



MANDEL CENTER FOR STUDIES IN JEWISH EDUCATION

TRANSFORMING TEACHING AND
LEARNING THROUGH RESEARCH
AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT



Dear Friends,

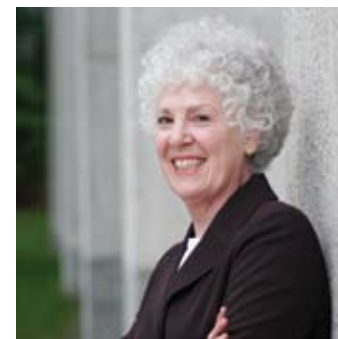
As my plane slowly descended on a recent flight to New York City, I had a marvelous bird's eye view of the network of bridges linking the city to itself and to the rest of the world, enabling travel across space, connecting people to each other and to their work, sending products to and from distant places. From the air, these stone and steel connections seem both firm and miraculous, a mixture of the solid and the ethereal.

Our work at the Mandel Center is about constructing and crossing bridges – connecting educators and institutions from diverse communities, linking research and practice in Jewish education, and extending our reach to teachers and scholars beyond our walls, who both benefit from and are active participants in our work.

This bridging takes us – and the teachers and educational leaders with whom we collaborate – to new places. But it goes further, shaping and changing the very nature of the people, practices, and places at the ends of each bridge. In dialogue with each other, educators and institutions grow, research and practice are newly

defined and configured, and the Center and those who join in our work are mutually transformed.

I am delighted to share our annual report for the 2007-08 academic year, a window onto our projects and publications, with a focus on the various bridges we build and traverse in our work.



“No bridge, once spanned, can cease to be a bridge.”

– Franz Kafka

It has been a remarkable year. As you will see in the following pages, we hosted a landmark conference on the teaching of rabbinic literature, Center-affiliated researchers published numerous articles and papers in a variety of venues, our projects flourished and grew, and many new hands and minds joined our inquiries into Jewish education.

At the beginning of the year, we welcomed Rebecca Silvera Sasson, a Wexner Graduate Fellow and doctoral student at Teachers College, Columbia University, to work with the DeLeT/MAT program. As the year ended, we said a heartfelt farewell to Judy Elkin, who has masterfully directed DeLeT since its inception, as she leaves the Center for a new career as a personal and professional coach, and we welcomed Serene Victor, renowned teacher educator, to lead the program. Now in its seventh year of preparing and inducting beginning teachers for Jewish day schools, DeLeT has become the Jewish day school concentration of the Master of Arts in Teaching program at Brandeis. And for the first time this year, alumni of DeLeT are serving as mentor teachers for current DeLeT fellows.

The Center takes very seriously its role in building the academic field of Jewish education, so we are especially delighted that Orit Kent, coleader of the *Beit Midrash* Research Project and former Center doctoral fellow, successfully defended her groundbreaking doctoral dissertation this year. (See this report's section on "Linking Research and Practice" for more about Orit's work on *hevruta* learning.)

In the spirit of inquiry that characterizes all of our work, I invite you to learn about our diverse studies of Jewish education by reading this annual report, by visiting our website, and by asking your own questions – in your own settings or by connecting with the Center. Join us in the work of transforming Jewish education!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink that reads "Sharon Feiman-Nemser". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Sharon Feiman-Nemser
Director, Mandel Center for Studies in Jewish Education
Mandel Professor of Jewish Education



Connecting Educators and Educational Communities

Located at a world-class research university, the Mandel Center is ideally situated to bring together educators from diverse communities. Our projects and programs build bridges between educational researchers and practitioners, between the fields of general and Jewish education, and between educators in different institutions and from different Jewish denominations.

This year, we hosted a reception and colloquium at the annual conference of the American Educational Research Association (AERA), that for the first time brought together an intergenerational group of fifty educational researchers with interests in Jewish education. Here at the Center, a yearlong study group on “intelligent performance,” convened by our scholar-in-residence Israel Scheffler, gathered faculty and researchers in Jewish and general education at Brandeis. Our Induction

Partnership regularly brings together educational leaders from a wide range of Jewish day schools in the Boston area to investigate and develop school-based structures and practices to support new teachers. As part of the Choosing to Teach project, we held our second annual study retreat with colleagues from the University of Notre Dame who are engaged in Catholic education. And at the Teaching Rabbinic Literature conference in January, participants represented the full range of institutional and Jewish denominational diversity – day school teachers and rabbis presented alongside university professors and instructors at institutions of higher Jewish learning.



