

## Chapter 2

# Self-Regulation Among Students: Sharpening the Questions

Michael Ben-Avie

### Introduction

The ideas embedded within this chapter emerged during the writing of two articles by Ben-Avie and Comer (2005, 2010) on the intersection between the Yale Child Study Center's School Development Program (SDP) and Jewish education. James P. Comer, M.D., founded SDP in 1968 to turn around low-performing, dysfunctional schools that serve urban, minority youth. Comer, who is African-American, was interested in seeing whether predictors of youth development and student learning were the same for two different groups of youth on opposite sides of the spectrum in terms of socioeconomic status and familial commitment to education: students in urban, minority schools and students in Jewish day schools; this was found to be the case, especially in terms of the importance of relationships (teacher–student, student interpersonal, and home–school). This research set in motion a study of the childhood roots of adult Jewish quality of life, which encompassed Jewish schools, camps, and youth movements. When the opportunity emerged to conduct a 6-year longitudinal outcome evaluation of an urban school district's implementation of the Smaller Learning Communities (SLC) initiative, it would have been sufficient to use the evaluation strategies and research instruments that SDP honed in urban schools throughout the country. Instead, the decision was made to draw upon the findings from the childhood roots of Jewish adult quality of life research, which underscored the importance of an internal psychological process—self regulation. Thus, instead of continuing previous research in urban settings in a new urban setting, the pattern actually was (1) research in an urban setting, (2) research in the Jewish community, and (3) research in an urban setting. What was the unique contribution of the Jewish

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M. Ben-Avie (✉)

Tag Institute for Social Development, London, UK

e-mail: michael.ben-avie@yale.edu

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M. Ben-Avie et al. (eds.), *Applied Jewish Values in Social Sciences and Psychology*,

DOI 10.1007/978-3-319-21933-2\_2

research to understanding the learning and development of youth placed at risk? Thus, the research areas that emerged as important in Jewish educational settings, and not Judaism per se, were demonstrated to have value when investigating the extent to which schools promote the learning and development of youth.

The purpose of this chapter is to show that research that combines Jewish ideas and practices with the concepts and methods of the social sciences should not a priori be excluded from the public discourse on public education. In this chapter, the findings from research studies that were conducted in Jewish schools, camps, and youth groups are applied to urban schools that serve low-income, minority youth. The importance of these findings emerge from the realization that school reform today does not tend to address students' formation of a relationship with a group and the needs of society. Instead, there is a narrow focus on higher standards, better instruction, and more rigorous testing. Helping students to multiply their options and decreasing the number of those who are underprepared for future careers are youth development topics that go far beyond introducing a "developmentally appropriate" curriculum, raising standards, or establishing accountability measures. The longitudinal study in an urban setting demonstrated that the knowledge created in the Jewish community and Judaism's social values have much to offer the wider community by sharpening questions, contributing towards solving pressing educational challenges, and adding a distinctive values orientation.

## Overview of Chapter

In this chapter, different approaches are presented on how to interweave Jewish texts and practices with social science research. On one level, Jewish ideas and values informed the development of a research instrument, the *Learning and Development Inventory (LDI)*, which was then used in urban public schools to evaluate the effectiveness of federally funded grants. In another instance, psychological concepts (e.g., future orientation) are explored in Jewish educative settings and then used to provide an explanatory framework for the success of urban, minority students. So, too, research from the social sciences and Jewish ideas and practices (e.g., Jewish teachings that discourage self-absorption and encourage awareness to people's interdependence) are seamlessly interwoven with social science research in order to address educational change.

## Student Learning and Development: Self-Regulation

With self-regulation, success depends on having awareness of a problem and of an ideal outcome, skills to map out a strategy to solve the problem, and having a willingness and skill in persisting at and refining the strategy until a positive outcome is achieved. Students strengthen their self-regulation when they have an orientation

to the future and engage in goal setting as a way of articulating ideal outcomes. It is questioned as to what is the developmental process through which students increase their self-regulation capacity and what are the risks of inadequate self-regulation. Psychological development in students entails the increasing self-regulation of the natural psychological processes by voluntary ones. Luria (1976) outlines the voluntary psychological processes as “the laws of logical thought, active remembering, selective attention, and acts of the will in general which form the basis for the most complex and characteristic higher forms of human activity” (p. 5). According to Pintrich and Schunk (2003), successful self-regulation leads to effective social relations with peers, teachers, and family members; to high academic performance; and to optimal life opportunities. When students have inadequate self-regulation capability, asking them to set challenging goals can mean setting them up for failure. For these students, the end result is senseless violence, increased vulnerability, and/or diminished life outcomes.

Baumeister et al. (2010) explain that the term self-regulation is often used as a synonym for self-control. They write that “Regulation means change, but not just any change. Rather, it means bringing behavior into line with some standard” (p. 70). What is the challenge that students face when developing their self-regulation capacity? The key teaching of the Jewish text known as *Path of the Just* is that we must think. Frankel (2007) writes in his discussion of the text, “That might seem like an obvious lesson, but it takes work to put it into practice ... How about our interactions with others? Do we really think about the effect our words might have and even what effect we would want them to have? THINK! Think about where you are, think about where you want to go, think about how you’re going to get there. Think about the long term and think about the short term. In fact, think about everything you do.”

If, however, students were to “think!” all the time, the outcome may be counter-productive. As an award for thinking about everything that they do, students may feel justified in indulging now and then in self-injurious or maladaptive behavior. Continuously regulating behavior and emotions leads to ego depletion, an internal state in which mental energy reserves are exhausted (Baumeister et al. 2007). When students are faced with too many choices, they tend to become self-paralyzed. They may experience a numbness of the mind or a considerable lack of awareness of the environment around them. They may get into accidents or find themselves engaging in reckless behaviors. Conscious decision-making is intense in its consumption of attentional resources. Students’ successful self-regulation, and thus optimal performance, entails the ability to allocate and manage regulatory resources, so that high awareness and consciousness prevails when making key decisions, but quickly switches to habit when possible to conserve resources (see Carver and Scheier 1998). Effective, conscious self-regulation is the ability to overcome obstacles and focus on tasks using proactive and deliberative self-management (Schmeichel and Baumeister 2007). By contrast, the effectiveness of automatic self-regulation is measured by its efficiency and speed and its ability to function without active or conscious intervention (Carver 2007).

## Research on Self-Regulation

Self-regulation can be (and often is) initiated and pursued automatically (see Fitzsimons and Bargh 2007 for an extensive review). Moreover, acting on the basis of a conscious intention can be less effective than reacting by instinct, as it can take longer to form the intention than actually carry out the action itself (Kelso 1995). Unconscious self-regulation does not deplete the person's limited self-regulatory capacity, as it happens automatically. Thus, it is more efficient for self-regulation to happen outside of conscious awareness and guidance (Bargh and Gollwitzer 1994). Once the person has established mental intentions to react in particular ways, the appropriate responses and the control processes necessary to implement them can be activated by social or environmental cues, without the need for the intervention of conscious choice. Once students have set a goal in their mind, it will be "shielded" or protected from distraction and derailment (Shah et al. 2002).

