



June-July 2008

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Fruits of their labor: Mandel fellows present their final projects

The first week of June was a special week for fellows of the Mandel School for Educational Leadership. After a long period of research, exploration, discussion, personal study and observation, they presented the culmination of their personal projects to their contemporaries, experts in the field, and Mandel faculty at the Mandel Leadership Institute. A festive mood presided as people crowded into the room to hear the innovative presentations.



Project posters are assessed by colleagues

“One of the central aims of the studies at the Mandel School for Educational Leadership is to strengthen the ability of the fellow to translate their world-view into a practical vision. The individual project is one of the tools for fulfilling this goal,” said Dr. Neta Sher-Hadar, a Mandel faculty member who guided fellows through the process of creating their projects.

Sher-Hadar explains that the projects were comprised of three sections: theory, research and policy. The theory was acquired through observing issues in education and society or formulating an educational or social world-view leaning on the theoretical world. Research involved the examination of the social and educational state of an organization, institution, school or other body, from a personal, educational and managerial perspective. The final stage was a call for practical action and promotion of a new initiative, either within an existing organization or the founding of a new one.

Fellows addressed different educational and social questions, in line with their own fields of interest. For example, Sleman Alkereni, a fellow who grew up in the Bedouin town of Rahat, presented, “A Program for the Enhancement of Parental Involvement in Education in Rahat.” His project outlined the challenges of parental involvement in the Rahat educational system and addressed the challenges of forming parent committees, emphasizing the critical importance of parent involvement in their children’s education. Alkereni proposed a pilot program which will form two parents groups in a Rahat elementary school at the beginning of the next academic year.

Other projects included "Social and Environmental responsibility of institutions for higher education in Israel" and "A proposal for an innovative Arts High School," which related to the question of arts education in Israel. Other fellows presented; "A new traditional Community Center"; "A center for Teacher Empowerment"; "Education for civil participation in public education"; "Yerucham – A test case of local politics"; and "Teachers & Principals and what goes between."

The criteria for the success of the projects are multi-dimensional, explains Sher-Hadar. For some fellows, the success lies in the process of the project, as they find that the consolidation and clarification of their world-view involved in creating the individual project is an effective way of summing up their two-year learning process at the Mandel Leadership Institute.



Mandel staff and faculty listen to presentations

Examples of successful Mandel fellow projects from previous years that were brought to fruition are: The Semel Institute of Dr. Sarit Barzilai; the Ovnayim Institute (for the development of practical knowledge in education) of Shevi Guvrin; 'Keshet' High School of Ruth Lehavi; 'Alma' - Hebrew college of Dr. Ruth Calderon; and the organization 'Pleasant Recovery', founded by Granit Almog-Barakat, which coordinates dozens of volunteers in providing assistance and services to hospitalized children.

Building Educational Vision: The Hadar Seminar at Mandel Leadership Institute

Founders of Mechon Hadar (MH), an institute of Jewish study, prayer and personal growth, participated in a unique seminar this spring at the Mandel Leadership Institute. The seminar served as the culmination of a year-long Mandel fellowship, which helped the three educational entrepreneurs, Rabbis Ethan Tucker, Elie Kaunfer and Shai Held, develop their educational vision for a new initiative – Yeshivat Hadar.

MH aims to help foster the development of new independent minyanim (prayer groups) outside NYC, and to provide opportunities for intensive

Jewish study. This summer's planned Yeshivat Hadar program will offer 36 participants an eight-week in-depth study experience, combining traditional text study, egalitarian prayer and social action with a special focus on personal religious growth.

Over the past year, Tucker, Kaunfer and Held have interacted and learned with Mandel faculty from the United States and Israel, including Professors Dan Pekarsky, David Stern, Devora Steinmetz , Rabbi Elisha Anselovits, and Dr. Eli Gottlieb.

In this one-off educational venture, the Mandel Leadership Institute provided the three founders with a fellowship to assist them in creating a deeper understanding of the vision behind Hadar. During their week-long visit to Israel for a final seminar, studies and discussions focused on creating an in-depth understanding of issues relating to culture creation, and what it means to build organizational culture which supports and strengthens educational goals.



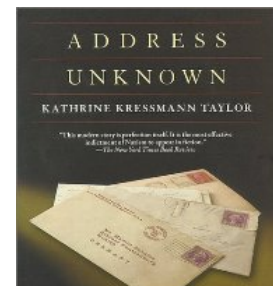
Rabbi Elie Kaufner, one of the founders of Mechon Hadar

Following their year-long participation in the Mandel fellowship program, both Kaunfer and Tucker have won prestigious awards. Rabbi Kaunfer, executive director of MH, was named to the inaugural class of Avi Chai Fellows, which recognizes emerging communal and educational leaders within the North American Jewish community. One of six fellows chosen from a national search, Kaunfer will direct the proceeds of this three-year grant to provide initial funding for a year-round yeshiva program, expected to launch in 2009. This award follows co-founder Rabbi Tucker's receipt of the first Social Entrepreneur Fellowship from the Grinspoon Foundation. The Forward recently named Kaunfer one of the country's top fifty Jewish leaders and the Jewish Week named him one of its "36 Under 36" in its May 23, 2008, issue.