Graduates of the DeLeT/MAT program at Brandeis and the Alliance for Catholic Education program at the University of Notre Dame come together for intensive reflection on the relationship between their religious/cultural identities and their identities as teachers.



As an outgrowth of the Center-sponsored colloquium this year, veteran and novice educational researchers interested in Jewish education are establishing a special interest group (SIG) within the American Educational Research Association.

By connecting educational communities and educators, we deepen learning and research in the field and here at the Center through rich comparisons between different settings and the linking of disparate conversations. As educators in a variety of contexts learn with and from one another, we overcome the isolation of Jewish educational practice.

“At the Mandel Center’s colloquium at the AERA conference, it was inspiring to see so many well-regarded education researchers committed to the study of Jewish education.”

– Renee Rubin Ross,
 Doctoral Candidate,
 Program in Education and Jewish Studies,
 New York University



Linking Research and Practice

The gap between research and practice, all too familiar in general education, finds its counterpart in the world of Jewish education. The Mandel Center works to integrate these two activities – not just by connecting them so that they can inform one another, but by rejecting simple distinctions between the two.

While working with Jewish day schools to implement school-based structures to guide and support their new teachers, we also study the factors that enable and constrain this process of change. As a result, our Induction Partnership produces substantive research that is useful to educational leaders and teachers – what we like to think of as “knowledge with legs” – while promoting change in our partner schools.

This year, Orit Kent, a Center doctoral student in Jewish education and Jewish studies, successfully defended her dissertation, a groundbreaking study of *hevruta* learning in our *Beit Midrash* for

Teachers which she co-led with Elie Holzer of Bar Ilan University. As Orit’s work is more widely disseminated, educators in diverse settings will be able to teach their own students the *hevruta* learning practices she conceptualizes.

Our extensive efforts to promote and produce research by practitioners themselves – in an emerging field known as the scholarship of teaching – dissolves the distinction between teacher and researcher, as instructors of Jewish texts at all levels study their practice and their students’ learning. This kind of research deepens the relationship between purposes and practices in teaching, and empowers teachers to seek evidence about the impact of their work on students.



In the DeLeT/MAT program’s mentor teacher study group, early-career and senior day school educators observe and analyze each others’ teaching practice.



Students in the DeLeT/MAT program conduct research on their own teaching, and each student publicly presents that research at the MAT end-of-year conference.

Ever mindful of our mission to transform practice, we translate research findings into conceptual and practical tools for use by Jewish educators. The educational settings in which we develop and refine these tools enable and inform our research.

At the Mandel Center, research and practice grow into and out of one another and the pure roles of “researcher” and “practitioner” dissolve, as teachers participate in significant research and researchers engage in design experiments that take them into classrooms and other educational settings.

“The Mandel Center is doing important work on new teacher induction in Jewish day schools. The institutional continuum which the Mandel Center team has created can help all schools think about what strong, school-based teacher induction involves. I am delighted they will be presenting this work at our national New Teacher Center symposium this year.”

*– Ellen Moir,
Executive Director, New Teacher Center,
University of California, Santa Cruz*



Extending Our Reach

At the Mandel Center, disseminating research and fostering inquiry are forms of pedagogy – and our “students” number in the thousands.

Our research generates sophisticated, accessible discourse on teaching and learning among teachers and scholars, across North America and around the world. Too often, teaching is – as Lee Shulman, former President of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, points out – “the second most private activity.” Our work, made public, engages teachers and scholars – many of whom we have never met – in their own inquiry and analysis.

Collaborations with the Partnership for Excellence in Jewish Education, with whom we are co-sponsoring a new Community of Practice for day school leaders, and with educational leaders and teachers at Communiten (a two-year after-school program for high schoolers modeled on the Florence Melton Adult Mini-School) now widen our impact on new audiences, locales, and populations.