While we often have a heroic conception of self-regulation, whereby we valorize the person who exercises enormous self-restraint, effective self-management is best achieved when good choice making becomes habitual. A key way this can be done is through social and environmental cues that serve as subconscious stimulants, which trigger good behaviors. Gollwitzer and Schall (1998) refer to this as "implementation intentions," whereby if students link their behavior with the appearance of a particular external event or feature, this dramatically increases the likelihood that they will instinctively react in accordance with their original intention. This is because their mind is already pre-programmed to respond in the more adaptive manner, reducing the amount of conscious effort required to ensure an effective reaction. Another way of thinking about "implementation intentions" is to call them "if-then-plans."

These if-then-plans (implementation intentions) create a mental pairing of situational cues and courses of action that would normally be applicable to habitual activities (Gollwitzer and Schall 1998). Significantly, research shows that implementation intentions lead to speedy enactment of the desired behavior even under heavy cognitive load, when the person's self-regulatory capabilities are at their weakest. Implementation intentions facilitate goal-attainment by heightening the accessibility of both the forthcoming critical situation and the desired response, such that even if one is otherwise engaged, the desired reaction should occur automatically, swiftly, and efficiently (Gollwitzer et al. 2007, p. 213). Such mental priming is particularly useful when dealing with actions that are unpleasant or easy to forget (Gollwitzer et al. 2007). Delegating implementation to habit or "standard operating procedures" enhances self-control in the face of distractions and temptations by making the desired response automatic, thus helping the person resist temptation and distraction (Gollwitzer 1996).

Teachers may guide the class as a group to conceive of alternative ways to behave when a student rolls his eyes at another student's suggestion while engaged in a team project. As a group, they may decide on which course of action they will take if they should encounter this situation (to use Peter Gollwitzer's (1996) phrase, "If situation x is encountered, then I will perform behavior y"). In essence, this course

of action then becomes the standard to which students would regulate their behavior. Because they prepared themselves ahead of time, the likelihood is increased that their response would be below the threshold of choice. When an identical situation does occur, the students as a group could later analyze their thoughts at the time, their actions, and whether they met the standard. It is not the purpose of if-then-plans (implementation intentions) to preclude the use of conscious choice making. There are numerous situations in which implementation intentions would not work (i.e., when there are no external cues). Nevertheless, creating mental intentions supported by the external cues can dramatically improve the chances of a person making the right choice and will often ensure that this is achieved with little distraction or effort, therefore enabling the right choice to come at no cost to the attention and focus needed for other pressing concerns.

## **Belongingness is a Reason to Self-Regulate**

Students' self-regulation is enhanced when students have a sense of belongingness or connectedness to family, friends, school, youth group, etc. In turn, this provides them with the commitment that they need to override self-absorbed and self-indulgent behaviors. Baumeister et al. (2010) note that belongingness is a reason to self-regulate (p. 74). As they write, "We suggested that expending limited resources for the sake of self-control is the price people pay to gain acceptance in society and thereby satisfy their fundamental need to belong. Put simply, people exert self-control for the rewards it can bring them in return ... Belongingness motivates self-control and virtuous choices" (p. 78). This self-identification strengthens students' resolve to follow the standards and customary ways of behaving of the schools, even at the cost of impulsive behaviors that give them great pleasure in the here and now. Consistent with this approach, Baumeister and Vohs (2004) define self-regulation as "how a person exerts control over his or her own responses so as to pursue goals and live up to standards" (p. 500).

Students who grow up in poorly functioning, disruptive, and/or insecure family networks and communities often do not experience the quantity and quality of interactions needed to adequately promote their self-regulation and thereby their academic learning. Students' connectedness with others promotes their engagement in educationally purposeful activities (Comer et al. 1999) and provides them with a sense of belongingness, which is a reason to self-regulate. In the 6-year longitudinal study described below, it was observed that the students with fewer adults who cared about them were more vulnerable to loneliness in school. The students who indicated "zero adults" care about what happens to them also had the highest rates of agreement with the following item, significantly differing from all the other students: "During this school year, another student has bullied me." These findings indicate that least-connected students had more challenges with interpersonal relations than more-connected students. One of the most important predictors of self-regulation was found to be the students' scores on this item: "At school, I try to hide my feelings from everyone."

The least-connected students also tended to have the lowest scores on “I have some very good friends at this school,” while the most-connected students had the top scores. Has the Internet alleviated students’ loneliness? Miller (2012) described a poll of 1000 people aged 18–35 conducted by Macmillan Cancer Support. The poll found that the average person has 237 Facebook friends, but just two whom they could rely on when faced with a serious problem. He writes, “Worryingly around a quarter of respondents said they had just one true friend while one in eight said they had no one at all” (p. 1). Kahlil Oppenheimer (2013), a Brandeis student, wrote in the campus newspaper *The Justice*:

As of writing this article, I have 1052 friends on Facebook, but it only feels equally, if not less, reassuring than my four close childhood friends. I was initially surprised by this observation, because more is better, right? But the connections I have made and maintained over Facebook and the persona I’ve created for myself feel artificial in comparison with real life. I cannot even imagine how content I’d feel if I had 1052 friends in real life and four Facebook friends (p. 7).

Oppenheimer concluded the article by saying, “We belong online and are alone in person.”

For a school to shape students’ self-regulation (and thereby their potential to enhance the societies in which they will live as adults), school reform cannot focus only on how the students have to change. It is all about relationships, including among all those who have a stake in the life success of the students. Teachers, too, have to change the way they work and interact with others. Promoting a sense of connectedness among students is one of the most important childhood roots of adult quality of life. In *The Childhood Roots of Adult Happiness*, Edward Hallowell (2002) states, “A connected childhood is the most reliable key to a happy life” (p. 91). The word “connected” in this statement refers to young people’s connectedness to family and school. Hallowell’s statement is based on the results of the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, which found that connectedness to school and home were the two most important protective factors for adolescents. The National Longitudinal Study on Adolescent Health is a study mandated by Congress to identify risk and protective factors at the family, school, and individual levels as they relate to emotional health, violence, substance abuse, and sexuality in adolescents (American Youth Policy Forum 2004). Clearly, family connectedness and school connectedness were identified as protective against almost every health risk and likely to improve student well-being. On the other side of the equation, students’ development relies on their self-regulation. Learning and development are not spectator sports.

## **A Jewish Approach to Self-Regulation**

Consider that students may know which of the two possible courses of action is in their best interests, and even understand the benefits and harms that are involved. When provoked by desire, however, their impulses may rule and they may act in

ways they later regret. Judaism offers models of both building up self-regulation. Judaism's approach to promoting students' self-regulation stands in contrast to "character" initiatives which focus on the sublimation and transformation of negative traits (e.g., reducing students' temptation to engage in disruptive, nonacademic behaviors in the classroom). Instead, the intent of the Jewish approach is to enhance and bolster students' capacity for self-regulation by focusing on cognitive-behavioral elements.

