Educating the Educators

Edith Lubetski

Hedi Sternberg Library, Yeshiva University, lubetski@yu.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://ajlpublishing.org/jl

Part of the Bilingual, Multilingual, and Multicultural Education Commons, Elementary Education and Teaching Commons, Information Literacy Commons, Jewish Studies Commons, Junior High, Intermediate, Middle School Education and Teaching Commons, Pre-Elementary, Early Childhood, Kindergarten Teacher Education Commons, and the Reading and Language Commons

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 4.0 License.

Recommended Citation

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 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.

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, yehaleikha zar ve-lo pikha “Let another person praise you, and not your own mouth.” To be humorous, some change the pronunciation: yehaleikha 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 presentation 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. Zelda 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’Me- 
sorah 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 cre-
ate 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 spon-
soring 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 con-
cerned 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), 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 administra-
tors. 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 tremen-
dous 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 pre-
sented 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. 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 edu-
cators to impress upon them the impor-
tance 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 akhshav ematai. If not now, when?

1. U.S. News and World Report (June 12, 

2. The first and third programs were video-
taped 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 Librari-
anship vol. 7, no. 1-2 (Spring 1992-Win-
ter 1993), pp. 96-98.

4. The following was reported to the AJL 
Council by Esther Nussbaum, Novem-
ber 2002:

On October 14th, 2002, at a conference of 
the Association of Modern Orthodox Princi-
pals (AMODS), which took place at the 
Hilton Hotel in Newark, two parallel ses-
tions 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 Unter-
man, Director of AMODS of Yeshiva Uni-
versity, 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, Liv-
ingston, 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 subdi-
vided their responsibilities according to the 
topics: The Librarian and the Administra-
tion; 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 life-
long 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 instruc-
tional and information technology, profes-
sionalism and collaborative efforts. 
Everyone lauded the need for networking 
and being involved in professional organi-
sations such as AJL for the librarian’s own 
continuing education.

The sessions, which were introduced by 
Edith Lubetski, who enthusiastically credit-
ed AJL for its efforts and success in pro-
moting Judaica librarianship, were well 
received by the principals who readily 
admitted that they, indeed, had not been 
well informed and appreciated the present-
tations.

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 Col-
lection: A Resource Guide (Littleton, CO: 
Libraries Unlimited, 1983) and served as 
President of the Association of Jewish 