Our Bridging Initiative continues to produce working papers investigating the teaching of Bible from kindergarten through the

university, including a suite of articles that recently appeared in the *Journal of Jewish Education*. Articles by Center researchers on our *Beit Midrash*, Induction Partnership, and Choosing to Teach projects serve as practical and conceptual resources, helping teachers and teacher educators facilitate intensive text study and bridge the worlds of teacher preparation and beginning teaching.

Videos from our two-day conference on Teaching Rabbinic Literature (see pages 10 and 11 of this report) are available on the Center website, so that an ever-widening circle of educators can virtually experience the entire event. Articles based on conference presentations are being published as working papers and submitted to print journals.

Through various media, we reach teachers, educational leaders, and scholars “*ba-asher hem sham*” – wherever they are – and engage them in the work of inquiry and investigation at the heart of the Center’s mission.



One of many programs beyond our walls supported by the Center, “Pedagogy of the Imagination: An Interdisciplinary Symposium” (co-sponsored with our colleagues in the Brandeis Education Program and other departments and offices) featured university-based and independent scholars.



In 2007-08 an average of 2,000 individuals visited the Center’s website each month, continuing the increased level of website traffic we achieved last year – with more than 2,800 visitors in the peak month of May. (Preview of redesigned Mandel Center homepage shown.)

Publications and Presentations

Mandel Center researchers published their work in the *American Journal of Education*; the *Handbook of Research on Teacher Education*, Third Edition; *Jewish Educational Leadership*; the *Journal of Jewish Education*; *10 Years of Believing in Jewish Day School Education* (Partnership for Excellence in Jewish Education); *Transforming Teacher Education: Reflections from the Field*; and *What We NOW Know About Jewish Education*.

We presented at the American Association of Colleges of Teacher Education, the American Educational Research Association, the American Sociological Association, the Davidson Graduate School of Jewish Education of the Jewish Theological Seminary, the Mandel Center’s Conference on Teaching Rabbinic Literature, the Network for Research in Jewish Education, the New England Educational Research Organization, the Partnership for Excellence in Jewish Education, the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion, and the Solomon Schechter Day School Association.

Titles of articles, chapters, and presentations, as well as links to the publications and organizations, are available at www.brandeis.edu/mandel.

“The Florence Melton Communiten High School is a world-class, coordinated system for teen education and engagement that includes Jewish students from all backgrounds. Partnering with Brandeis University’s highly-respected Mandel Center is enabling Communiten to create a ‘community of practice’ for its faculty throughout the country, to help realize our vision and change the face of Jewish teen education.”

– Evan J. Segal, Chairman
Florence Melton Communiten High School



Conference on Teaching Rabbinic Literature

More than 225 academics and educators from North America and Israel gathered in January at the Mandel Center’s research conference on the teaching of rabbinic literature. Participants represented 30 Jewish day schools, 20 colleges and universities, and 12 *yeshivot* and rabbinical seminaries, from across the denominational spectrum.

Amidst the diversity of the more than 50 presentations was a single-minded focus on asking probing questions about the practice of teaching and about student learning.

Topics explored included:

- the “pedagogy of slowing down” in teaching Talmud at a summer *kollel*
- Mishnah study as a means of meaningful ethical inquiry for middle school students
- the history of the page of Talmud and its influence on Talmud study
- teaching *halakhic* sources while respecting student autonomy
- teaching Talmud through the lens of legal theory
- approaches to teaching *midrash* in Jewish elementary schools
- fostering student awareness of the Talmud as an edited document in a pluralistic Jewish high school.

Two themes of note emerged from conference evaluations:

- **Asking “new questions.”** One participant reported, “My frustration comes mainly in realizing how much work I now feel I have ahead of me, now that the fire of questioning and refining my own practice area has been kindled.”
- **Investigating student learning.** In a post-conference evaluation, a school team wrote, “[We] need to learn more about how our students are internalizing the material. How can we think of the subject matter from the point of view of the student? How can we probe beneath the surface?”

More generally, we might ask: What do we want students to learn, and how do we know that they are learning it? These are among the most difficult questions to answer – but pursuing them has the potential to transform pedagogy.



In formal sessions and informal encounters, teachers at all levels – from day schools to universities – engaged in discussions of pedagogic questions.



The entire conference was recorded and is now available for viewing online – more than 50 total hours of footage, and more than 120 videos.