The Judaic tradition brings into play—in the lives of its strict adherents—continuous opportunities for comparatively manageable exercises in self-regulation, which build up a general capacity for using the conscious mind to make effective choices. Through negotiating a multitude of occasions for making relatively non-taxing but nevertheless meaningful acts of restraint, students develop an acceptance and predisposition towards rejecting temptation and making principled decisions. Highly demanding choices would create a high level of temporary malfunction, as students would suffer a considerable depletion in their self-regulatory capacity. Yet, the kind of efforts required in the practices which are described below are not so demanding that they cannot be inserted quite readily into a normal way of living without overwhelming the conscious mind.

Jewish ideas and practices offer insight into how cognitive-behavioral techniques may "disrupt" unconscious, internal responses to complex choices and, instead, raise the decision-making process to the level of conscious choice—so that students may intentionally regulate their responses. These techniques are part of the Mussar movement. The word "mussar" appears in the book of Proverbs, and it can mean "disciplined learning," "education," or "instruction." The Mussar movement emerged in nineteenth-century Eastern Europe to further spiritual and ethical development. The intent of the techniques is to disrupt unthinking, reactive behavior. Consider that the Yeshiva of New Haven uses Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto's (1738) *Mesillat Yesharim* (*Path of the Just*) to instruct the students. In discussing the trait of watchfulness in Chap. 2, he writes: "The idea of watchfulness is for a man to exercise caution in his actions and his undertakings; that is, to deliberate and watch over his actions and his accustomed ways to determine whether or not they are good, so as not to abandon his soul to the danger of destruction, and not to walk according to the promptings of habit as a blind man in pitch darkness."

To illustrate, Jews who are scrupulous in their adherence to the kosher dietary laws have a clear moral mandate for guiding their selection of foods. On a daily basis, observant Jews are required to consider their choices and refrain from eating certain foods and thus selecting other choices. Recently, Tag scholar Shmuly Yanklowitz added a new dimension known as *Tav HaYosher* (ethical seal). The Tav HaYosher is a local, grassroots initiative to bring workers, restaurant owners, and community members together to create workplaces in kosher restaurants that are just and committed to human rights. Thus, in the areas in which the ethical seal is practiced, the choice is not only whether the leafy vegetables have been carefully checked to ensure that they have no bugs. Rather, the choice is whether the restaurant workers receive fair pay and have a safe work environment. The treatment of workers is not often thought about by people who are dining at a restaurant. This is



the type of mindfulness and intentionality upon which self-regulation is strengthened. Through it, a compass emerges that guides students as they make specific choices and take specific actions necessary to navigate in a complex society. This points the way to seeing that systems of meaning and values are critically important to the development of self-regulation, according to our colleague Isaac Schechter (2013) from the Institute for Applied Research and Community Collaboration.

A school or individual class could introduce a model of moral decision-making into the practices of the class, asking participants in the project to only purchase ethical food choices, to carefully assess the caloric content of foods, record the food they eat in a journal *before* they put it in their mouths, put a coin in a charity box for hungry children before eating any treats, institute meat-free days (to mirror the Jewish rule of not eating meat and dairy products together or one after another), to go for a period of time without any snacks or junk food, to do some exercises before eating, and so on. These and similar practices could help inculcate in students that eating should be a thoughtful practice, in which decisions and choices are made. In this way, students will increase their capacity for thinking before taking action and exercising personal control. The more they do so over time, the more deliberate their present and future actions will be.

Sefer HaHinukh, a thirteenth-century anonymous work which explains the reasons behind Jewish laws, explains that “the mind is drawn after one’s action,” meaning that students’ behaviors start to affect the way their minds work” (section “Positive 16”). The book explains that this is the reason for the practices of Judaism. The example the author offers is of eating unleavened bread on Passover and refraining from eating regular bread for 7 days. Small acts of self-regulation help to create a more self-regulated mind. These acts build up self-regulatory capacity. Small acts of self-restraint repeated continuously every day will enable self-regulation capacity to grow incrementally without causing major ego depletion. For example, the US military requires all soldiers to make their beds for the sake of promoting productivity throughout the remaining day. If one accomplishes a small but significant task early in one’s day (such as making a bed), one feels a small sense of pride and therefore is more likely to be incentivized to complete further tasks throughout the day, maintaining a more regimented mindset (McRaven 2014). Moreover, through continuously engaging in these acts, students become increasingly habituated; so they gain twice: once by building capacity and, twice, by attaining a comparatively high level of automation. Once students have reached a high level of automation, the task is to set the bar a bit higher and repeat the cycle. This is the Jewish concept of personal growth and character development.

## A Note on Jewish Sources

There is no uniform, unbroken approach to education in Jewish sources. In this chapter, Proverbs, the Mishna, the Talmud, Rashi, Luzzato, the Mussar movement, Hasidut, and so on are made without distinctions among them. Some concepts men-



tioned are well known; others are known primarily within their particular communities (e.g., in this chapter appears the concept of *hachlata le'atid*, which is translated as future resolve). The use of Jewish sources in this chapter reflects Daf Yomi, the daily study of one page of the Talmud, in which concepts from a myriad of Jewish sources may be introduced to elucidate the issues on the page.

## Two Jewish Ways to Build Self-Regulation Capacity

Consider the “Disconnect to Connect” initiative (Schechter, personal communication, 2013). Every week, on the Jewish Sabbath, observant Jewish students refrain from using cell phones and social media for 25 hours because no electrical devices (e.g., cell phones, computers, and televisions) are used. They disconnect despite their fervent desire to stay connected to their friends. Jewish students’ non-use of social media on the Sabbath has become engrained in their consciousness so that the non-use has become habituated (it is “below the threshold of choice”). Despite the high dependence on connectivity (bordering on addiction!) during weekdays, on the Sabbath, observant students demonstrate an incredible level of self-discipline. This capacity to exercise self-restraint—so vital for successfully accomplishing adult quality of life—is inculcated through a complex system of rituals and restrictions that develop the psyche to accept the need for and generate the capacity to be able to exercise choice even in the face of considerable temptation. Without their cell phones and access to social media, observant Jewish students tend to connect more with the people who are physically around them. Thus, the intent of our “Disconnect to Connect” initiative is to promote “electronic downtime” among students, increase their self-regulation, and encourage them to connect more with those who are physically close to them.

Those who are newly observant have to wean themselves away from the use of cell phones and social media on the Sabbath. There are two approaches within Judaism that provide guides for behavior in this instance. One approach is for students to fully admit how much they feel the urge to use social media and then build self-regulatory capacity by placing their cell phones in plain sight and resisting the temptation each and every time they see the phones. This approach may be called the “Rashi” approach after a statement made by this towering Jewish scholar. Jonathan Feiner, our colleague from the Institute for Applied Research and Community Collaboration (personal communication, 2013), notes that within each commandment, there are numerous details with profound psychological insights. For example, in analyzing the kosher dietary laws, Rashi quotes an ancient Jewish text (Leviticus 20:26) that states, “Do not say, I dislike the flesh of the pig, but rather, I like it but God has decreed that I abstain from it.” It builds more self-regulatory muscle to admit that one desires to eat non-Kosher food and then refrains from doing so than to convince oneself that the food is disgusting. With this, once students make the decision to refrain from certain foods or using the Internet on the Sabbath, they then do not need to rethink their decision every time they see food. In other words,

they do not experience ego depletion because refraining is below the threshold of choice. This is an illustration of the twofold nature of self-regulation: increasing the capacity (the “muscle”) and habituating the behavior so it is a preferred automatic response.

