

**How to Determine a “Successful Jewish Education”
for Secular Jews in Israeli *Mamlachti* Schools**

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Bios

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This paper represents the first stage of a two stage project for creating “educational measures” that will enable conceptualization of “excellence” and evaluation of “success” in the area of Jewish cultural education in the Israeli *Mamlachti* (non-Orthodox) school system. In this first stage we offer a theoretical framework for conceptualizing Jewish educational excellence. In the course of January/February 2003 the theoretical framework will undergo testing and refinement as data is collected about the educational activities taking place in Israeli schools (see below).

There is a pressing need for a “measure of educational excellence” designed specifically for Jewish education amongst non-Orthodox Jews. As we will see in the coming pages, there are currently two clear baselines against which educational success is currently conceptualized and evaluated in the Israeli school system: (1) the Religious Measure used by Orthodox Jews and (2) the Bureaucratic Measure used by the Ministry of Education. Neither, of these measures enables an appreciation of the way non-Orthodox Jews understand Jewish culture and construct their connection to the Jewish People. The result is that central players in the area of Jewish education in Israel, such as the Ministry of Education, Foundations and often the schools themselves underestimate and misunderstand the varieties of Jewish cultural education currently found in Israeli *Mamlachti* schools and the potential for building upon them. The consequence is a marked lack of institutional support for non-Orthodox Jewish education in the Israeli school system, which undermines the ability of those working to further the educational enterprise in this area.

This paper begins with a case study of the current problem, and then offers a description of three distinct measures for conceptualizing and evaluating educational success in the area of Jewish cultural education: (1) the Orthodox Religious Measure, (2) the Bureaucratic Measure used by the Ministry of Education, and (3) a Secular Standard for Jewish Cultural Education.

We will elaborate on the differences between the three measures, with the goal of highlighting the unique qualities of “a successful secular Jewish education.”

Drawing from the theoretical description of the concept of success in secular Jewish education, we will propose a measure against which it will be possible to conceptualize and evaluate educational excellence. Our hope is that this measure will serve as: (1) A baseline against which schools can evaluate their own work; (2) a framework, for effectively channeling resources to excellent educational programs; and, (3) a means to enable foundations and the Ministry of Education to measure the results of their investment in secular Jewish education.

I. Case Study: The Lack of State Funding for Jewish Education in *Mamlachti* Schools

We offer the following case study, in order to illustrate the need for a clear baseline against which excellence in Jewish education is determined.

Of the 1,292,000 students in the Israeli-Jewish State school system in 2003, 57.6% study in the *Mamlachti* (non-Orthodox) stream.¹ In 1994 the Shenhar Commission, appointed by Zevulun Hammer, the late Minister of Education, urged development of a coherent program of Jewish education to make Jewish and Zionist culture meaningful to the non-Orthodox Jewish population of the *Mamlachti* schools (Shenhar 1994). While some Education Ministry resources were given over to implementing the Shenhar Commission’s recommendations, they were insufficient to the task at hand and paled next to resources given for Jewish education in Orthodox-Religious Schools and major initiatives that the Ministry has since undertaken in other areas. Moreover, the tools necessary for systematically monitoring and evaluating the

¹ 18.8% in the state religious schools, and 23.6% in the Independent Religious schools. Source: Ministry of education web site: <http://cms.education.gov.il/NR/rdonlyres/03A5BF6F-62CB-4703-ADC5-62FF4D32DC49/12146/chap8.pdf>

educational programming needed to realize the Shenhar vision have not been created (Rash and Ben-Avot 1997).

A major opportunity to implement the Shenhar Commission's recommendations presented itself in 2003. The Legal Counsel to the Government learned that 300 million shekels of the Ministry of Religion's budget allocated for the purpose of Jewish education in the school system, was being given exclusively to Orthodox-Religious and Haredi schools. The Legal Counsel ordered the budget be distributed by the Ministry of Education according to professional, rather than sectorial criteria – thereby making it available to Mamlachti schools as well. To implement the directive, the Minister of Education appointed a committee headed by then Deputy Minister (and now member of Knesset) Zvi Handel. The Handel Committee presented its conclusions in November 2003.

