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Steve Bailey, Ph.D.
Shalhevet School

Introduction

Parents who are concerned about their child’s proficiency in college-preparatory curricula but also serious about his or her religious development in young adulthood, are willing to spend thousands of dollars a year sending their children to private Jewish high schools. After four years, they expect that their children will have received a quality Jewish and general education so that they graduate knowledgeable in Jewish texts and in Jewish practices while being prepared to compete for acceptance into prestigious universities.

But parents sending their children to a Jewish school also expect that their children will graduate a “mensch.” They expect that their children’s attitudes and behavior will reflect Jewish values such as honesty, respect, caring, truthfulness, tolerance, compassion and social sensitivity. The fact is, most graduates may achieve academic success and competence in basic knowledge and skills, but still remain seriously lacking in moral maturity, both in universal ethics and Jewish values.

Indeed, both formal and informal observations of Jewish schools have revealed significant evidence of cheating, plagiarizing and lying throughout the four years of high school. Disrespectful language and disruptive behavior towards teachers, administrators and peers are commonplace. Overall, there are manifestations of social insensitivity, intolerance of differences and immature moral judgment (Bailey, 1996; Green, 1985; Friedman, 1984; Nulman, 1975; Selig & Teller, 1975; Yaron, 1975; Menitoff, 1974).

Certainly many “traditional” schools graduate students who are strongly identified with observant Jewish life, but even these graduates often fail to absorb Judaism’s non-ritually based ethics and morals. Worse, a larger percentage of graduates either reject, ignore or simply fall away from traditional Jewish life and in their rejection, often substitute Jewish values with the non-Jewish cultural values of their contemporaries.

Ethical reasoning and behavior, integral to Jewish education, comes from the transmission of values that strengthen the young adult’s Jewish identity in coping with the moral dilemmas of everyday life and from a firm basis in Jewish literacy and ethical traditions. If a Jewish adolescent enters young adulthood as a college-bound, morally stunted
individual, we, as Jews, are in trouble. Where will we get the next generation of knowledgeable identified Jews who reflect Jewish ethics in their university, professional and personal lives?

Who has the primary responsibility to transmit values and literacy--the home or the school? This paper takes the position that, for the following three reasons, the Jewish school is a key player in resolving this critical issue.

First, although the ultimate responsibility for character development is on the parents, schools are in a better position to influence the developing child’s moral qualities, since children spend most of their waking hours in school. Hundreds of moral dilemmas present themselves in school life and educators can use these opportunities to sensitize students to ethical decision-making.

Second, administrators and teachers are the child’s models for ethical thought and behavior, intentionally or unintentionally. How educators relate to the child daily becomes the real teaching tool for the child’s moral sense. If administrators and teachers are arbitrary, unfair, authoritarian and disrespectful toward their students, it will not matter what traits and values are taught verbally; a student learns what a student sees.

Finally, any school-based moral education program must be comprehensive to be effective. Periodic moral exhortations or sporadic social-caring activities do little to affect the internalization of values and ethical behavior. It is the day-to-day, real-life experiences that a child integrates. Therefore, schools need to incorporate formal and informal techniques that are omnipresent.

It is this writer’s position that such a school-based comprehensive program, which satisfies these three criteria, is the a Just Community -- a model for moral education, based on the pioneering work of the late Prof. Lawrence Kohlberg of Harvard University.

Kohlberg’s Model of Moral Education

Moral development in religious education comprises the psychological processes that are involved in a child’s developing sense of what is right or wrong -- which lead to moral action -- based on both general universal and specific religious value systems.

Professor Lawrence Kohlberg of Harvard University formulated a typology of the development of moral thinking (1973). The typology contains three hierarchical levels of
moral reasoning. Within each level, there are two related stages. These levels and stages represent developing moral philosophies, that is, distinct ways of viewing moral issues, which change as the child grows. It is important to note that these moral judgments do not reflect external standards learned from parents or teachers, but rather the child’s own morality reflecting his or her particular stage of moral reasoning. Also, the child does not necessarily advance in her moral reasoning with age or logical reasoning; age allows the capacity to reason at higher levels, it does not cause the child to reason at higher levels. Finally, the levels and stages are hierarchical, meaning that a child has to pass through lower stages before arriving at higher stages.

A Modified Kohlberg Model: The Just Community

As the result of his experiences in schools, Kohlberg came to emphasize new aspects of moral education and modify some previously held notions. Reimer (1989) discusses some of these that are relevant to our summary.