The problem with this approach is that it requires students to deliberately strain their self-regulation. Another approach is consistent with the Mussar movement. In this approach, students would decide between two options. For example, one could leave the cell phone in plain sight or one could hide the cell phone. Mussar teaches students to select the option in which they do not set themselves up for failure. In this case, the preferable path would be to hide the cell phone and thus not put oneself in a situation where temptation lurks.

When becoming religious, some may not have (yet!) the self-regulatory capacity to do this. As a first step, they may learn the laws regarding the use of cell phones on the Sabbath, and the reasons for these laws. As a second step, they may talk with observant Jews to learn their strategies. For the next step, they may pay attention to what they are thinking and feeling when they reach for the cell phone. Then they may steadily increase the amount of time that they refrain from using cell phones. In this case, the idea is to build self-regulation capacity through comparatively easy steps and then habituate them as much as possible to reduce the self-regulation load.

## **Some Examples of Cognitive-Behavioral Approaches Based on Jewish Ideas and Practices**

### ***Social and Environmental Context***

Students’ social and environmental context may promote effective self-regulation or subvert it. To illustrate, the Jewish laws of *muktzah* (items that are set aside so that they are not moved on the Sabbath) offer a complex set of ideas about how to create an environment that is Sabbath-friendly. Observant students do not touch tools whose main purpose is for something forbidden on the Sabbath unless they plan to use them for something permitted (e.g., a hammer). Something that has no permissible use on the Sabbath (e.g., a pen) may not be used at all. If the *muktzah* item is in their way, students may use their elbows, for example, instead of their hands to move it so that they are less likely to unthinkingly use it. In short, there is a whole system in place to keep students well within their self-regulation capacity so that they do not flirt with a collapse of self-regulation. While exercising the comparatively manageable acts of restraint just described, the student is still building up self-regulation muscle strength. It is sufficiently strenuous to give some benefits while not requiring the kind of exertion that could lead to too much depletion. Walking this fine line is what Judaism is all about. The same may be said for the kosher dietary laws and many other aspects of Jewish law. Whereby under some circumstances there are leniencies to allow for self-regulation capacity not to be stretched

to breaking point because a self-regulation collapse is very damaging to future success at self-regulation. The priority is to support students in developing the ability to manage their own thoughts, emotions, and actions. In this case, building self-regulation capacity will come secondarily and should wait for low-risk situations.

## ***Social Exclusion***

Bullying often occurs unintentionally, through group dynamics that result in some students being excluded, explains Tag Institute's Rivkie Ives. This is particularly pronounced among students, who are typically less aware of the consequences of their actions and who are typically less attuned to the reactions of their peers. In Jewish teaching, there is a great deal of emphasis on paying attention to the negative consequences of one's actions. *Arvut* (mutual responsibility) is a concept that regards a deficiency in another as a deficiency in oneself. Attention is drawn to seemingly innocent expressions that could offend or hurt others. In addition, there is a strong strain in the Judaic literature encouraging group inclusion and ensuring the needs of the vulnerable. Ives has developed cognitive-behavioral exercises in the form of games that groups of students play to raise their awareness of the choices that they make when interacting with other students. Over time, the games condition the students to avoid words and gestures that socially exclude others.

## ***Self-Regulation and Future Orientation***

Zimmerman (1990) explains the link between thinking about the long term and self-regulation. Based on a review of research studies on self-regulation, Zimmerman explains that "in terms of metacognitive processes, self-regulated learners plan, set goals, and self-evaluate at various points during the process of acquisition" (pp. 4–5). Philip Zimbardo and John Boyd (2008) observe that, "Being Jewish is likely to push one toward future orientation, because Jewish tradition honors scholarship and education as a means of personal and community advancement. Education in academic settings is all about goal-setting, planning, delayed gratification, and anticipating rewards for progress, the building blocks of a solid future-orientation foundation" (p. 141).

Goal-setting is a specific cognitive-behavioral exercise and may promote students' self-regulation and future resolve. A traditional Jewish method of stretching students' orientation to the future is through having the students publicly make a *hachlata le'atid* (future resolve). Writing in the context of healing, grief, and regret, Estelle Frankel (2003) explains that a *hachlata le'atid* "involves projecting oneself into the project and imagining doing things differently from the way on has done them before. Specifically, it involves developing the intention never again to repeat the destructive patterns of the past. This resolve will ultimately be tested when we

find ourselves in a situation parallel to the one in which we previously had erred” (p. 147).

A *hachlata* may involve matters great and small. Students, for example, may make a *hachlata* to focus their attention on improving in one specific area, learning a particular sacred text, or changing a behavior. A *hachlata* may be made at any time for any behavior. A student may make a *hachlata* to refrain from idle gossip about other students or study extra hard to prepare for an exam. The point of a *hachlata* is that it is a commitment made in public. Often, each student in a class or group may make his or her own unique future resolve and the group as a whole encourages everyone to attain their desired outcomes. Teachers, family members, and other adults may guide the students in the fulfillment of their future resolves. A student may make the resolve to engage in a certain behavior but may lack the knowledge and skills to do so. An adult or older student may teach the necessary knowledge and skills, and a parent may stay on top of the student’s progress in attaining the desired outcome. Thus, fulfillment of a *hachlata* may rest upon the relationships that students have with adults and older students.

One way in which the adults help students attain their desired outcomes is through helping them write or articulate all the small steps that they need to take over time in order to complete a long-term goal. If students make a future resolve to improve their performance on tests in a specific subject area, adults can guide the students in publicly declaring during weekly group meetings the specific academic habits of mind (e.g., study skills, time management) that they will use and the instrumental actions that they will take over the course of the week to achieve this far-away goal. A student may commit, for example, to seeking extra help from the teacher on Wednesday, solving practice problems for 35 min on three specific evenings, setting up a study group with classmates and meeting with the group at least once during the week, and so forth. The following week, the students publically describe their achievements (or lack thereof) from the previous week and declare the specific actions that they will take over the course of this week. In this way, students learn to regulate their behavior to accomplish far-away goals.

However, in classrooms in which bullying, cliques, or even just snobbery are present (even though hidden), students are loath to expose their weaknesses. Hence the importance of teachers making such a *hachlata le’atid* in front of each other and the students as a model to the students.

### ***Applying These Approaches to Nonreligious Youth***

While extensive work has been done to demonstrate the critical harm wrought through failed self-regulation, little is known about how to effectively raise self-regulation (especially outside of religious settings) and its impact on character development. Approaches that include values and mindfulness (or thoughtful behavior) are important, but only part of the puzzle. Tag scholar Tzvi Pirutinsky suggests opportunities to practice self-control, social reinforcement, modeling, and

self-monitoring, as well as asserting cognitive control over behavior as other pieces (personal communication, 2013). The following sections address the implications for educational change initiatives. Well-intentioned, but ineffective initiatives will continue to be promoted unless development is the aim of education, and developmental principles are the underlying science of education. When students develop well, they learn well.