The gap between the declarative and operative level was large. At the declarative level the committee stated that an historical moment is at hand, in that a policy of “affirmative discrimination” will be implemented in order to bring necessary funds for Jewish education to the Mamlachti schools. However, in reality, the nature of the funding criteria has made it virtually impossible for Mamlachti schools to qualify for funding. The criteria were more or less in line with educational activities pursued by Orthodox-Religious, rather non-Orthodox schools. In addition, no effort was made by the Ministry of Education to use the insights provided by the Shenhar report to create more appropriate funding.

In order to mitigate the damage, in 2004 *Panim*² began a multi-year project to aid Mamlachti schools in negotiating the process of requesting funds made available by the Handel Commission. As a result of the first year of work, 119 (out of a possible 417) Mamlachti schools

² Panim for Jewish Renaissance in Israel. <http://www.panim.org.il>

applied for funds, of which five million shekels (*out of a total of 160 million shekels*) were granted to 20 schools.

- **3% of the available funds were granted to the Mamlachti schools, with 97% going to State-Religious and Haredi schools. Moreover, the money was distributed to the Mamlachti schools with no clear criteria. Schools with noticeably weaker credentials in the area of Jewish cultural education received money, while those with outstanding programs did not.**

In order to work against the clear pattern of discrimination, Panim has extended its work vis-à-vis the Handel Commission to a multi-year project that will gather data on the educational activities having to do with Jewish cultural education in Mamlachti high schools. This work includes both the collection of empirical data from 250 high schools and the development of an educational measure for conceptualizing excellence and evaluating success of Jewish educational activities covered by the survey. The hope is that the combination of data about actual Jewish educational activity in the schools, along with a means to determine objective criteria for educational excellence, will enable a larger portion of public funds to reach the Mamlachti schools who are making a substantial effort to improve the Jewish education of their students.

II. The “Why,” the “What” and the “How” of Jewish Education

For the reasons detailed in the previous section, there is an urgent need to development a clear measure of educational excellence in the field of Jewish education for non-Orthodox Jews. With a clear set of educational criteria, we expect that it will be easier to highlight patterns of discrimination in the funding process.

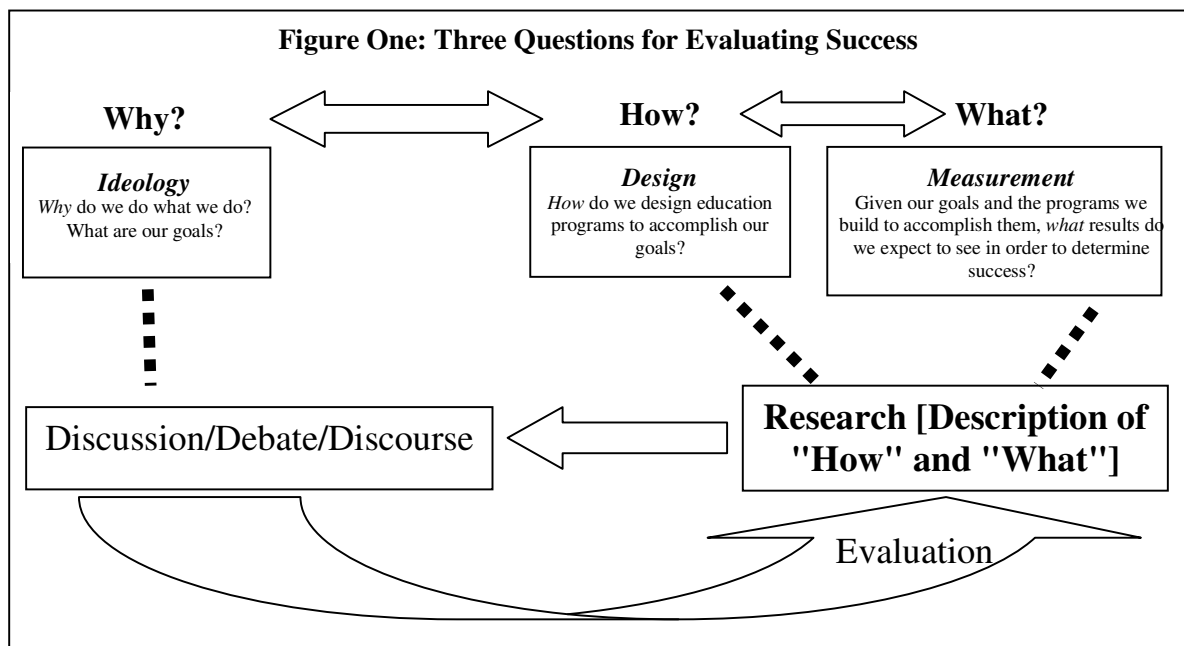
The problem is that unlike education in areas such as Math and Science, concepts such as “success” and “excellence” in Jewish education are notoriously hard to define. The very concept of “Jewish Education” is open to multiple and conflicting ideological interpretations. Diverse ideological lenses generate very different answers to such basic questions as: What forms of