Having worked with adults and adolescents, Kohlberg viewed the work with adolescents, typically at the “conventional level” of moral development, as the key population to target for moral education. He wished to create a Just Community to initiate adolescents into a conventional moral system reflecting fairness, equality and community. Kohlberg, according to Reimer, learned from his kibbutz visit that respect for rules is not allegiance to arbitrary regulations promulgated by an authority, but can be seen as a respect for agreements that the group makes among themselves and with their leader. Combined with Durkheim’s notion that respect for rules is basic to moral education, Kohlberg saw that group values were integral to individual moral maturity.

1 Based on Dewey’s original three levels of moral thinking, Kohlberg called the first level the preconventional; the second he called conventional and the third he named the postconventional or autonomous. The preconventional level takes an egocentric perspective, typical of young children, where the child considers only his own experience of good or bad consequences of his behavior. The conventional level, found most often in school-aged children, focuses more on conformity to the expectations of the group, whether family, friends, school or nation. The widened perspective not only includes conformity with the social norms but also maintaining or justifying this order. Finally, the postconventional level, typical of older adolescents and many (though not all) adults, expands the moral perspective to autonomous moral principles that have validity beyond the authority of the group or society norms. Within each of the three levels are two stages which further refine the level’s perspective.
Another related area of movement from theoretical to practical was Kohlberg’s acknowledgment that the content of moral education could not be separated from the form of moral reasoning. In other words, although moral development was focused on styles of reasoning -- not whether a position was “pro” or “con” a certain action -- it became clear to Kohlberg that there was no way to introduce conventional morality without specific content relating to a moral code of behavior (Peters, 1973). Kohlberg realized that when dealing with real-life moral dilemmas, what is decided is important, not only how it was decided. This practical and important limitation to the pure democratic value of equality is a crucial element of a realistic Just Community program.

A final area to discuss is Kohlberg’s concern for indoctrination. He was always opposed to indoctrinating students as a violation of democratic values. However, in his acknowledgment that teachers should advocate conventional values and the community should transmit its values, how does one protect against indoctrination? This was a concern especially in light of Durkheim’s stress on respect for rules and attachment to the group.

What Kohlberg eventually argued for was a Just Community approach, which would insure against indoctrination by a democratic governance approach to rules and policies. This meant that the rules would not be monolithically pre-established by the educators with no participation from the school community, but rather, the responsibility for the formulation and maintenance of the rules would be shared by educators and students. To be sure, the educators retain the responsibility for educationally sound policies, but educators would have to base their policies on reasons that students can understand and accept, with genuine permission for dissent from the opinions of the educators. This balance allowed for the teaching of specific moral content and moral action, but within a context that allowed for critical thinking, discussion and responsible resolutions. Thus educators were advocates of rules and policies and not indoctrinators.

The Just Community Approach for Jewish Education

What should the overall school atmosphere look like in a Just Community? What needs to characterize a moral education program in which students feel heard, cared for and respected? There is a well-stated set of principles, which describe the overall character necessary in a school environment for effective moral education. Thomas Lickona, a respected researcher and author on moral education, published a recent article (Lickona, 1996), in which he listed eleven principles to guide schools in planning programs for character (or moral) education projects, drawing from Just Community research.
These principles can also serve as a summary set of guidelines to characterize our moral education project for Jewish high schools. Paraphrasing and adapting Lickona’s principles to Jewish moral education, we get the following eleven guidelines:

1. **A moral education project in Jewish schools should promote core ethical values, such as honesty, caring, fairness, responsibility and respect for others as well as ourselves.** The school should demonstrate how these core universal values are found in Jewish texts and how they are expressed through Jewish law and custom. The school needs to publicly stand for these values and define them in terms of behaviors that can be observed in school. Further, the school needs to establish ways of studying and discussing them, and using them in school policies. To show the commitment to these values, the school needs to enforce them by holding the whole school community accountable to standards of conduct consistent with these core values.

2. **The project goal of “moral maturity” must include thought, feeling and behavior.** Moral maturity consists of understanding, caring about and acting on core ethical values, in an age-appropriate manner. The task of a moral education program is to help students, administrators and teachers know ethically correct values and to know how to express them. As time goes on, understanding deepens and ethical behavioral choices become more consistent.

3. **Effective moral education requires an intentional, proactive, comprehensive approach to ethics in all phases of school life.** This means that the way teachers act in the classroom, the way administrators make and enforce policies, methods of instruction and assessment, the management of the physical school environment, relationships with parents, conduct at sports events, etc., are all opportunities for moral education. “Stand alone” moral education techniques may be useful first steps, but must lead to a holistic approach applicable to all of school life.