## Implications for Educational Change

A flurry of strategic partnerships were formed around 1992, subsequent to the New American Schools Development Corporation's funding for new models of education. Many of these partnerships offered hope that "break-the-mold" school designs would fundamentally change how schools educate students and thereby impact their developmental trajectories. For example, our Yale School Development Program (SDP) formed a strategic partnership with TheodoreSizer's Coalition of Essential Schools at Brown University, Howard Gardner's Project Zero at Harvard University, and Janet Shiltz's Education Development Center. Few of the strategic partnerships still exist. Instead, current approaches to educational reform have a focus that is too narrow to be useful in promoting on a large scale both the learning and development of students. A remedy to this narrow focus emerges from ideas embedded within Jewish texts and practices.

What does it take to promote students' self-regulation? Most of the ambitious school reform initiatives have failed because they did not succeed in changing people's underlying notion of the foundational science of education. For example, across the USA today, new Common Core State Standards (CCSS) are being implemented. They tend to address such academic content areas as English/language arts and mathematics. CCSS for youth development have yet to be articulated. Today's initiatives to reform schools tend to reflect the notion that education is often almost entirely about mastering utilitarian skills. Learning today has become increasingly individualized and even commoditized. In this modern framework, education is a way for one person to gain sufficient mastery of a part of the world to be able to gain credentials, a degree, a job, etc. By way of contrast, the idea of learning in Judaism always relates back to the kind of society we are looking to create. In Judaic terms, education is something in which the whole of society has a claim. A person is not studying primarily for some specific goal, but rather because society needs people who have learned and developed well.

Student background demographics (which are not amenable to change) and performance on standardized tests still guide education and outcome evaluations. Consider the report template provided by the US government to school districts that received SLC grants. These districts were to supply student demographic information (e.g., gender, ethnicity), the total number of students receiving a regular diploma, and the number of graduates who enrolled in postsecondary education, apprenticeship, or advanced training for the semester following graduation. In terms

of student performance, school districts were required to report annually on school-level and district-level student outcomes for state English/language arts and mathematics standardized tests as well as graduation rates. An additional report template was developed by Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory. This template focused on school structures (e.g., interdisciplinary teaching), building district support, curriculum, etc. In terms of “continuous program improvement,” an indicator was “Teams use school-wide student achievement and attendance data to reflect on their practice at the end of each year.”

What is missing in today’s school reform initiatives is a focus on promoting both the learning and development of students in a balanced manner. This is critical because students who develop well, learn well (Comer et al. 1999). The Biblical book of *Proverbs* (22:6) says, “Educate a child according to its way, even when he is aged he shall not depart from it,” suggesting that education is about setting a young person on a life path, not merely enabling the acquisition of knowledge. This perspective on education is at the heart of the Judaic approach to learning, in which knowledge is not “an axe with which to chop” (*Ethics of the Fathers* 4:5), a utilitarian tool, but a process of growth and maturation. Thus, the intent of this section is to set the stage for making the case that Jewish ideas and research in educative settings should not a priori be excluded from the public discourse on public education (Yanklowitz 2013).

## The Childhood Roots of Adult Quality of Life

In between two research projects on school reform in dysfunctional urban schools, research was conducted in Jewish schools, camps, and youth movements as part of a study of the childhood roots of adult quality of life (the “childhood roots” study). The topic of self-regulation emerged as important. In Jewish educative settings, young people are expected to bring their behavior in line with standards. The standards are expressed in terms of *middot* or values.

There is a tendency for people to think of values as simply “being nice to people,” says Yossi Ives, the founder of Tag International Development and Tag Institute for Jewish Social Development. He advocates for a conception of values that is based on “judicious action: A values orientation looks at every action as the product of a choice, and it adopts the view that it is important to make good and effective choices.” He notes that values are not ethics. Ethics is about an overtly moral perspective: a philosophical exploration of the rights and wrongs of an issue. Values, by way of contrast, looks at the priorities for people’s choices—how what they value influences their behavior (2013, private communication). How do youth learn values?

Within a Jewish context, the sacred texts and mores offer people a framework that permeates their actions with meaning. A sense of meaning is enacted through these “mores.” Mores are “customary ways persons treat the occupants of social roles and enact the expectations regarding conduct embodied in their own” (Hansen 1993, p. 654). An example of Jewish mores is explained best as interrupting the

“white noise” of the people in our everyday lives who we tend not to notice. If the students were to behave respectfully to the teachers but not to the secretaries and the janitors, it would be said that the students are not conducting themselves properly according to Jewish mores. Likewise, if older children were to take advantage of their age and not help younger children, the older students would not be engaging in right action.

Thus, students enact mores through their everyday interactions with others. Students who refrain from socially excluding other students—and stand up for these students when they are a target of disdain—are examples of the internalization of Jewish social values and behavior in line with the mores of the Jewish community. Often, social exclusion is not a preplanned act. In our Jewish day school studies, 74% disagreed that “When another student is being made fun of in a humiliating way, I join in the laughter.” By way of contrast, in our studies of urban high schools, 43% disagreed.

For Jewish educators, the most desired outcome from instilling a sense of sacredness and/or spirituality among students is right action, which requires self-regulation. The psychological process that mediates between study and action may be termed “mindfulness,” to employ Ellen Langer’s (1994) term. The more one studies a subject, the more likely it is that his or her mind will be occupied with topics relating to that subject. Moreover, the very method of study and the symbolic systems employed impress upon individuals’ ways of thinking. To illustrate, embedded within the sacred texts of the Jewish sociocultural community are value-concepts that contain information of past generations. Through the study of the community’s sacred texts, students’ cognitive structures develop “which select and categorize information, and serve as reference frames for thinking and acting” (Pepitone and Triandis 1987, p. 481). For example, studying the concept of *tzedakah* (righteous action) awakens children’s selective attention to events and individuals in the environment that compel a *tzedakah* action. In other words, one might say that they undertook an ethical action because *tzedakah* required it of them.

*Menschlichkeit* refers to the qualities of becoming a better person and the demonstration of self-regulation. To what extent is “*menschlichkeit*” associated with students’ engagement in learning? In order to demonstrate the link between students’ interpersonal relationships and academic learning, we constructed two scales from items on the *Learning and Development in Jewish Schools: Student Survey*—*menschlichkeit* and intellectual engagement. The survey was administered at a Jewish day school as part of the childhood roots of Jewish adult quality of life study ( $n=246$ ). The relationship was observed to be strong<sup>1</sup>. This means that the higher the students’ scores on *menschlichkeit*, the higher their scores on the scale that measures intellectual engagement. In order to investigate this phenomena further in-depth, the items that measure *menschlichkeit* and intellectual engagement were modified for students in public schools and administered as part of the longitudinal study that was conducted as part of the outcome evaluation of the SLC initiative.