identity change should occur as the result of participation in an educational program? What is our conception of the “ideal Jew”? What types of institutional support, and what inter-institutional ties are required in order to “succeed” in an educational mission?

- **If we can’t measure success in Jewish education, like we measure knowledge and ability in mathematics or physics, then how can we devise a basis for conceptualizing and evaluating educational excellence?**

To create evaluative measures we must begin with the ideological reasons “why” we wish to push forward a Jewish educational agenda (Ackerman 1969) in Israeli public schools? If we know “why” we want to create educational programs having to with Judaism and Jewish culture, then we can begin to conceptualize “how” educational goals are to be realized, and “what” must occur in order to state that we have reached our goals (Kopelowitz 2003).

- **In combination, the “why,” the “how” and the “what”³ allow us to grapple with evaluating educational success (see chart below).**



³ We wish to acknowledge Dr. Victor Friedman for introducing us to the three questions that serve as the conceptual basis of this paper.

III. Orthodox, Bureaucratic and Secular Measures for Determining the “Why” “How” and “What” of Jewish Education

Within the contemporary educational system there currently exist two clear measures for determining educational success in the area of Jewish education. We label these measures the (1) Orthodox-Religious Measure, and (2) the Bureaucratic Measure used by the Ministry of Education. We begin by describing the “why”, the “how” and the “what” that are put forth to evaluate success according to these two measures. We will then argue that there is a need for a third measure, attuned to the world view and values of secular Jews.

- **Without the formulation of a Secular Jewish measure for evaluating educational success, there is no way to distinguish excellent from mediocre Jewish education, in a manner that is relevant and meaningful to the non-Orthodox experience in Israel.**

**Measure One:
The Orthodox-Religious Measure
Continuity between Home, School, Synagogue and the Rest of Everyday Life**

A. The Orthodox “Why”

Orthodoxy, as with all other forms of contemporary Jewish identity, represents a response to the freedom of modern society. The emancipation of Jewry in the 19th and 20th centuries placed all Jews in a position of determining for themselves, the nature of their everyday practice of Jewish culture and tradition. If prior to emancipation, Jews were forced to belong to an organized Jewish community (*kehilla*) and to live a normative Jewish life that was more or less in line with communal expectations, after emancipation individual Jews received the freedom to determine for themselves how to live a Jewish life (if at all) (Katz 1993 (1958)).

Of the Jewish reactions to emancipation, Orthodox Jews make the strongest attempt to maintain a continuity of Jewish experience between the various activities of everyday life. There is an expectation, that to the extent possible the individual Jew will engage in religious and cultural practices that are distinctly Jewish, whether at home, in the work place, when participating in leisure activities, in life-cycle and other celebrations, in the synagogue, and the school? On the one hand, it is possible to distinguish between liberal and conservative Orthodox Jews by the extent to which they try and create continuity between the different areas of everyday life (Heilman 1977; Heilman and Cohen 1989; Kopelowitz 2005 (forthcoming)). For example, we can distinguish between types of Orthodox Jews by the extent to which gender separation is maintained not only in the synagogue but in other areas of everyday life as well. Similar distinctions between Orthodox Jews exist in the way they eat and

