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Learning to Mentor
and Mentoring to Learn

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Introduction

Jewish
early childhood education programs in the United States generally offer two- to five-year old children (and their families) an opportunity to engage in general and Jewish developmentally appropriate practices in an educational

setting.Â The majority of these programs
are managed by a school director who does not necessarily require a degree in
educational school leadership.Â Depending
upon the size of the school, assistant directors are hired to assist in the
leadership of the school. Â Each class of
up to approximately 20 students has one teacher and assistant teacher, although
at least one additional teacher is hired for larger classes.

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Often
directors and assistant directors are veteran teachers who have not been
educated or formally trained as school leaders.Â
Moreover, American Jewish schools rarely require that their directors
and assistant directors augment their professional training with advanced
degrees or classes (formal or informal) in educational leadership.Â Consequently, the directors' overall
development is on the job training without much ongoing support other than the
occasional attendance of educational conferences.Â Accordingly, the majority of their
understanding of how to lead schools originates from their prior knowledge and
experience as teachers as well as their native intelligence, self-reflection
and creativity.Â

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There
is an abundance of academic literature suggesting that leading a school as it
relates to children, teachers, parents and lay leaders necessitate
substantially different skill sets than those required by a teacher.Â Â

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In
June 2008, the Lookstein Center of Bar Ilan University and the UJA-Federation
of New York
launched an innovative mentoring program, the Educational Leadership
Advancement Initiative (ELAI).Â ELAI was
created for the specific purpose of preparing veteran teachers and
administrators in New York
area schools for larger leadership roles in Jewish day schools.Â ELAI's first cohort of participants was
comprised of 18 mid-career teachers, department chairs, assistant principals
and guidance personnel who aspired to impact positively on their schools as
well as to advance their own professional careers.Â Six principals of Jewish day and high schools
were invited to mentor the 18 mentees.

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In
this paper I shall examine and reflect upon the journey of the six principals
(mentors).Â Specifically, this paper will
focus on the unintended outcomes of the ELAI mentoring program on the mentors
themselves: on how mentors improved their own school leadership skills as a
result of mentoring others.Â Finally this
paper will consider the application of the ELAI model to support directors and
other school leaders for Jewish early childhood educational leadership.Â The following three questions will assist in
clarifying the possibility of such a project:

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(i)Â Â
To what extend could the experience of the ELAI mentors become a model for early childhood centers?

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(ii)Â Â
What is the value of the three retreats?

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(iii)Â Â
Are monthly meetings significant to the development of the mentor/mentee relationship

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Data collection

Critical incidental questionnaires adapted from Brookfield (1995) were distributed after each day of the retreat and at the monthly meetings.Â Both mentors and mentees responded to questions centered on the experience of the participants asking them to respond to the following:

At what moment in the session did you feel yourself most engaged with what was happening?
At what moment in the sessions did you feel most distanced from what was happening?
What actions that anyone took in today's session did you find most affirming and helpful?
What action that anyone took in today's sessions did you find most puzzling or confusing?
What about today's sessions surprised you the most?
What will you take away from today's session that will advance your educational leadership?

Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â The survey responses served as a guide to the directors to improve the program in a continuing manner. Moreover, after each session a half hour reflection was instituted to debrief the experience of the day.Â At the debriefing meetings the participants were asked to talk and share about what they learned about themselves as educational leaders. Often after the sessions, participants reflected via email with their mentors, as did mentors with the directors. As the Educational Director, the researcher kept a journal of occurrences at the retreats and at monthly sessions.Â Â

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Limitations

The intent of the data collection was to assist the directors and the mentors to instituted immediate improvements of the program; it was not collected as a research project and therefore may not be as precise as a direct survey to address specific research questions.Â The data is presented from the perspective of a reflective practice to suggest application to enhance early childhood school leadership.