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<sup>1</sup> ( $r=.732, p<.001$ ).



An internal compass for navigating in a complex society requires a high level of self-regulation. According to Jewish thought, however, personal control and restraint are not developmental outcomes per se; rather, the outcome is societal. As intermediate institutions, schools have the potential to enhance the societies in which the students will live as adults. As Seth Kaplan (personal communication, 2013) explains, human flourishing depends on many important factors that are not easily measured. Among the most important of these are the intermediate institutions—organizations, families, places of worship, schools, values, and norms—that shape behavior. These play important roles encouraging habits, setting standards of conduct, and incentivizing activity that help individuals, communities, and society at large function better.

Self-regulation among the students occurs in schools that are characterized by intentionality to shape students' wholeness and "who-ness" in a manner that is aligned with societal outcomes. Wholeness emerges when there is a balance among all the students' domains or pathways of development. When development is uneven, there is an overemphasis on one aspect of that development to the detriment of overall development in the present and, possibly, in the future. To illustrate the latter, if students' cognitive development has been overemphasized to the detriment of their social development, they may be at grade level in their learning, but may be unable to successfully engage in teamwork and group problem-solving (which may ultimately impact their academic achievement).

Students need an education that will enable them to handle technology, the sciences, and all the contradictions that are involved in the social world to empathize with and care about people who are not as successful as they are. Today's students need an education that trains them to assess, decide, and act in ways that are good for themselves and society (Ben-Avie et al. 2003). Jewish texts teach that being well-educated does not guarantee that people will use their education well. A vital component of education is to provide students with sufficient opportunities to recognize that it is not just their knowledge base that is important but also what they do with their knowledge (Sternberg 2001). In this way, students develop a "who-ness."

As an intermediate institution, schools have the potential to positively impact students' developmental trajectories so that they develop a wholeness and a who-ness. A study of 1010 students in six Jewish day schools (Ben-Avie and Comer 2005) focused on connectedness to school and home. The study found that 14 factors related to learning and development. Among the most interesting findings of the study was that the three most important predictors in whether these students were meeting or exceeding the desired developmental outcomes were associated with connectedness—teacher–student relations, student interpersonal relations, and home–school relations. Community is an important predictor of adult quality of life.

Self-regulation interventions that are currently being implemented in schools tend to have a narrow focus on specific academic skills and not on students' character or future quality of life. For example, the Self-Regulation Empowerment Program (SREP) was designed to help middle- and high school students become self-directed learners by teaching them to use learning tactics during specific academic tasks (Cleary et al. 2008, p. 74). By way of contrast, the quality of life constructs described above address whether the students are good people. Do they engage in

right action? Are they developing an internal compass to navigate in a complex society? Are the students developing a sense of connectedness with adults and other students? Research in Jewish schools, camps, and youth movements indicated that these are important questions to ask.

## Self-Regulation and Whole School Reform

This section describes how the “childhood roots” study sharpened the research questions in the evaluation of the US federally funded Smaller Learning Communities (SLC) initiative in an urban school district, and focused attention on areas of research that emerged as important in the studies of Jewish schools, camps, and youth movements. The aim of the section is to show how research on Jewish ideas and practices may inform research in urban schools. This is consistent with the overall purpose of the chapter, which advocates that research findings from studies of Jewish schools, camps, and youth movements should not a priori be excluded from the public discourse on public education (Yanklowitz 2013).

The types of data that are traditionally collected for outcome evaluations of educational and psychological interventions include students’ performance on standardized tests (e.g., Connecticut Academic Performance Test, which measures performance in mathematics, science, reading, and writing), SAT scores, Advanced Placement scores, student behavior (i.e., disciplinary referrals), and graduation rates. All these data points were collected for the SLC outcome evaluation. However, the Jewish childhood roots study also pointed to the importance of investigating various aspects of students’ development. These aspects include connectedness to home and school, students’ sense that many adults care about them, right action based on values, the qualities of a good person, students’ internal compass and self-regulation, and students’ future orientation and overall intentionality. The main research instrument that was designed to measure the impact of the SLC school reform initiative in these domains was the *LDI*<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> The core of the *Learning and Development Inventory (LDI)* was initially piloted and field tested at schools affiliated with the Yale Child Study Center’s School Development Program. Subsequently, the core was customized and administered to children and adolescents attending Jewish schools, youth groups, and camps. The findings from these research studies in Jewish developmental settings informed the subsequent versions of *LDI*. The current version of *LDI* is a derivative of the initial core, the surveys for Jewish youth, plus additional scales that were aligned with the requirements of federally-funded outcome evaluations. The current version of *LDI* has now been administered in schools in different states as part of outcome evaluations of federally funded interventions that were designed to promote students’ learning and development.

Data analyses were conducted on the responses to the survey to discern whether the survey meets statisticians’ criteria for being a reliable survey. This was found to be the case: The internal consistency reliability for *LDI* was found to be in the high range (.93). Factor analysis was conducted and two factors emerged: (1) Learning and Development; and (2) Self-Regulation (“personal control”). Internal consistency reliability was then conducted on each of these factors: Learning and Development (50 items, alpha = .932) and Self-Regulation (29 items, alpha = .871).

For the longitudinal study, all the students were included. Instead of random sampling, all the students in the city's three high schools participated in the study. In 2009, the 9th-grade students completed the *LDI*. Each subsequent year, the students once again completed *LDI*. Thus, it is possible to compare the scores of the students when they were freshmen (Time 1), sophomores (Time 2), juniors (Time 3), and seniors (Time 4). In total, there were 7395 completed surveys during the course of the study.

Across the schools, the most important predictor of Grade Point Average (GPA) was the students' scores on the scale that measures self-regulation.<sup>3</sup> It is worthwhile to note that high school students' level of self-regulation is amenable to change in a way that background demographics (e.g., ethnicity, gender, and parents' income level) are not. The three high schools in the school district were categorized according to the extent to which their underlying operating systems functioned well. The students in the high-functioning school had the lowest levels of self-regulation during their freshmen and sophomore years. The students in the low-functioning school initially had the highest levels of self-regulation. By their senior year, the students at the high-functioning school had the highest levels of self-regulation. The results above suggest that maturation is not necessarily the best explanation for the positive changes experienced by the students at the high-functioning school. If maturation were the best explanation, then all the students would have experienced the same positive changes in self-regulation, regardless of the school setting.

## Students' Self-Regulation and Adults Who Care About Them

Students develop the motivation to achieve in school and in life through their interactions with adults as they navigate through school, home, work, and recreational activities. Students will, however, decline to exercise personal self-control and restraint unless they have formed healthy relationships with teachers, other related professionals, staff, and peers. In particular, until students make learning their own, they need to be engaged with teachers who value learning. The relationship is important because it fosters students' emotional attachment to knowledge (Ben-Avie et al. 2003). Supportive relationships enhance students' engagement and motivate them to continue to study and learn. Whenever instructional activities become too abstract, whenever students become disinterested and disillusioned, the generative relationships that students have with others—and with their own selves—have the power to sustain them in the learning process.