4. **The school itself must be a caring community.** The structure and dynamics of the school must represent a microcosm of a caring and just society that fosters the desire to learn and to “be a good person”. Daily life in the classrooms, hallways, cafeteria and gym must reflect concern and respect for others, responsibility, kindness and fairness.

5. **To develop moral maturity, students need opportunities for moral action.** Students learn best by doing. By grappling with real dilemmas of school life (classroom policies, school-
wide policies, group planning and problem-solving, community service, etc.), students develop practical understanding of the requirements of fairness, benevolence, cooperation and mutual respect. Through repeated experiences, students develop moral reasoning skills and ethical behavioral habits.

6. **Effective moral education includes a meaningful and challenging academic curriculum in both Judaic and general studies.** Academics are not separate from ethical development. In a caring school in which students feel respected and liked by teachers, they are more likely to work hard to succeed. Reciprocally, when students feel competent and successful, they are more likely to feel valued and to value others. A good program gives students varied opportunities to feel competent and respects their differing strengths and weaknesses.

7. **Moral education should help develop a student’s intrinsic motivation.** As moral reasoning develops in students, so does the commitment to doing what their moral judgment tells them is right. There needs to be a movement away from extrinsic rewards to the real reasons to act responsibly: to express Jewish values (which include core ethical values), especially the rights and needs of self and others. This is especially important in discipline policies. Similarly, both the Judaic and general studies curriculum should be presented in a stimulating, challenging way so that the motivation to learn is due to the intrinsic satisfaction that comes with understanding and competence.

8. **Administration, faculty and staff must all become a moral community in which all share responsibility for moral development and adhere to the same core ethical values that are taught to students.** This principle involves three dynamics. First, all adults must model the core values in their behavior and take advantage of the opportunities they have to influence the ethical development of students. There is no difference between general studies and Judaic studies staff on these goals. Second, The school administration and staff must be given opportunities, like those given to students, to discuss dilemmas of school life, problem-solve and work through personnel policies and issues related to school atmosphere and work conditions. If administration and staff do not experience mutual respect, fairness and concern, they are less likely to be committed to teaching these values to students. Finally, the school must designate time for both Judaic and general staff together to reflect on moral issues. Reflection on the fairness of school requirements and policies, the quality and character of Judaic programming, student
behavior, relationship with parents, and the school environment are all necessary for building a Just Community which is constantly self-monitoring and self-adjusting.

9. A moral education project requires leadership from both staff and students. In order to affect a Just Community project, there needs to be a project director, administrator or teacher who champions the effort and is responsible for structuring, monitoring, troubleshooting and long-term planning. Students, too, need to be represented in terms of leadership roles on committees, meetings and projects.

10. The school must recruit parents, community Rabbis and Board members as partners in building and supporting the Just Community. Since parents are the foremost moral educators for their children, there needs to be a component of parent training in moral education goals and techniques for the home. Additionally, parents need to be kept informed about the school’s goals and activities. The project will be enhanced if Board members, Rabbis and community agencies are integrated into the school’s Just Community dynamics.

11. There needs to be an ongoing evaluation of the project to assess the character of the school, the school staff’s functioning and the extent to which students behave in ethically correct ways. One needs to survey students regarding issues of respect, fairness and caring. Staff needs to be assessed on dimensions of fostering moral development and the degree to which they are models of the core values they wish to transmit to students. Schools need to gather statistics on such data as attendance, frequency of rule violation, vandalism and incidents of disrespect towards faculty and peers. Data also needs to be gathered on observed incidents of honesty, caring, benevolence, responsibility and kindness.

The Just Community Model for Jewish Day Schools

Now that we have established a theoretical and practical compatibility between Kohlberg’s model of moral education and the goals and purposes of Jewish education, we can look at how this model would appear in a Jewish school.

The Just Community model has two major characteristics: A school-wide government called an Authoritative Democracy and specific components that reflect the goals of moral education.
Authoritative Democracy

The traditional authoritarian educational process seeks to transmit the knowledge and values deemed worthwhile by the community to the next generation. Its goal, in school government, is conformity and it is preoccupied with maintaining order and control. Inevitably, the authoritarian bureaucracy dominates the school community by coercion and subjugates the students to its own goals of ideological and behavioral conformity. Equally inevitable is the hostile "us versus them" relationship between students and administration and the consequent resentment by students, of the values imposed.

At the other end of the continuum, is the democratic education process. On the positive side, all members of the school have rights, privileges and responsibilities in a democratic governing system. Students are empowered with the right to be heard, for their reasoned needs to be taken seriously and with the inalienable right to be treated fairly and respectfully by administrators and teachers. All are equal partners in working to seek how to deal creatively with contemporary life.