dress, amongst other activities. Nevertheless, despite the tremendous variety of lifestyles among Orthodox Jews the common denominator is that they share a basic ideal that some continuity between Jewish practice in the home, in the synagogue and the school be maintained. Thus, there is an expectation that an individual will eat kosher food or pray, not only in the home or synagogue, but elsewhere as well. In the case of the Orthodox-Religious school there is an expectation that students will maintain the laws of kashrut and prayer, just as “they ideally” do in their homes, in their synagogues and anywhere else they may find themselves during the course of everyday life.

From the perspective of the Orthodox parent, the “educational success” of the school on matters of Jewish religion and culture depends on its ability to strengthen the experience of continuity between home, school and synagogue. What is done in the school, in terms of Jewish religion and culture, should have meaning beyond the narrow confines of the classroom and school building.

A successful educational program enables continuity of experience, both in terms of space and time. Continuity in space refers to the idea that basic patterns of behavior are found in home, synagogue, school and elsewhere. Continuity in time refers to the idea that what we are doing in the here-and-now has significance vis-à-vis what our ancestors did in the past and for what we will and our children will do in the future.

- **Summation: The Orthodox answer to the question of “Why Jewish Education?” is “that it is the role of the School to promote and strengthen the experience of continuity in space and time.” In space: Between home, synagogue, the school and other areas of everyday life. In time: Between past, present and future.**

B. The Orthodox “How” - The Example of Prayer

If the Orthodox answer the question of “why Jewish education” with the answer that Jewish education should promote and strengthen the continuity of experience in time and place, then the “How” of Jewish Education must be found in educational practices that enable the individual to draw connections between what is done in the school and elsewhere. For this reason, prayer is a fundamental part of the Orthodox-Religious school curriculum, for prayer as an action binds the experience of “being in school” to like prayer experiences that the student experiences elsewhere. The knowledge that Orthodox-religious Jews the world over are praying in a similar way also contributes to the integration of the school with the rest of the life experience. In addition, to the spatial dimensions of prayer, there is also a connection created between the act of praying in school, and to past and future, both in terms of an individual's own behavior, but also in terms of perceived continuity of behavior and experience from generation to generation. Likewise, there are many other elements of the formal (i.e., Oral law, Bible, Jewish History, Zionism) and informal (i.e., Tiulim, ceremonies marking National and Religious Holidays etc.) education, that occur within the Orthodox-Religious school that are predicated on the assumption of continuity of experience.

C. The Orthodox “What”

Given the Orthodox-Religious goal of creating the experience of continuity in space and time, and the educational mechanisms – such as prayer - that are built into the school curriculum, “what” then must occur in order to declare educational success. Here the answer seems relatively straight forward. The student should perceive the school as either supporting or enhancing the experience of religious and Jewish culture that he or she has elsewhere.

- **The Orthodox-Religious Measure: To the extent that students view the content of their Jewish education at school as an anomaly that has little to do with life as it is lived outside of school, so Orthodox-Religious education has failed!**

Measure Two: The Bureaucratic Measure used by the Ministry of Education

A. The Bureaucratic “Why” – The Need to Regulate Society

The measure of success used by the Ministry of Education to determine success is the opposite of that used by the Orthodox-Jew. Whereas the latter seeks continuity in space and time, the formal state educational system uses goals and educational tools that stress immediate accomplishment in the here and now as its measure for evaluating success.

The education system, like the army, the legal system, the political system or any other system of the modern state, is a bureaucratic enterprise that seeks to create clear cut, rational standards, for regulating patterns of social behavior in a predictable way across the entire national population (Herzfeld 1992; Weber 1978).

B. The Bureaucratic “How” – The Core Curriculum

To achieve the goal of creating national standards, a core curriculum is created that all schools, which are funded directly by the Ministry of Education, are expected to implement. The core curriculum is divided into disciplines of knowledge, each with its own content and set of

examinations that provide a measurable means for tracking the acquisition of standardized knowledge by the student. The core curriculum aspires to create a measure of success for each discipline that will enable comparison between students and schools in a manner that is not dependent on the ideological tendencies of one segment of the population or another.