Reflection is an active process of witnessing one's own experience in order to take a closer look at it, sometimes to direct attention to it briefly, but often to explore it in greater depth. This can be done in the midst of an activity or as an activity in itself. The key to reflection is learning how to take perspective on one's own actions and experience-in other words, to developing the ability to explore and be curious about our own experience and actions, we suddenly open up the possibilities of purposeful learning-derived not from books or experts, but from our work and our lives. This is the purpose of reflection: to allow the possibility of learning through experience, whether that is the experience of a meeting, a project, a disaster, a success, a relationship, or any other internal or external event, before, during or after it has occurred.Â (Amulaya)

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Literature Review

Mentoring: a Definition

There is no universally recognized definition for mentoring, nor is there any official standard that must be met in the mentoring process (Feiman-Nemser, 1996).Â The term mentor has its origin in Homer's poem "The Odyssey" (Dimock, 1989).Â
Before Odysseus goes to war, he hires an old man named Mentor to educate and nurture Telemachus, his son.Â Mentor is a trusted friend who demonstrates integrity, wisdom and personal involvement with Telemachus.Â Thus the term "mentoring", which is defined as an emotional relationship between a more experienced person and less experienced person in which the older person helps the younger person in his/her growth and development (Sikula 1996).

The numerous definitions of a mentor in educational settings overlap, with differences in choice of wording and imagery.Â
Schein (1978) argues that the term mentor should apply to a person who has several of these roles:Â teacher, coach, trainer, positive role model, developer of talent, protector, opener of doors, sponsor, and successful leader.Â
Kay (1990) further develops the meaning of mentor and suggests, "Mentoring is a comprehensive effort directed toward helping a protÃ©gÃ© develop the attitudes and behaviors (skills) of self-reliance and accountability within a defined environment" (p. 27).Â
Huling-Austin (1990), defines a mentor as a facilitator of change, a manager and an initiator.

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Jonson
(2002) gives examples of mentoring in other areas of society.Â She discusses the athletic or drama coaches, the physician and lawyer internships and the apprenticeships of craftsmen such as plumbers and printers as they are mentored in their professions.Â While all of these groups vary in their mentorship programs, the relationship of the mentor and protÃ©gÃ© is one of building trust between an experienced adult and a novice.Â The process is not one of evaluation or judgment, but rather the goal is to provide guidance to the mentee.

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Educators,
novice teachers as well as seasoned administrators - struggle to balance innovation and efficacy.Â If each generation of educators can transmit its wisdom to the next generation, then great strides will be made toward improving our schools.Â In her article on "Communities of Learning," Pearl Mattenson (2006) wonders,

What would our schools
look and feel like today if they were truly communities of learning?Â Imagine if all the stakeholders in the school community truly identified themselves as learners.Â All of us, administrators, parents, teachers, board members, and of course our students, acknowledging that what we don't yet know is a more powerful motivator in our lives than what we claim to know.

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Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Yet, we observe that in the daily challenges of educating children, teachers and administrators often lack opportunities to learn from each other.Â
As Ingersoll and Smith (2004) note, "Although elementary and secondary teaching involves intensive interaction with youngsters, ironically the work of teachers is largely done in isolation from colleagues."Â I might add this phenomenon is not unique to teachers alone but is an equal challenge to administrators on all levels.Â Mentoring addresses this phenomenon and enables educators to create real learning and change.Â

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Clearly the sharing of accumulated knowledge is not the only factor.Â
The sharing of knowledge coupled with positive personal interactions make all the difference, argues Parker J. Palmer.Â (2008)

We must go beyond helping
educators become better at doing their jobs - as important as that is - and support them in becoming instruments of institutional change.Â [M]ovements for cultural change require collegial community - the human capacity to come into relationships that support moral agency, that can inform, critique, inspire, amplify, and sustain acts of individual integrity.Â If collegial community is lacking, there is no way for individuals to make a difference.

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Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Further,
Palmer asserts, "And what lies behind relational trust? One answer is moral
agency (e.g. the personal capacity to sideline one's ego for the sake of a
larger good) and collegial community (e.g. the collective capacity to
collaborate rather than compete)." Â

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Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Mentoring should mirror that type of interpersonal
connection and trust.Â Mentors must be
able to set aside competition and work collaboratively.Â The rewards for mentoring often surpass
expectations; not only do the mentors feel satisfaction at contributing to the
greater good, but they also learn and grow from the experience.

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Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â According to Daresh (2003) the mentoring process benefits
both the mentee and the mentor,

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After serving as mentors, people report greater
overall satisfaction with their job as teachers.

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Mentors get increased recognition from their peers.

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Mentoring gives people opportunities for personal
career advancement.

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Mentors often gain a renewed enthusiasm for the
profession.