The study showed that not all students formed an important relationship with at least one teacher in school. They were the students who “floated through the day.” They tended to strongly agree or agree that they settle for just passing courses. Their scores on this statement negatively correlated with their scores on self-regulation.

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<sup>3</sup>  $F(2, 7394) = 18.068, p < .001$ .

This means that the students who agreed that they settle for just passing courses had the lowest levels of self-regulation. It is noteworthy that 26% of the students strongly agreed or agreed that “At least one of my teachers has told me that he or she does not think I’ll ever make anything of myself.” A linear progress was found when this statement was considered in conjunction with “I settle for just passing courses.” Three subgroups emerged based on their responses to the statement about having at least one teacher tell them they will not make anything of themselves. One group comprised students who strongly agreed or agreed with the statement about the teachers. They had the highest scores on the statement about (not) settling for just passing courses, significantly differing from the other two groups.

The students in the three urban high schools were asked to indicate about how many adults in their lives (at home, at school, and in the community) care about what happens to them. They were provided with the following response options:

- 0 adults
- 1 adult
- 2–5 adults
- 6–12 adults
- 13–25 adults
- More than 25

The students who indicated zero or one adult had significantly lower scores on self-regulation and overall learning and development than the students who indicated a number greater than six. Engaging in academic habits of mind (time management, study skills, consistent study patterns, etc.) in order to earn a solid GPA requires self-regulation. As students develop the internal motivation to self-regulate, they need adults around them who care about what happens to them and either pull or push them when they falter in their studying. The students who indicated that “more than 25” adults cared about them had the highest GPAs; they were followed by the students who indicated that “13–25” adults cared about them. The students who had the lowest GPAs were those who indicated “zero” adults cared about them; they were followed by the students who indicated “2–5” adults cared about them. Moreover, the students who indicated that either 13–25 adults or “more than 25 adults” care about them reported the fewest interpersonal relationship challenges, significantly differing from the other students. The students who indicated that more than 25 adults care about them had a score of 67 (on a scale of 1–100). The students who indicated 1 adult had a score of 46. Thus, the students who felt that many adults care about them had the highest levels of self-regulation, academic achievement, development, and competency in social situations.

## Seeking Adult Guidance

Maladaptive behaviors that impede learning and development emerge, in part, when students have yet to develop the level of self-regulation necessary for consistently practicing academic habits of mind (which includes time management, study hab-

its, and the process of inquiry that is common to all academic disciplines) and the self-advocacy that is the result of an orientation to the future. University students, for example, tend to drop out when they find themselves in a difficult situation and do not engage in goal-directed activities to resolve the situation. Seeking help is an effective problem-solving strategy; however, students tend not to seek help until a situation escalates beyond recovery.

A sense of not feeling that many adults cared about them influenced whether the least connected students turned to adults for help. When a student was worried about a friend, he/she would not feel comfortable talking to an adult about the friend. When making a decision about the future, the least-connected students tended to not seek advice from an adult at school. Consider the students' responses to this item: "When things go wrong, I tell at least one adult in my life about it." The least-connected students had the lowest scores on this item, and the most-connected students had the highest scores. Students were also asked whether they would find an adult—either in school or outside school—if they were having a personal problem. A linear progression was observed in the responses of the students to this item: The students who indicated "zero" adults cared about them had the very lowest score followed by the students who indicated "2–5" adults and so forth until the students who indicated "more than 25." The same pattern was found in the students' responses to "If I have some type of crisis during the school day, I know that there is an adult in the building who will help me." Thus, a consistent pattern emerges in which the students who indicated that few adults cared about them were not likely to turn to adults when faced with a personal issue or "when things go wrong," even when the worry was about a friend. This pattern increases the vulnerability of the least-connected students, given that seeking guidance is an effective problem-solving strategy.

## Disrupting Students' Unconscious Internal Responses

We typically are aware of how our responses are triggered by things and people outside ourselves, but our responses are triggered much more powerfully from within. Our colleague Trudy Rashkind Steinfeld (2009, personal communication) offers the following analogy: Just think of two students on the schoolyard reacting to the same taunts—One remains relatively unaffected while the other is dumping his book bag on the ground and getting ready to fight. Something is going on inside each of them, and each knows that he is having a response, but almost certainly each is oblivious about many *specifics* of that response. Most of our internal responses actually operate unconsciously. Someone will say a few words to us about something that has not even happened yet and our mood will suddenly change. The new mood is not something we consciously direct ourselves to feel; it is something that "just comes up" from somewhere within. The student preparing to fight on the schoolyard has heard just a few words challenging his manhood, but he is suddenly awash in images

stored over a lifetime as well as in instantaneously created vivid images of the future, and all of those images trigger a powerful emotional and behavioral response.

There is an aspect of self-regulation that is important in this context. *Proverbs* 16:32 states that “He who is slow to anger is better than the strong man, and a master of his passions is better than a conqueror of a city.” One way in which students disrupt interpersonal relations is through displays of anger. Close to one third (30%) of the urban students in the longitudinal study strongly agreed or agreed that “It is very hard to get me angry.” As the students matured, they were more apt to handle difficult social interactions. For example, the older the students were, the more likely they were to have high scores on “If I get annoyed at another student, I am able to put my annoyance aside after thinking about the situation for a short time.” So, too, the student scored highly on “It is very hard to get me angry.”

In terms of demonstrating empathy with other students, no change was observed in the students’ responses over time to this item: “If a student is being bullied or mistreated, another student will usually stand up for him/her.” This is an indicator that the anti-bullying initiative that the schools implemented did not compel the students to act. This finding suggests that the concepts embedded within the initiatives in the schools, including the anti-bullying initiative, did not awaken the students’ selective attention to events and individuals in the schools in a way that they would feel they have no choice but to act. It is troubling that only 57% of the students strongly agreed or agreed that “Most teachers at school care whether I am a good person.”

The mistake that the city’s SLC initiative made was to focus only on the students. The Jewish childhood roots study underscored the importance of the adults changing the way they work and interact with one another so that the students would develop emotional regulation and engage in right action. A complementary configuration of education, to use Cremin’s (1976) term, emerges through creating a functional community. In a functioning community, there is a common language that is shared among educators and parents, which enables educators, administrators, parents, and community members to align activities and curricular units with the aspects of development that they most desire to promote. This common language derives from a knowledge of youth development and a shared sense of the aim of education (i.e., adult quality of life in that particular community).

Whether students experience a “conspiracy on their behalf” depends on the intentionality of the adults in the community to promote agreed-upon aspects of behavior and the adults’ efficacy in doing so. The “conspiracy” comes to fruition when the adults have a clear sense of the norms of the group that they themselves would want to psychologically inhabit and have clear methods for encouraging the students to form a relationship with this group. If the adults do not form a relationship with this “recreated” community and act accordingly, then the students will not have images in their minds of adult quality of life, as defined by the group. As a result, they will not “catch” a climate of self-regulation and right action. The highest levels of development are attained through actions—through using one’s education well.