Presenters, respondents, and panelists analyzed their own and others’ teaching practices and presented a variety of conceptual approaches to the teaching of rabbinic texts.



Conference participant evaluations emphasized the notable presence of large numbers of both junior and senior scholars of rabbinic literature from a wide range of institutions.

To date, the conference homepage has been accessed more than 29,000 times since it was launched in the fall; the conference program book, a 60-page document containing abstracts of all the sessions as well as bios of the presenters, has been downloaded more than 2,000 times. Videos and materials from individual conference sessions have been downloaded more than 2,700 times. These videos provide not only a permanent record of this landmark event, but a set of tools for the ongoing professional development of individuals and institutions. The videos are available at

www.brandeis.edu/centers/mandel/TeachingRabbinics.html

See the inside back cover of this report for “What They’re Saying” about this conference...



Projects, Programs, and Staff

Research Projects

Bridging Scholarship and Pedagogy in Jewish Studies

Leader: Jon A. Levisohn

Senior Research Associate: Susan P. Fendrick; *Coordinator for the Conference on Teaching Rabbinic Literature:* Beth Polasky

The Bridging Initiative promotes new images and deeper understandings of the teaching of Jewish studies in multiple settings by facilitating critical dialogue among scholars and teachers at all levels and by developing a new tradition of practice-centered research.

Beit Midrash Research Project

Coleaders: Elie Holzer and Orit Kent

This project investigates two distinctive forms of Jewish learning: the interpretation of Jewish texts and *hevruta* learning. To date the research has been carried out in the DeLeT/MAT program at Brandeis.

Induction Partnership

Leader: Vivian Troen

Project Team: Sarah Birkeland, Nili Pearlmutter

The Induction Partnership generates knowledge about the support, development, and retention of beginning teachers in Jewish day schools, while creating strong pilot induction programs in area schools that serve as sites for research.

Choosing to Teach: A Study of Beginning Teachers in Jewish, Catholic and Public Schools

Leader: Eran Tamir

Research Team: Sharon Feiman-Nemser, Karen Hammerness (Stanford University), Bethamie Horowitz (New York University)

This comparative study examines the interactive effects of personal background, teacher preparation, and school context on the identity, teaching, and career commitments of new teachers in Jewish, Catholic, and public schools.

Longitudinal Study of DeLeT Graduates

Leader: Eran Tamir

Research Assistant: Yi Zhu

This longitudinal study tracks the career patterns, teaching practices, working conditions, and Jewish and other life choices of graduates of the DeLeT program at Hebrew Union College in Los Angeles and the DeLeT/MAT program at Brandeis. The study also surveys individuals before and after the program to assess DeLeT's impact on their evolving Jewish and professional identities.

Philosophy of Education Research Colloquia (PERC)

Director: Israel Scheffler

PERC offers a series of colloquia, open to the public, that deal broadly with educational matters from a humanistic, comparative, and historical perspective.

Scholars Program

Scholar-in-Residence: Israel Scheffler, Victor S. Thomas Professor Emeritus of Education and Philosophy, Harvard University

Dissertation Fellow: Rabbi Daniel Lehmann

Postdoctoral Research Fellow: Eran Tamir

Research Assistant: Jacob Cytryn

Research Affiliate: Susan L. Shevitz, Professor Emerita

The Mandel Center builds capacity for the academic field of Jewish education by supporting scholars at various stages of their careers.

Professional Development

DeLeT/Master of Arts in Teaching

Leader: Judy Elkin

Coleader: Rebecca Silvera Sasson

Mentor Teacher Development Coordinator: Vivian Troen

Instructors: Ellen Alt, Christine Brumbach, Heidi Chapple, Cynthia Davis, Sharon Feiman-Nemser, Elie Holzer, Orit Kent, Jon A. Levisohn, Lesley Litman, Susan Mayer, Nili Pearlmutter, Dirck Roosevelt, Faye Ruopp, Rebecca Silvera Sasson, Francesca Stark, Sue Stibel, Susie Tanchel, Vivian Troen

Field Instructors: Leslie Bazer, Alison Cook, Amy Gold, Cindy Shulak-Rome, Ayelet Steiner

Mentor Teachers: Deborah Barolsky, Hana Berman, Heidi Chapple, Batya (Beth) Foreman, Shira Horowitz, Meg Lederman, Sara (Shea) Maurino, Hilary Mofsowitz, Sharon Duman Packer, Jocelyn Segal, Fran Sharpe, Eve Youngerman, Tori Zissman

A joint initiative of the Education Program and the Mandel Center, the DeLeT/Master of Arts in Teaching program prepares teacher-leaders for Jewish day schools and serves as a laboratory for research on teacher preparation, induction, and retention.