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Sparks (2005) views the
mentoring relationship as a learning opportunity for both the mentor and
mentee.Â

Mentoring relationships
provide continuous cycles of learning through which both mentors and new
teachers [mentees] learn from one another throughout their relationship.Â In the best mentoring relationships both
parties enter the relationship with a teachable state of mind.Â Mentors understand and convey to new teachers
that they are learners as well as teachers, a point of view that eloquently
expresses the critical importance of career-long professional learning.

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Lois Zachary (2002) concurs.Â "Mentoring
is best described as a reciprocal and collaborative learning relationship
between two (or more) individuals who share mutual responsibility and
accountability for helping a mentee work toward achievement of clear and
mutually defined learning goals."

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Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Zachary stresses further (2002), "mentoring can be a
powerful growth experience for both the mentor and the mentee.Â Mentors will learn new things about their
mentees, themselves and their organization."Â
In fact, she says, "The continued growth of the mentor is essential to
the success of the mentoring."Â

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There are a
growing number of mentoring styles, as explored by Zachary (2005) aspects of
several models are relevant to this case study:

Reverse
Mentoring: The concept has evolved, and today reverse mentoring is
sometimes referred to as mutual or reciprocal mentoring.Â Use of these terms captures the essence
of the relationship and sets up the fact that the parties involved expect
there is something to be learned and taught by each party, as indeed is
the case.

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Peer Mentoring:
Peers at the same level of experience, expertise, organizational status,
age cohort, etc., form a mentoring relationship.

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Furthermore, in a
peer mentoring situation, [a] small group of individuals who have similar
job functions, experiences, interests, or needs form a self-directed group
to learn from each other....Â
Executive mentoring and mentoring circles are examples.

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Team
Mentoring: Several mentors team up to offer feedback and guidance to a
group [an intact team].Â Members
promote collaborative learning, enabling members to benefit from each
other's experience, knowledge, and support.

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The
different approach by the same writer communicates a powerful message about a mentoring program for leaders in education: if the leaders themselves learn - then they truly can transform schools into institutions of collaboration and ongoing education.

Sweeny (2001) however
warns,

The most critical weak links in ineffective mentoring
programs are mentor training and support. These two elements are often missing because people assume that an excellent
employee will naturally make an excellent mentor. In fact, that is often not the case. Mentoring is a professional practice with its own knowledge and research base, strategies and best practices. Without access to these "tools" of effective mentoring, the quality of mentoring is frequently inadequate to produce the kind of impact that the program was designed to produce.

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According
to Zachary (2000) a change in mentoring has evolved from the mentees learning to the mentee as an adult learner. She further asserts that the shift requires that the mentor facilitate the learning relationship rather than act as the transmitter of knowledge.Â Brookfield, (1986)
asserts, "Essential facilitation is characterized by the conditions of voluntary engagement of both partners, mutual respect for the mentee's individuality, collaboration, critical reflection and empowerment of the learner."

The
mentoring process is one where the mentor and mentee are committed to making connections, developing a process of engagement, and working collaboratively. (Zachary 2000).

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PROGRAM BACKGROUND:

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Â Six principals of Jewish
day schools and high schools were invited to mentor the eighteen participants ("mentees") who were entering the year-long program. The schools that were represented by both participants and mentors ranged from Community to Reform, Conservative, Modern Orthodox and Charedi day schools.Â Each mentor was assigned two to four mentees.Â

The number of day schools represented by mentors and mentees encompasses throughout New York City and Nassau, Suffolk, and Westchester Counties was eighteen.Â

Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â The mentors were to serve as instruments of advancement for the mentees and to support their growth as Jewish educational leaders.Â One of the major elements of the program was a mentor-guided project developed by each participant mentee to be implemented during the spring semester of the project year.Â These school enrichment projects allowed participants to apply their expanded understanding and insights, as well as their enhanced leadership skills in their school settings.Â

Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â The program consisted of three retreats; a three day introduction retreat in June, a January week long retreat in Israel and a June two day closing retreat.Â The initial retreat focused on self-assessment and school vision.Â In Israel the group explored different leadership styles and the closing retreat was dedicated to presentations of projects. Additionally, the entire group of mentors and mentees reconvened once a month to learn with and from each other.