However, here too, there are fundamental weaknesses. Adolescents cannot be expected to have the reasoned judgment of mature adults and, therefore, cannot be seen as equal partners in the education dynamic. Adolescents often are creative and energetic, but also impulsive and insensitive. Moreover, adolescents are not professional educators and cannot be expected to govern their formal education effectively. Accordingly, a “pure” democracy, where administrators, faculty and students have equal rights in all areas, is a naive educational structure. Nonetheless, empowering adolescents to actively participate in their education and affording them rights of fairness and respect are critical to an effective educational strategy.

These two strategies appear paradoxical as extremes, but, in fact, both contain elements of an ideal model for contemporary Jewish education. In our moral education project, let us call this third strategy, which integrates goals and techniques of both authoritarian and democratic bureaucracies, an “Authoritative Democracy.” Such a government is democratic in terms of according students the right to be heard, for their reasoned needs to be taken seriously and with the inalienable right to be treated fairly and respectfully by administrators and teachers. However, the school also seeks to transmit traditional Jewish community values and achieve a significant degree of conformity to religious norms. In effect, it is a democratic bureaucracy, which is limited in three areas where exclusive authority is retained by administration and faculty. These are:
1. Pedagogic authority -- The school must retain sole authority over curricular and pedagogic goals by virtue of the school’s contract with parents to provide an education which is approved by the civil authorities and is congruent with parental aims. Thus, curriculum and graduation requirements are determined by the administration and faculty.

2. Religious authority -- Jewish schools retain the authority to legislate policy on practices as required by Jewish tradition and ethics (and for Orthodox schools, contemporary halakha)

3. Health and safety authority -- The administration retains the authority to affect policies which comply with health and safety measures as promulgated by Federal and State laws.

Components of a Jewish Just Community (K’hillat Tzedek)

Aside from an authoritative democratic government, a Just Community contains seven basic components that encourage moral maturity. The following is a summary of the basic rationale for each of these components, as it relates to the theory and practice of the Just Community reviewed in previous sections.

1. Democratic Classrooms

The Just Community is an Authoritative Democracy. As such it presents students with the opportunity for their reasonable needs to be heard and taken seriously, and to be treated respectfully and fairly. No other place is this more critical than in the classroom. We also argued, like Kohlberg, that while teachers should not indoctrinate based on asserting their personal power of authority, they should represent the school’s ethical norms that appeal to the moral reasoning of the group and transmit these norms to the group. Therefore, teachers need to establish classroom policies as models of ethical reasoning and democratic values to the students.

There is also a need for clearly defined and equitable discipline policies that are consistently followed-through. The combination of fair classroom and discipline policies create a

\[2\] A Just Community with these components was established by this writer in an experimental Jewish High school in Los Angeles (Shalhevet) in 1992, and continues to the present.
Democratic Classroom which reflects the Just Community goal of an ethical system representing democratic values of mutual rights and responsibilities.

From the students’ side, students in a Democratic Classroom learn to take the perspective of the teacher, to balance her needs and theirs, to develop a sense of trust, to propose their own solutions and to become sensitized to personal responsibility.

2. Moral Dilemma Discussions

The pioneering work of Moshe Blatt\(^3\) who demonstrated that moral dilemma discussions in a classroom resulted in an increase in the moral reasoning stage of the student. This technique has remained a cornerstone of programs aimed at raising the moral maturity of students. Aside from moral reasoning development, there are at least five other important goals of this technique, as noted by the staff of the Civic Education Project at Carnegie-Mellon University, in their workshop manual.\(^4\)

In addition to the above, since dilemmas discussions should primarily focus on issues that can be applied to real life, both in school and outside, students learn to apply their skills to everyday ethical dilemmas. This increases the probability that cognitive concepts will turn into more ethical, socially sensitive behavior.

3. Town Meeting

We have noted that an effective moral education program requires a proactive, comprehensive approach to fairness, respect and to democratic values of privileges and responsibilities in all aspects of school life. This is true not only in the Democratic Classroom, but also in the policies and procedures reflected in the school’s general rules. As an integral part of an Authoritative Democracy, students need to be given a chance to participate in their own educational experience by being given the opportunity to be heard and to participate in the development and maintenance of school policies. We mentioned certain limitations to the democratic involvement of students (in areas of school-wide pedagogic policies, religious policies and health and safety policies), but in areas of school-

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wide policies reflecting fair treatment and respect, students have a right and a responsibility to take part in their formulation and in the setting of consequences.

