomplishing the goal.

Conclusion

Why am I, a college librarian, so concerned about day school libraries? For one, I join many others in an interest in Jewish education. But, most probably, as psychologists would have it, it all goes back to my childhood. I attended the Yeshiva of Flatbush elementary school and, as fellow alumni will remember, we were "forced", through the library, to read Hebrew books. As I detailed in my article, "Read for Pleasure and Learn Hebrew, Too!" (Lubetski),³ this library activity had a far-reaching effect on our language skills, knowledge of Jewish history and folklore and, in general, commitment to our heritage.

This was only one program in one school. There are a plethora of activities for our talented day school librarians to offer to benefit students, teachers and administrators. As a matter of fact, those who have attended AJL conventions have seen for themselves how creative our day school librarians can be. I sat in on a number of sessions and thought to myself how lucky the students were to have such effective librarians in their schools. Recently, I attended a luncheon and sat next to Rabbi Samuel Goldin, spiritual leader of Cong. Ahavath Torah, Englewood, N.J., who mentioned, in passing, that his mother, Pearl Goldin, was librarian at the Hebrew Academy of Nassau County for many years. Adina Levine, an editor of the Stern College newspaper, *The Observer*, who also sat at the table, excitedly remarked, "She was my librarian. She had a tremendous influence on me. It was due to her encouragement that I read so widely and so much."

AJL is beginning to recognize the need for outreach. Under the leadership of Toby Rossner, president of AJL, Fred Isaac presented a session at the UAHC Biennial Convention in Boston on December 5, 2000, discussing the essential role of a synagogue library in the educational and cultural mission of the institution. At the behest of Pearl Berger, AJL President (2002-2004), AJL librarians presented two concurrent sessions at the conference of the Association of modern Orthodox Day Schools on October 14, 2002.⁴ This is a good beginning. We need to do much more. In a letter dated July 20, 1989, I wrote to Dr. Marcia Posner, then president of AJL: "I think AJL should embark on a program of outreach to principals and educators to impress upon them the importance of the libraries in the schools . . . This is virgin territory and we certainly could make a great impact if we make the effort." This is as valid today as it was then.

Im lo ackhshav ematai. If not now, when?

1. *U.S. News and World Report* (June 12, 2000), p. 53.
2. The first and third programs were videotaped and were cataloged by the Yeshiva University Libraries.
They can be borrowed on Interlibrary loan.
3. Lubetski, Edith. "Read for Pleasure and Learn Hebrew, Too!" in *Judaica Librarianship* vol. 7, no. 1-2 (Spring 1992-Winter 1993), pp. 96-98.
4. The following was reported to the AJL Council by Esther Nussbaum, November, 2002:

On October 14th 2002, at a conference of the Association of Modern Orthodox Principals (AMODS), which took place at the Hilton Hotel in Newark, two parallel sessions were held in which the attendees were treated to presentations by librarians.

When AJL president, Pearl Berger, who is Dean at Yeshiva University Libraries, learned of the Conference she suggested to the organizer, Rabbi Jeremiah Unterman, Director of AMODS of Yeshiva University, that the conference include a library session. That suggestion developed under the guidance of Edith Lubetski, Head Librarian of Stern College for Women into two parallel sessions: one with elementary school librarians and the other with high school librarians. The first panel included Shelly Feit of Moriah, Englewood, NJ,

Leslie Monchar of Kushner Academy, Livingston, NJ, Merna Davidowitz of ASHAR in Rockland County, and was chaired by Edith Lubetski. The High School panel was organized by Joyce Levine of North Shore Hebrew Academy in Great Neck and included Esther Nussbaum of Ramaz Upper School in New York City and Bruchie Weinstein of Magen David Yeshiva High School in Brooklyn, New York.

The Elementary School Librarians subdivided their responsibilities according to the topics: The Librarian and the Administration; The Librarian and the Faculty; The Librarian and the Students.

They informed the principals, many of whom probably never fully comprehended the extent to which librarians, besides maintaining the collection of materials, can give curricular assistance, teach research and literacy skills and help attain the goal of making the students a community of lifelong learners.

The Upper School discussion was divided into two topics: what the principal can expect from the librarian and what the librarian should expect from the principal. Each topic was elaborated upon by the panelists who emphasized the need for well-equipped and well-funded libraries, providing instruction in the use of instructional and information technology, professionalism and collaborative efforts. Everyone lauded the need for networking and being involved in professional organizations such as AJL for the librarian's own continuing education.

The sessions, which were introduced by Edith Lubetski, who enthusiastically credited AJL for its efforts and success in promoting Judaica librarianship, were well received by the principals who readily admitted that they, indeed, had not been well informed and appreciated the presentations.

Edith Lubetski is Assistant Professor of Library Administration and Head Librarian, Hedi Steinberg Library, Stern College for Women, Yeshiva University. She co-authored Building a Judaica Library Collection: A Resource Guide (Littleton, CO: Libraries Unlimited, 1983) and served as President of the Association of Jewish Libraries (1986-1988).