Program Description

ELAI's directors did their best to prepare and support the new mentors.Â In June, prior to the commencement of the mentees' program, the mentors had a daylong workshop with Lois Zachary.Â She introduced effective communication and trust building strategies for the mentors to use, as well as a checklist for self-assessment of the mentoring process.Â She identified ways to develop trust, established rules of engagement, and delineated goals and expectations for the mentoring process.

Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â There were several challenges that the directors encountered in the beginning of the program.Â Since ELAI was in its pilot year, the expectations of the mentors were not well defined.Â Following Zachary's session the mentors reported that the obligation of mentoring was considerably more daunting than previously anticipated.Â Consequently, expectations were refined as the program progressed and the mentors gave feedback on what was necessary in order to accomplish the goal of mentoring at ELAI.Â They requested more ongoing couching and support.Â This resulted in a program strength; it infused ELAI with collaboration between the mentors and the program's directors.

Initially, the mentors' engagement in the program was complicated by their absence from much of the mentees' opening retreat.Â Due to budgetary concerns, the mentors participated for only one of the three days of programming.Â ELAI's program designers did not anticipate the necessity of having the mentors at every retreat and workshop including the January retreat.Â At the first retreat, however, it became apparent that mentors should be at all functions that mentees attended both to develop their mentor-mentee relationships as well as participate in discussions of what was presented.Â This allowed for an additional enriching

experience that enhanced the growth of the participants while strengthening the mentors' abilities to begin the process of relationship building.Â

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Development of the Program

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Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â At the initial retreat in addition to examining current educational literature and analyzing case studies, the retreat included daily presentations by world-class professionals who presented workshops. Among the areas that the lectures addressed were Educational Vision in Jewish schools, Self-Assessment and Career Aspirations, Creating Collaborative Educational Staff, How to Effect Change in Others and in Ourselves, and The Importance of Change in Achieving Your Vision.Â These provided a theoretical framework for understanding how the various organizational levels in a school operate and how effective school leaders work with diverse groups.

As the program's director wrote following the retreat,

On the second day of the retreat the mentors spent the full day with the mentees and the interaction was electric.Â The enthusiasm and the experience of the six mentors changed the nature of the learning.Â Since then each participant has met with their mentor and has begun planning their growth this year.Â The mentors are able to lead small groups during the workshops and facilitate the discussion.Â We found the mentors particularly helpful in working with the groups on case study analysis of real school situations.

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Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Beginning in September after the initial retreat and every month thereafter, the mentors and mentees met once a month for a three-hour workshop relating to school leadership. The purpose of the monthly workshops was to guide participants on how to observe different areas of school life through their work with colleagues, mentors, and experts in the field.Â Mentors and mentees, as a team, analyzed and debriefed different aspects of the component of the monthly presentations by experts in the field.

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Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â As reported by 15 out of the 18 mentees the Sunday meetings were beneficial to them.Â Mentees had an opportunity to listen and learn from each other and dialogue with mentors with years of experience in the field of Jewish education. At the same time, all six of the mentors reported that the opportunity of face-to-face meetings with presenters and mentees, triggered personal reflections referencing to the mentor's school.Â Additional contact following the monthly meetings continued either by email or telephone.

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Collaboration

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Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Although the meetings of the mentors did not have formal agendas, over time they became more substantive and intense, as the group continued to build camaraderie and trust.Â Mentors, who received a stipend for their participation, surpassed the program's requirements.Â
The first step was giving extra time at each Sunday workshop.Â The mentors requested that the workshops include time for meetings with their mentees.Â
Working lunches were therefore introduced.

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Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Just as immediately, the six mentors insisted on meeting together for an hour after each Sunday workshop to debrief and connect as a group.Â The result was the creation of community of practice, which quickly became a community of learning.Â At these meetings, several of the mentors shared articles and books that they were reading on topics of school leadership, culture and best practices of mentoring.Â Often the conversation centered on the programs at the mentors' schools and how the process of mentoring benefited their own practice.Â The Educational Director and the mentors regularly referred back to The Mentor's Guide by Lois Zachary, a book that was used at the training session.Â The book guided the mentors to incorporate SMART goals, specific measurable goal setting for the projects of the mentees. As the mentees discussed their school project and articulated leadership roles, one of the mentors soon became conscious that his school did not have a job description for the assistant principal, and realized that the school would benefit from creating one.Â
At the next monthly meeting the mentor reported that he and the assistant principal in his school articulated a written job description for the position of the assistant with clear expectations.Â The use of SMART goals not only enhanced the leadership of the mentees, but greatly affected the mentors' leadership as well.