C. The Bureaucratic “What” – Success on Standardized Tests

In the effort to universalize knowledge through the use of disciplines of knowledge, the issue of “relevance” and “meaning” of the material learned in a particular discipline to the life of the student outside of the classroom becomes irrelevant. Excellence is determined by high scores on standardized tests. Whether or not someone will use classroom knowledge outside of the school is not a formal priority set by the Ministry of Education when it asks, “What are we accomplishing?” No formal expectation exists for continuity between classroom, the wider school environment, the home and elsewhere.

D. The Complementary Nature of Bureaucratic and Orthodox-Religious Measures

In the criteria⁴ issued by the Educational Ministry for funding school activities specifically developed to “Jewish Education” four distinct disciplines are recognized: Jewish Thought, Halacha, Oral Law and Jewish Holidays and Celebrations. Of these, the first three have a clear set of standardized exams that students are expected to pass in order to “succeed” in each discipline. The type of information that a student is expected to learn in order to succeed in the examinations is knowledge that falls in line with Orthodox-Religious categories of thought, and much of the time the teachers are Orthodox Jews in the Religious and non-religious schools alike.

- **We learn is that in the case of “the Jewish disciplines” there is a large overlap between the content pushed by the Ministry of Education and**

⁴ Chief Executive Circular (*Chozer Manca*) 2003/3 (A), November 2nd. 2003.

categories of knowledge that Orthodox Jews regard as important. As such, the two educational measures complement, rather than contradict one another. Orthodox Jews can send their children to the State Religious schools, and feel that the Ministry of Education is funding curriculum that is appropriate for developing a sense of continuity between school, home and synagogue.

On one hand, the Ministry of Education stresses accomplishment on standardized exams, rather than continuity of experience between school and the surrounding society. However, the overlap between Ministry sponsored disciplines and Orthodox-Religious categories of knowledge only strengthens the ability of the schools to teach material that is “Jewishly relevant” to the students elsewhere in their lives.

- **For reasons that we will now explore, for schools in the General (*Mamlachti*) system, which cater to non-Orthodox populations, the emphasis on disciplines that emphasize Orthodox-Religious content creates a situation in which “Jewish education” is equated with “Religious Education” and becomes irrelevant to life outside of the classroom for students who do not live a religious life-style.**

Measure Three: A Secular Measure for Jewish Education

A. The Secular “Why”

As opposed to the term “Orthodox Jew” which denotes a population of Jews defined by their aspiration to consistent practice of religious ritual, the term “secular” is generally used to refer to a population defined by “what it does not do” vis-à-vis religious tradition (Liebman and Yadgar 2004; Liebman and Yadgar forthcoming). We are speaking about diverse population groups, almost all of whom identify as Jewish (Levy, Levinsohn and Katz 2002) but have made no explicit attempt to adopt a particular ideological code for furthering their Jewish identities. For most non-Orthodox Jews, being Jewish involves participation in a number of religious rituals or life cycle events over the course of the year, such as the Passover seder or a brit milah ceremony, and participating in the public holidays and public life of the Jewish State (Bar and Ya'ar 2003;

Deshen 1997; Deshen 1998; Handelman 1990; Kopelowitz and Rosenberg submitted; Liebman and Don-Yehiya 1983).

In order to overcome the tendency to define non-Orthodox Jewish identity by what people do not do, we following the strategy pursued by Yoffe and Arad (2003), who use the concept of “the Secular Arena” to describe the cultural, social and institutional space occupied by “the Jewish public in Israel who, for a variety of reasons, do not accept the burden of Jewish commandments and law as defining their Jewish identity or implying commitment to a particular way of life.” Of interest here, is that Yoffe and Arad argue that “the general state school system (which was the focus of the Shenhar Commission) is a defined organizational framework that enables concrete description and analysis of the vast majority of Israeli Jews who operate in secular arena and derive their identity from the concepts and activities of Judaism as culture.”