Past experience has shown that since students are involved in rule-making, there is an increased probability students will accept the responsibility to maintain the rules. Teachers and administrators have an equal right to have their views known and explained to the whole student body. Therefore, a Town Meeting is the setting in which students, administrators and teachers discuss and work through school policies. Such open discussion teaches skills of listening, articulating, evaluating, tolerating and respecting different views, analyzing conflicts of values and balancing competing needs of justice and caring. Like moral dilemmas, these meetings are aimed at increasing moral maturity and social sensitivity as well as an appreciation of democratic values of a community.

4. Fairness Committee

Typically, a student feels powerless when treated unfairly in school. Perhaps the student was excluded from a club unfairly or felt discriminated against by a teacher or administrator. There is no course of appeal, no action to be taken. This powerlessness often leads students to act out in non-constructive ways like cutting class, acting disrespectfully to others or damaging school property.

Essentially, the purpose of the Committee is to deal with problems of fairness that arise among students, between teacher and student, and between administration and student. In this context, fairness means that both parties have a right to be treated with respect and to have their needs balanced so that both sides can accept a resolution. In this context the teacher and student have equal rights for respect and fairness, even if one is the teacher and the other a student.

While the Committee should be viewed as a conflict negotiation agency--not a court--it has the power to recommend a particular resolution to the Principal by which the parties agree to be bound. One important by-product of the Committee is that students learn principles of the Jewish system of justice through a rabbinical member of the Committee. Since the Committee is not a court, the Rabbi does not decide the specific outcome, but contributes to the discussion using Jewish law as guiding principles for evaluating the case.

5. Effective Discipline Policies

In a Just Community, a great deal of time and energy is spent on developing fair and equitable policies in the Democratic Classroom and formulating school-wide policies at
Town Meetings. Also, the entire rationale for a Fairness Committee is to assure that all members of the Just Community are treated fairly. Therefore, a lack of follow-through on agreed upon rules and regulations represents a violation of respect, fairness and responsibility, the foundation of the entire moral education project.

In the adolescent’s natural need for autonomy, it is predictable that some will try to ignore, disregard, blatantly violate or subtly circumvent rules. On the other hand, it is equally innate for an adolescent to seek structure provided from a consistent, predictable environment. Both these realities argue for the critical need for clear, descriptive behavioral expectations for all members of the Just Community and equally clear consequences for violations of these expectations. More importantly, policies were made with the participation of students and they accepted the responsibility to uphold the agreed upon rules. Not only do students quickly lose respect for a teacher or administrator who cannot enforce policies, but also the entire message of the Just Community is undermined by allowing students, teachers or administrators to abdicate their responsibility to maintain social order in the school as reflected by school or classroom policies. While it is true that enforcing school rules takes a tremendous amount of time and energy, it is energy well-spent in a school which teaches Just Community values.

6. Community Service

A key goal of the Just Community project is the integration of mature ethical reasoning which will lead to morally mature, ethical behavior. Aside from the expectation for ethical behavior in school, there is an expectation for ethical behavior out of school--at home and in the community. This is consistent with the need to present the student with many opportunities for moral reasoning and ethical behavior, as we discussed. It is also consistent with the goal of generalizing their moral maturity to new situations.

An excellent opportunity for behavior reflecting social sensitivity, caring and ethical behavior is in volunteer work for community agencies serving the needy. By devoting a reasonable amount of hours consistently throughout the year, students experience the satisfaction of actually serving others in concrete, practical ways. Students also learn responsibility, reliability and trustworthiness because the students’ participation in the program is taken seriously by the school and the student has to keep time schedules, records and establish a responsible relationship with the agency being served.
An important component of the community service is that students keep a diary of their interactions with the people they serve. This allows for a conscious, thoughtful and reflective experience which influences the student’s moral maturity.

7. Parent-Training Workshops

Research in the Just Community has underscored the need for parents to be actively involved and personally invested in their child's education. In a Just Community, the responsibility is two-fold: to support and motivate their child's serious academic study and to promote the school's goals of Democratic and Jewish values and ethical behavior. These goals are reflected in our discussion of the characteristics of a Just Community which includes a meaningful, challenging and motivating academic curriculum and the recruitment of parents as partners in building and supporting the Just Community.

Aside from supporting the goals of the school, an important rationale for parents to be trained in moral development techniques is that the same dynamics of moral maturity evident in the school needs to be generalized to the home. We want students to behave respectfully towards their parents as they are expected to behave towards their teachers. We want parents to treat their adolescents with respect and fairness just as we ask of our teachers and administrators. We want to teach parents to communicate more effectively with their children as we want teachers to communicate effectively with their students. We want there to be fair discipline policies in the home just as there should be in school. A healthy environment that supports adolescent psychological, academic and moral growth in school should be evident at home as well.
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