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Numerous times at the mentor meetings, the mentors raised questions regarding the expectations of the projects.Â They talked about their experiences and asked the group to respond to their predicaments.Â They shared the desire for and exchanged information on how to develop best practice of mentoring.Â Â Zachary (2000) notes, "Facilitating successful mentoring is a reflective practice that takes preparation and dedication.Â It begins with self-learning." As one mentor wrote regarding his self development in the program;

It was both a pleasure and a privilege to participate with you in this transformational experience. The program brought us (the mentors) together as a community of learners with a strong focus on commitment to giving what we can to not just

our own mentees but to all mentees.Â I thank you for all that I gained by being with you and learning from each of you.Â The beneficiaries are not only the mentees but the mentors themselves.Â
After much conversation with my colleagues, we find that we keep reflecting back to our own points of references, our own schools, to their strengths and limitations, with new insight in how we can move forward, to quote Jim Collins, â€˜to go from good to great.'Â
All this, coupled with the outstanding, world-class presenters make for a superior program.....ELAI is second to none.Â
The diversity of the participants, and everyone's insight and outlook create a richness and exposure to special and unique venues.Â When one sits back and calculates, a total of close to 10,000 students, if not more, are the recipients of an enhanced Jewish education.

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After several monthly sessions the questionnaires returned with a consensus that the mentees wanted more group time with mentors.Â
As several of the mentees reported, "We gained more from the participants and mentors in group work than we did from presenters."Â While responding to the mentees' request, the program's directors also asked the mentors for their input in future planning since the mentors had the working relationships with the mentees.Â The more the directors invited the mentors to collaborate, the more initiative the mentors took in refining and developing the program, and the more they became vested in it.Â Moreover, several mentors volunteered to present a workshop.

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Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Fourteen of the mentees continually reported that they learned more from the facilitation of the mentors in small group work than from listening to the presenters themselves, so the invited educational presenters were asked to include more group time with the mentors and mentees.Â While the mentors and directors acknowledged the mentees' need to work more with the mentors, they were also mindful that the presenters were necessary to enhance the knowledge base of school leadership of both mentors and mentees.Â

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Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â As time went on, the mentors became instrumental in the planning of the workshops.Â
They collaborated on the projects and built relationships among themselves.Â The mentors created their own learning community and began to organize themselves as a more coherent and supportive group with ideas on how to strengthen the program and support each other as school leaders and mentors.

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Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Initially, for budgetary reasons, the mentors were not invited to the January, Israel

retreat.Â When the directors began to
plan the January retreat, there was concern that there would be a gap in the
approach of the mentees and their mentors if the mentees went through the
second retreat - an entire week of sessions - without processing their learning
with their mentors.Â That gap could
reduce the effectiveness of the relationship and ultimately of the
program.Â In addition, upon return from
the retreat, mentees were to begin to implement their individual projects in
their own schools.Â

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Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Eventually, sufficient funding was provided so that all
of the mentors could attend the Israel
retreat.Â However, by the time that such
funding was made available, the mentors were unable to arrange to leave their
schools for an entire week.Â Through
difficult juggling of priorities, five of the six mentors managed to fly to Israel
for part of the retreat.Â As an
increasingly cohesive group, the mentors organized their respective schedules
so that at least two of them would accompany the mentees on any given day.Â Interestingly enough, two of the mentors
travelled to Israel
for two days understanding the critical component of their attendance.Â Demonstrating great dedication, the mentors
were literally available at virtually all times throughout the trip.Â Mentors made themselves available during
meals, between workshops, on field trips, and late at the night.Â Well into the early hours of the morning,
they stayed awake to help not only their own mentees, but with anyone who was
interested in their input.Â They worked
in small groups in order that mentors enhanced upon each other's suggestions,
and mentees could learn from each other as well.Â Mentees worked collaboratively with mentors,
and mentors checked in with other mentors, as the community of educators formed
intense, intertwined, and meaningful relationships around the mentees' and
mentors' work together.Â As an important
aside, the directors noticed that the concentration of the work in Israel
was greater because of the time difference.Â
As long as the participants could not call the States before noon, they
were able to work more intensely away from their every day demands.