By focusing on a defined institutional sphere, such as the General School System, we can then look at the “why,” “how” and “what” of discernibly Jewish cultural activity in those schools in order to outline characteristics of a successful secular Jewish education. What types of knowledge and learning activities do non-Orthodox Jews in Israeli schools use to create a sense of “Jewish meaning” or “Jewish continuity” in time and space, that is the equivalent of prayer and learning halacha or Oral Law for the Orthodox Jew?

- **In order to answer the question of “Why will the non-Orthodox Jew want his or her child to have a Jewish education?”, we need to look at the formal and the informal events that occur in Israeli schools that enable a sense of continuity between the experience of being in school and the life as it is lived in other areas of everyday life? At what points in the experience of schooling, does the non-Orthodox Israeli experience a meaningfully “Jewish” education? Another way of stating the question, is what are the types of classes and informal activities, that touch on Jewish culture and tradition, that secular parents will want to see in their children’s schools?**

In the only existing research on the “Jewish motivations” of parents vis-à-vis the schooling of their children, Bar and Ya’ar (2003) document the strong interest parents show in having formal subjects in the curriculum and informal activities that emphasize the cultural and national experience in both the secular and religious spheres. **Almost all of the families covered by the survey celebrated some form of religious (Passover, Rosh Hashana, Sukkot etc.) and National/Secular (Independence Day, Holocaust) holidays in their homes AND a large majority regarded continuity between Jewish life in the home and school as important.** For example, Bar and Ya’ar write:

When the parents were asked whether they were interested in having the school celebrate festivals and religious holidays, it was found that almost all the parents wanted this but not necessarily because they wanted to emphasize the religious dimension of these holidays, as emerged in the detailed interviews that we conducted with some of the parents. These interviews show that some of the respondents regard the religious ceremonies at school as a continuation or completion of what is provided at home without mentioning that this continuation is related to religious contents; others regard these ceremonies as having a potential to integrate their children into the experience of Israeli nationhood. Another group of parents would like to have the holidays celebrated at school with an emphasis on nonreligious aspects of the holidays, such as the seasonal aspect of the Feast of Weeks and the national aspects of Passover (Bar and Ya'ar 2003, p. 78).

- **What we see is that, like the Orthodox-Religious Jews, the non-Orthodox Israeli Jew also desires a continuity of experience between home and school.**

B. The Secular Jewish “How” – The Importance of Informal Education

As with the Orthodox measure, the question of “how to implement the goals of a Jewish education” also involves creating an experience of continuity in time and space for the non-Orthodox Jew. However, unlike the Orthodox Jew the type of continuity between home, school and elsewhere is harder to define; because, the “why” does not involve a consistent religious ideology, but rather an eclectic mix of cultural, ethnic, nationalist and

religious ideological motivations and practices that differ from one type of non-Orthodox Israeli Jew to the next.

Despite the diversity of the non-Orthodox populations, the research by Bar and Ya'ar show that there are particular subjects, like the Holocaust and Zionist history that the parents consistently regard as Jewishly significant and attach high importance to as subjects for the school curriculum. There is also a high emphasis among the secular parents on the importance of exposing their children to the emotional side of the Jewish experience and to "Jewish values", as opposed to learning particular types of behavioral or theoretical knowledge about Judaism. For this reason, informal elements such as trips to museums such as Yad Vashem and sites such as Tel Hai are viewed as Jewishly important activities that are sponsored by the school.

- **We see that the research conducted by Bar and Ya'ar support assumptions made in the Shenhar report (Shenhar 1994) that formal subjects that emphasize Zionist and Jewish history, and informal educational activities are central to furthering the experience of "Jewish meaning" for non-Orthodox students in Israeli schools.**

C. The Importance of NGOs in Implementing a Secular Vision of Jewish Education

Beyond the formal and informal educational activities that are planned and implemented by the school, another important factor in achieving integration between the experience in the classroom and the world surrounding the school is the role of NGOs which specialize in Jewish cultural education and offer their services to schools. Given the dearth of non-Orthodox educators who specialize in areas of Jewish culture (also noted by the Shenhar commission), the expertise provided by the NGOs becomes a vital component in the world of non-Orthodox Jewish education.