Beginning Teacher Network

Coleaders: Shira Horowitz and Nili Pearlmutter

The Beginning Teacher Network builds a professional community among beginning teachers in Boston-area Jewish day schools.

Core Staff

Sharon Feiman-Nemser
Director, Mandel Professor of Jewish Education

Nora Abrahamer
Senior Associate Director of Operations and Development

Gloria Athanas
Office Manager

Valorie Kopp-Aharonov
Senior Executive Administrator

Jon A. Levisohn
Assistant Academic Director, Assistant Professor of Jewish Education

Marcie Quaroni
Senior Events and Projects Coordinator

David J. Weinstein
Communications Specialist



Mandel Center Partners and Funders

July 2007 – June 2008

The Mandel Center is a partnership between the Mandel Foundation of Cleveland, Ohio, and Brandeis University, which has enabled Brandeis to establish the Center's home on the Brandeis campus and to recruit talented researchers and teacher educators to carry out a distinctive program of research and professional development.

The Mandel Center and Brandeis University gratefully acknowledge the support of the following foundations and individuals:

Induction Partnership Support

- Combined Jewish Philanthropies
- The Covenant Foundation

Teaching Rabbinic Literature Conference Support

- An anonymous philanthropic foundation dedicated to enhancing Jewish day school education
- Combined Jewish Philanthropies
- Targum Shlishi, a Raquel and Aryeh Rubin Foundation
- Wabash Center for Teaching and Learning in Theology and Religion

DeLeT/MAT Scholarship and Program Support

- Anonymous (3)
- June Baumgardner Gelbart Foundation
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- Crown Family Foundation
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- Doris Graubart
- Harold Grinspoon Foundation
- George Hanus
- Louis Nemser
- Leslie and Howard Schultz Family Foundation
- Scott Tobin '92
- Joel and Frances Zemans

What They're Saying About the Conference on Teaching Rabbinic Literature

"Through your leadership and vision you are...inspiring Jewish scholars and Jewish educators to examine the significance and potential of studying the pedagogy of teaching rabbinic literature, a research area that has been hidden from view for far too long."

– educational leader

"Being in a room with so many other people dedicated to Jewish education and Jewish scholarship helped us feel part of a community that shares our passion and our goals."

– Jewish day school educational leader

"I commend [the Center] on the truly exciting conversations that emerged over the two days, thanks to your expert planning and vision."

– seminary instructor

"This was truly the finest conference I have ever attended: the plenary sessions were engaging and the individual sessions were broadening..."

– Jewish day school teacher

"In under two days, [each attendee] participated in 12 different learning opportunities... I came away with my head spinning, in only good ways. As someone not in the academic world, I wasn't sure beforehand how applicable it would be to my work. The answer was apparent by the end of the first session... [During the conference] I got nugget after nugget of practical pedagogical ideas."

– Jewish adult educator

"This was an unbelievably exciting experience...Who knew that there were so many people interested in this topic and looking for a venue to share their own ideas and learn from each other?...I was heartened that there is a new generation of scholars, women and men, who are studying the teaching of rabbinic literature."

– teacher educator

"The conference was just great: very exciting, stimulating, and pedagogically and academically meaty. I particularly appreciated the very varied nature of the participants and the exceptionally wide range of [their] personal, professional, and institutional backgrounds... [This] was much more lively than the standard academic conference I usually attend."

– professor of Jewish studies

"There was incredible enthusiasm from all the parties involved, and you clearly have identified a real need in the field... It was all very, very impressive."

– professor of rabbinic literature



Brandeis University



The Mandel Center for Studies in Jewish Education is dedicated to transforming the quality of teaching and learning in Jewish education by supporting innovative research, pioneering new approaches to professional development, and shaping discourse in the study and practice of Jewish education.

MANDEL CENTER FOR STUDIES IN JEWISH EDUCATION

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