Theater provides poignant education on Holocaust Remembrance Day for IDF Educational Leadership Development Program

One of the challenges of a society which places great importance on memorializing the Holocaust is how to avoid de-sensitization of the subject. This year the IDF Educational Leadership Development Program marked Remembrance Day for the Holocaust by inviting the kibbutz theater company to perform “Address Unknown” at the Mandel Leadership Institute.

The play, adapted from a novel written in 1938 by Katherine Kressman Taylor, follows a series of letters between a Jewish art dealer living in San Francisco, and his business partner, who had returned to Germany in 1932 and gradually adopted the Nazi ideology. The play, through the observation of isolated people, touches on essential questions of the ethical and moral deterioration, and the brutalization of an entire society.



Adapted from the 1938 novel by Katherine Kressman Taylor

“There is great educational value in the play and the way it deals with issues of democracy and with the abyss of our human identity as individuals and as a society,” says Dr. Motti Shalem, Director of the IDF Educational Leadership Development Program.

“The central axis in the Mandel IDF Educational Leadership Development Program is the attempt to confront the participants with different dimensions of their personal and collective identity; as Jews, as Israelis, as Israeli Army officers, as educators, and as human beings. Holocaust education is significant in the program since this chapter is essential to the process of observing every one of those dimensions. ‘Address Unknown’ was therefore

a complementary experiential element to the intensive study of the subject, and it seemed to me that the play was particularly fitting.” added Shalem.



Performed by the kibbutz theater company

Similarly, according to Shalem, the Israeli Army's educational system relates to the Holocaust as a central axis in the process of commander training. For the last four years, the program "Witnesses in

Uniform,” has sent hundreds of IDF commanders each year to Poland for a 5-day educational mission.

Although it is clear that in recent years the subject of addressing the Holocaust has become more central in officer training, Shalem states, “It is important to note that the Israeli Army does not replace the discussion of questions of Jewish and national identity with those of the Holocaust, and a variety of prisms are needed when cultivating an educationally-oriented leadership in the army or in our society.”

Jewish Identity beyond the Iron Curtain: Machanayim Marks Twenty Years of Activity in Israel

In a country only sixty years old, an organization which has been serving a community for two decades commands respect. Last month, the organization, Machanayim, chaired by Mandel graduate Ira Dashevski, celebrated twenty years since its establishment in Israel, following many years of activity in Moscow. Celebrations took place over a festive week with a range of activities in Jerusalem to mark the momentous occasion.

Machanayim began its activity in the Soviet Union during the period of the Iron Curtain. Members of the organization learned and taught Jewish studies alongside Zionist values underground. Most of the founders of the organization were refuseniks for many years, and battled for immigration to Israel, and Jewish and Zionist education.

When the members of the organization were permitted to immigrate to Israel together with hundreds of thousands of Soviet Jews, they discovered that there was a need for their activity in Israel too. For the past twenty years, the organization has been actively fulfilling its goal of providing immigrants with access to Jewish and Israeli content and activity.



Machanayim Conference at the Knesset

Today, the organization focuses on teaching Judaism and Israeli culture to Jewish immigrants and those in the process of converting. Machanayim

functions in cooperation with universities in Israel and around the world, the Jewish Agency, the Joint and others to provide the inter-cultural encounter between newcomers and veterans.

Machanayim has cooperated significantly with the Mandel Graduate Unit over the last few months, using MLI as a resource for thinking, planning and even as a location for joint activity. Similarly, the Graduate Unit was involved in the planning and carrying out of the anniversary celebrations.

The opening event of the 20th anniversary celebrations took place at the Jerusalem Municipality and was attended by Jerusalem Mayor Uri Lupoliansky, President of the Mandel Foundation, Annette Hochstein, and Members of Knesset, Rabbi Michael Melchior and Yuli Edelstein, who is also a Mandel graduate.

A conference entitled, “Judaism, Culture and Zionism: The identity of former Soviet Union Jewry” was one of the week’s keynote events. It was held at the Knesset, and attended by public figures and academics, amongst them Dr. Daniel Marom of the Mandel Leadership Institute, who spoke about Machanayim's important role in the public discourse concerning Israeli Identity.



Dr. Daniel Marom of the Mandel Leadership Institute

Chairman of the Knesset Committee for Immigration, Absorption and Diaspora, Michael Nodelman, commended Machanayim for their activity in Israel:

“In Russia it was forbidden to deal with religion and Jewish history; there were no synagogues, perhaps one or two in all of Russia – and these people from Machanayim took it upon themselves to learn and to teach Jews what is a Jew and Jewish traditions.

Almost all were refuseniks, and when the mass aliyah began, they came to Israel and here they continued their work. You may ask: why here? So many Jews arrived who did not know Judaism, who didn’t know tradition – and somebody need to help them return to the Jewish people and tradition.”

Further activities included an art exhibition, “Heavenly Jerusalem Earthly Jerusalem”; lessons by Machanayim activists in Jerusalem schools about the

history of the latest mass immigration; and a closing ceremony at the Begin Center.