A survey of NGOs conducted by Posen Foundation (Yoffe and Arad 2003) found 56 organizations currently operating in Israel, whose mission statements involve furthering a pluralistic vision of Jewish culture. Many of these organizations work with school staff, by providing enrichment programming, curricula materials, know-how and expertise that enable the creation of a meaningful educational environment, in a manner that is difficult to do without the NGO. Preliminary results from the 2004/2005 Panim survey of Jewish educational activity in non-Orthodox schools shows that many of the schools that place an emphasis on Jewish history and culture in their curriculum, make extensive use of services provided by NGOs.

D. The Secular Jewish “What” – The Need for an Educational Measure

“What” needs to occur in order to determine that the goal of achieving a sense of continuity between community, home and school actually happens? How are we to evaluate educational “success”? At the theoretical level, the answer to the question of “what” needs to happen in order to declare success is similar for both Orthodox and Secular schooling – there is a need for integration between of the learning experience in school and the larger life experience of the student. If the student views “Jewish education” as an anomaly with little relevance to the outside world, then the educational experience is a failure.

In the above discussion, we have learned that the 1994 Shenhar report argued that there is a need to promote a meaningful Jewish educational experience for the non-Orthodox Jew in the *Mamlachti* school, through the integration of family, school and wider community in the explicit educational policies of the educational system. We have also seen that the Shenhar recommendations are at one with the desire of non-Orthodox parents to see a continuity of Jewish experience between home and school.

However, in our discussion of the “how” of non-Orthodox Secular education we learned that the tools for implementing a Jewish integration of school, family and community, in time and space, are not as clear cut as for Orthodox-Religious education. Unlike the Orthodox, there are no clear behavioral measures for determining continuity of the secular Jewish experience, and there are also no coherent ideological measures for claiming success or declaring failure.

Panim is currently developing a survey of Jewish educational activities, which is to be implemented in a survey of non-Orthodox High Schools starting in December 2004. The survey draws on a theoretical framework that attempts to overcome the lack of a clear secular Jewish ideology by focusing on formal characteristics of educational programs that do, or do not, integrate the learning experience in time and space. The following are central questions which inform the Panim survey. Is the learning experience in a classroom or on a trip outside of the school, explicitly designed to create connections between home, school and community, or between learning in the here and now and the historical and global Jewish experience? Alternatively, does the educational program focus exclusively on the in-class experience, or on the school trip, without drawing connection between these two types of activities and activities happening elsewhere? Clearly, in our opinion, educational success in the secular sphere depends on the former, rather than the latter process.

To this end, the Panim survey will gather data on Jewish educational activities with an eye to asking if the activity is limited to the classroom or school trip, or is spread over several sites ranging from formal to informal educational activities inside and outside of the school. Who is involved in the planning and implementation of the educational program? To what extent are parents and communal personalities active in the educational process? What is the role of NGOs in the educational process? In addition the survey will look at the infrastructure

that the school builds in terms of support for integrative educational programming, support from the Ministry of Education, the nature of teacher training and the role of NGOs.

Panim's goal is to decipher the variables that stand behind the current educational successes of a select group of non-Orthodox schools who have actively promoted an integrative Jewish experience for their students. Amongst other questions, we want to know: What does the curriculum look like in these schools? Who is active in promoting and designing the curriculum? And, what are the sources of financial and educational support that the school receives?

We also want to examine current measures used by the Ministry of Education and Foundations for distributing financial and educational support to schools, and place these prevailing standards next to the Secular measure for educational excellence that has been outlined in this paper. Our hope is that this measure and the empirical data collected from the Panim survey will serve as: (1) A baseline against which schools can evaluate their own work; (2) a framework, for effectively channeling resources to excellent educational programs; and, (3) a means to enable foundations and the Ministry of Education to measure the results of their investment in secular Jewish education.

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