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Moreover,
ELAI provided the mentors an opportunity to converse with colleagues from
beyond their day school community. Drawing the team of mentors from diverse
Jewish day schools enabled the men and women mentors to benefit from the varied
professional experiences that they came into contact with through this program.Â A mentor from the Bais Yaakov
movement wrote:

As
I continue to reflect on this past year, let me begin with how this experience
was truly humbling. My background and experience in Jewish education come from
the far right. The opportunity to visit a pluralistic school in Israel, Yachad
Modiin, to interact with a mentor from the pluralistic, egalitarian Heschel
School, and interacting with a teacher from the Reform, Rodeph Shalom school, have
added another dimension toÂ the depth and
breadth of my thinking about teaching and learning. Â Being able to spend time with the caliber of
people who are so passionate, knowledgeable and experienced was a real
privilege.

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Â Â Â Â As a person who thirsts for knowledge, I
am interested in a variety of subjects. I learned about people and places of
which I had never heard, or only read about. I was able to explore, examine and
clarify the universal truths about teaching and learning. I have come to the
realization that we are all the same in our love for knowledge and teaching children,
the difference being cultural nuances. Thank you for an incredible journey of
growth.

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At
the closing retreat, the mentees presented their completed projects in small
groups facilitated by the mentors.Â The
mentors participated in probing further questions to clarify the project and to
give support to the mentees.Â The success
of the program was evident when the mentees presented their projects and
reported about their positive experience that was the intended, primary goal of
the program.Â However, the unintended
by-product, the mentors, development of a learning community of their own - was
also extremely valuable.Â

Talking about the goals of the
mentoring program today i.e. strengthening day school education in New York by mentoring a
cohort of educators annually, prompted me to reflect that Federation and
Lookstein have achieved perhaps an unintended success by bringing together a
group of Jewish day school administrators to work together.Â Our positions can often be very lonely given
the challenges of running a school and the additional challenge of keeping our
challenges confidential.Â To be able to
work with like-minded individuals, despite the differences in our school
cultures, and to be able to share comfortably are extremely gratifying and the
alliance we have already created by working and networking with each other has
to have advantageous implications for day school education in New York.Â
We might have to wait some time before any of our mentees make
significant contributions to NY day school education.Â I'd like to suggest that our collaboration is
of itself, already a significant contribution.Â
I came home very energized!

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Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â In fact, when asked to mentor in the
program again, all mentors agreed to continue for a second year.Â (One mentor, sadly, had to leave the program
due to illness.Â Here, too, the bond of
the community of mentors was evident, as the other mentors expressed sadness,
concern, and a desire to help.)Â The
mentors' enthusiasm about repeating the process with a new cohort - while
serving the program with their established learning community - reflects both
the cohesiveness of the group and the value of the program to each of them as
individuals.Â One mentor wrote the
following comments as a thank-you note to the directors of ELAI:

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Firstly, I want to thank you very much for all your efforts and planning of this wonderful program. Your modeling of the collaborative and reflective processes is an educational role model for all of us and it's an additional venue to see theory translated to practice.

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We are creatures of habit and we tend to be myopic in our own school settings. Spending time with both the mentors and mentees allows me totalize reflective practice to go from good to great and make practical and meaningful improvements within my school culture with both our faculties, and most importantly with our students. ... [T]he immediate beneficiaries are the adults and children alike. Like magic, processes and systems are put in place and mutual respect is elevated to a conspicuously... higher level. Thank you so much for the opportunity to grow and learn.

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Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â The development of the ELAI program in its first year not only helped a cohort of 18 aspiring mid-career educational professionals, but it became a learning experience and the foundation for a lasting community bond among principals from a variety of Jewish schools throughout the New York metropolitan area.Â As a group, the mentors acquired important knowledge and skills by attending sessions with leading professionals, by reading materials on school leadership, by experiencing the collaborative spirit ofÂ Â ELAI's directors, and by focusing on the projects of mentees.Â

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Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Furthermore, the mentors report that the program both changed and influenced their practice as principals.

We decided for our opening Orientation meeting to approach the issue of student integrity (and teacher integrity) to the school and wanted to present it to the teachers within an intellectual framework.

