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ROSH PINA: THE JUDAICA LIBRARIAN AS CORNERSTONE OF LIFELONG JEWISH LEARNING

by Kathe Pinchuck

What is lifelong learning? It can be defined as "all purposeful learning activity undertaken on an ongoing basis with the aim of improving knowledge, skills, and competence. It contains various forms of education and training, formal, non-formal and informal, individually, in a group setting or within the framework of social movements."¹ As Jewish educators, we facilitate these activities, but we also strive to inculcate our students with a love of Judaism that will amplify the learning experience.

A relatively new model in both business and education is "backward design." Using this approach, the first step for Jewish educators is identifying the desired results (laying a foundation for lifelong Jewish learning). Then, consider the evidence needed to determine whether the desired results are being achieved. Finally, plan the learning experiences to help students understand key concepts, and generate action plans focused on obtaining the desired results.² While each educational institution will have its own goals and ways to determine if they are being met, most can look to an integral collaborative partner: the Judaica librarian.

Libraries are not just service places; they also are active partners in the educational process, bringing together learners and learning opportunities.³ What are these opportunities? Chris Spagnuolo asserts there is much to learn at story time.⁴ Most story times begin with a welcome, an opportune time to instill the Jewish value of "greeting everyone with a cheerful face."⁵ It provides multiple learning experiences that help develop listening skills and observation skills (illustrations); it also often involves singing and movement. Opportunities for participation involve the audience in clapping, repeating lines, or simple readers' theater. This time can be devoted to a theme or can be used to reinforce curriculum concepts. It is amazing that sharing a book can provide differentiated instruction by connecting with students in different ways.

Jewish stories abound, and telling these stories connects pre-readers to their heritage. Stories "provide emotional transportation, moving people to take action...because they can very quickly come to psychologically identify with the characters in a narrative or share an experience—courtesy of the images evoked in the telling."⁶ You can tell children to be content with what they have, but a story where a man brings farm animals into his house in order to appreciate his surroundings (*It Couldn't Be Worse* by Vlasta Van Kampen; *The Little, Little House* by Jessica Souhami; *It Could Always Be Worse* by Margot Zemach) can make the point more subtly and with humor. But Jewish libraries have much more to offer than story time.

The Judaica librarian provides opportunities for informal learning by making books and other materials available on a wide range of subjects and at different reading levels. Who, of any age, has not been

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delighted when told they can pick any book off the shelf? A quiet moment in the library is really informal improvement of knowledge, although the technical term cannot capture the serene experience. For example, an early childhood student may be intrigued by the legend of the Golem (look for books by Barbara Rogasky, Isaac Bashevis Singer and David Wisniewski). He or she may then want to learn more about Jewish mystical characters, Jewish history and customs, or Czechoslovakia. As an adult, he or she may come across the writings of the Maharal (Rabbi Judah Loew) and be willing to delve into some challenging concepts because of his initial encounter with the wise rabbi.

As we proceed through the twenty-first century, the prevalence of digital devices, with which most pre-school students are adept, has created an overload of information. One of the biggest challenges to educators is teaching students how to manage information. If the goal is Jewish information literacy, a Judaica librarian can assist in developing projects that help students develop confidence in their ability to use the library and find answers to their questions. As an information specialist, the librarian sees technology as one of many tools to organize data and make it useful.

Robert Berkowitz and Michael Eisenberg⁸ developed an information process model for younger children. The Super3 Information Problem-solving Model provides a framework for doing research. The planning stage involves thinking about what needs to be done and writing a list of questions. The doing stage is where students organize the answers to the questions and make something to show what they learned. In the early education setting, the "something" can be Jewish art, music, cooking or baking – projects are only bounded by the educator's creativity. In the reviewing stage, students can go over their work and look at both the product and the process. These steps provide a paradigm for life-long learning, as evidenced by their similarity to the backward design process and their application in various situations.

The Judaica librarian is in the Jewish library because he/she loves information, loves Judaism, and is enthusiastic about helping others through collaboration and information literacy. Using this resource to its fullest potential will lay the foundation for a lifelong link to a Jewish life and to Jewish education.

Endnotes:

1. Haggstrom, Britt Marie, ed. *The Role of Libraries in Lifelong Learning*. Rep. Ljusdal: IFLA, 2004.
2. McTighe, Jay, and Ronald S. Thomas. "Backward Design for Forward Action." *Educational Leadership* (2003): 52-55. *Academic Search Complete*. Web. 14 June 2011. <http://www.kennesaw.edu/education/CFEP/forms/teachinduct2b.pdf>.
3. Haggstrom, Britt Marie, ed. Op. cit.
4. Spagnuolo, Chris. "12 Things I Learned at Storytime." *Edge Hopper*. 20 Mar. 2010. Web. 14 June 2011. <http://edgehopper.com>.
5. *Pirkei Avot 1:15*
6. Guber, Peter. "The Inside Story." *Psychology Today* (March/April 2011): 78-84.

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7. Heider, Kelly L. "Information Literacy: The Missing Link in Early Childhood Education" *Early Childhood Education* (2009) 36:513-518.

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