I believe that the way we set up the session was directly influenced by my experiences at Lookstein. ELAI.Â Â Â Three groups of teachers read articles and then taught them to others.

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The teachers were very excited on many levels...the articles were thought provoking, it was a learning moment, everyone participated and everyone was heard at some point. It was well organized and well thought out....As I said, the way we set it up was surely a result of our experiences at ELAI.

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Another mentor articulated her personal change in school leadership.

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As an educator, my mentoring experience was invaluable to me. The mentoring experience helped me to articulate in detail the specifics of a practice so that I can reflect, examine and grow from each experience in a more meaningful way.

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I have been in a leadership role for 32 years and many strategies I use are a result of experience on the job, books, data and learning from people around me, in an informal way. I have always been reflective of practices, both that did or did not work. Mentoring has helped me grow in my own leadership professionalism. When meeting with challenges, I can now focus on specific areas of what is blocking the process, and I am better able to problem solve, from a wider lens of perspective.

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We all know one needs to validate,
communicate and team build, but having the opportunity to share workshop time
with masters in the field and learn from the mentees' experiences and different
school cultures, has enriched my thinking. The program gave me greater
insights, broader global perspectives, highly organized, categorized protocols
from a group of incredible colleagues with whom I shared and learned.

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Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Most importantly, as they compared
their experiences, shared information, and solved problems together, the
mentors built bonds of mutual respect and trust.Â They created the type of collegial community
that allows educators, in Parker J. Palmer's (2008) words, "to renew their
professional integrity" in order to make a real difference in their own schools
and in the education of future generations.

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Discussion

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The
Educational Leadership Advancement Initiative exhibits the essential elements
of a successful educational leadership-mentoring program.Â Both mentors and mentees benefited by
learning with and from each other. As the literature supports successful
mentoring requires ongoing education of the process of mentoring.Â Mentoring is a specific skill set that needs
to be learned. Â The mentors in ELAI exhibited
and modeled capacity as lifelong learners.Â
Furthermore, focusing on a topic such as leadership permitted for a
diverse group of Jewish educators to work and learn with and from each other. Â Ongoing professional development and
meeting
with mentors on a regular basis greatly enhanced the mentor and mentees
relationship.Â As well, the mentors
formed concurrently a community of learners.Â

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As
a critical aside, Jewish educators are often underpaid.Â Treating educators to a professional even
lavish retreat both in the United States
and Israel
enhanced their sense of self-respect and prestige as educators.Â The mentors and mentees reported often that
the program and the retreats rejuvenated their interest in continuing to
develop as Jewish educational leaders. Indeed, almost half of the participants
moved on to leadership positions within two years of the mentoring experience
and attribute much of their success to ELAI.

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Adapting
the ELAI model for the Jewish early childhood community may similarly promote early
childhood educational leadership. Â Creating
a diverse group of Jewish, early childhood leaders could substantially enhance
and heighten the quality of the professional conversation among Jewish early
childhood educators.

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Proposal for
Early Childhood Mentoring Leadership

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Utilizing
the ELAI model to create a community of more knowledgeable Jewish early childhood leaders will advance the field while developing a deeper understanding of the nature and responsibility of leadership in order to inculcate best practices in teaching and learning in Jewish early childhood education.Â

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By
identifying six early childhood directors from cross denominational centers to mentor 24 teachers in schools other than their own, a cohort of educators will begin a journey of professional development as early childhood educational leaders. The mentors will have the opportunity to study the mentoring process; the mentees will have the coaches necessary to develop as school leaders.

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As
experienced in the ELAI project, for the envisioned program, three retreats are essential for the success of the project: an initial retreat for building
trust; an Israel
component for the experiential learning; and a final retreat to present participant projects.Â During the final
retreat, the participants will be responsible to create, plan and implement a Jewish educational leadership project within their own early childhood programs. Â Participants and their mentors will
attend monthly meetings presented by educational experts.

When
a school or a community invests in the growth of its educators, this bespeaks its high regard for their role and their value. Helping them to advance their knowledge and craft has a positive impact on morale that invites newcomers to join them.Â By encouraging participation,
we help Jewish educators build a sorely needed network of peers to provide support, share innovation and communicate across institutional and bureaucratic lines.Â (Schnall, 2005).

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