The first step in helping students become concerned about those around them and the larger society is to discourage their self-absorption, which is the point of

Jewish *middot* (soul traits). The second stage is eloquently articulated by Rabbi Yitzchak Ginsburgh (2001), who explained: "It is taught in Hassidism that one of the most effective ways to begin the process of soul purification is not necessarily by intense, inner spiritual work, but by doing good for others. Sometimes we are so absorbed in our own selves, even for positive reasons, that we lose sight of the broader reality around us" (p. 46).

The students in the three urban schools were asked to indicate the strength of their agreement with this item: "I believe that I will make a positive contribution to society during my lifetime." Of the students, 10% said, "This isn't a concern of mine," 35% said, "maybe," and 55% said, "definitely." What is the relationship between self-regulation and the students' level of agreement with this statement? The students who indicated that "This isn't a concern of mine" tended to have the lowest scores on the scale that measures self-regulation. For example, they had far more trouble than the other students in staying out of fights in school. When they do not behave in class, they attribute this misbehavior to "that's just the kind of person I am" and "I'm just not able to control myself." In terms of academic achievement, the students who said, "This isn't a concern of mine" had the lowest GPA.

By way of contrast, the students who indicated that they will "definitely" make a positive contribution had the highest self-regulation scores. For example, they had the highest score on finding it easy to sit "comfortably and calmly" in their seat at school and the highest score on "My behavior in school is never a problem." So, too, the students who felt that they would definitely make a positive contribution to society had the highest scores on the scale that measures future orientation. For example, they had the highest scores on "Thinking about the future I want makes me do more now to get that future (e.g., studying, staying focused, saving money, practicing skills I'll need in the future)" and "I am willing to put up with difficulties in order to achieve something I feel is meaningful."

What specific cognitive-behavioral exercise may disrupt students' unconscious internal responses? A way in which adults help students attain their desired outcomes is through helping them strengthen the "muscle" of their self-regulation. Just as self-regulation has the properties of a "strength" insofar as it becomes easily depleted, it also shares those qualities inasmuch as it can be gradually enhanced and built up like physical muscle (Schmeichel and Baumeister 2007). Thus, it is important to develop a way of helping students who have a low self-regulation threshold to raise the bar at which they become depleted of self-regulatory capacity.

Of course, teaching students critical thinking skills is certainly one way to guide students' choices. Incentives and disincentives are also realistic methods. However, the most effective way to promote students learning and development is to ensure that they have the capacity to self-manage and practice right action. Consider that students may know which of the two possible courses of action are in their best interests, and even understand the benefits and harms that are involved. When provoked by desire, their impulses may rule and they act in ways they later regret.

Of the students, 40% agreed that "There are times when I feel uncomfortable about something I've done because the person I think I am wouldn't do that." Fifty-nine percent agreed that "I separate myself from a group of people my age if they



are doing something I don't want to do." Only about a third of the students (39%) disagreed that "I remain silent if my friends are going to do something harmful." These items were important predictors of self-regulation.<sup>4</sup>

Tag Institute scholar David Baruch explains, "The Chassidic text called *M'or Eynayim* (a Chenobyl sefer) discusses the distinction between doing something because it is a choice (i.e., free will) or because it is simply your *ratzon* (desire). Doing something because you want to (i.e., impulse) is not really an exercise of choice. Choice is when you see the options and you utilize your free will to decide based on a moral value. Maybe the increase emphasis on free will and choice among religious communities actually sets the stage to be more aware of the choice to self-regulate." The corollary of this, however, is that if everything is free-choice, the person becomes exhausted—which is why students need some aspect of choice to be mechanized or habituated (2013, personal communication).

Underlying the Jewish approach to developing a compass to navigate in a complex society is to prepare beforehand how one will act in trying situations. This requires a mindfulness and intentionality about one's sense of self, how one behaves in a particular context (comparisons with others and with one's self in other contexts and at other times), and the value of the task or process in manifesting one's true self, and the need to maintain a consistent frame of reference about the world and about the self. Laurin et al. (2011) conducted a set of studies that examined how exposure to religion influences self-regulation. They define self-regulation as "the diverse set of processes through which the self alters its own responses or inner states in a goal-directed manner" (p. 1). Self-regulation in a religious context works in tandem with *temptation resistance*—"refraining from behaving in ways that derail goal pursuit: In other words, temptation resistance occurs when goal pursuers ignore, inhibit, or distract themselves from stimuli that would push them further away from the goal object" (p. 2).

## Future Orientation

Self-regulation and future orientation are closely related. Comer (1997) points out that there are some students who will thrive regardless of the school they attend. For almost all students, however, the school they attend influences their self-regulation and thereby their learning. Takanishi and colleagues (1997), in reviewing indicators of adolescent well-being, point to research that "perceptions of future opportunity" are "linked to educational achievement and involvement in post-secondary education" (p. 430). They continue that, "adolescents who perceive future opportunities are more likely to move into constructive, positive adult roles in society" (p. 437).

Present and future orientations tend to be important influences on a student's behavior and the two are not necessarily opposites of each other (i.e., a person can be both highly future- and present-oriented). Present orientation impacts a student's

<sup>4</sup> [ $F(1, 7394)=204.206, p <.001$ ].

immediate, day-to-day behavior. Students who indicated that they plan to attend a 4-year college, and who had family members who attended college, were not only more future-oriented but also less present-oriented than their peers who had other educational plans or who would be the first in their families to attend college. These results possibly explain their “magical thinking,” in that students may have future aspirations for attending college, but they are engaged or preoccupied with present activities and, therefore, do not engage in self-regulatory activities in the here and now to obtain their most desired outcomes.

The students who formed healthy relationships with their teachers and staff tended to have significantly higher scores on the scale that measures future orientation. For example, they tended to have higher scores on the following items: “I write in my day planner all the small steps that I have to take over time in order to accomplish a far-away goal,” “When I set goals, I usually follow all the way through to completing them,” and “Thinking about the future I want makes me do more now to get that future.”

Since the schools serve urban, minority youth, teachers’ expectations about the students’ futures were low. The teachers whose students participated in the longitudinal study completed a parallel survey in which they said that “I have run out of ideas on how to deal with at least one person here” (40% agreement) and “We have some young people who nobody could deal with” (38% agreement). The teachers had not recognized that the way that they worked and interacted with others had the potential to raise students’ levels of self-regulation and to change the trajectory of their development. The *LDI*, which emerged from Jewish ideas and practices, helped to counteract these notions as the results were discussed during teacher workshops and added to the objectives of the initiative.

## Conclusion

Tag Institute for Social Development is a think tank and research center that promotes interdisciplinary research. The research integrates insights from Jewish texts and practice with the methods and concepts of the social sciences. The aim is to design interventions that contribute to the well-being of individuals, families, communities, and the wider society.

One of the most fundamental teachings of Judaism is the existence of free will and the ensuing responsibility for, and consequences of, action. Laurin et al. (2011) define self-regulation as “the diverse set of processes through which the self alters its own responses or inner states in a goal-directed manner” (p. 1). The results of the longitudinal study (2002–2011) that we conducted in an urban school district as part of an independent evaluation of the SLC initiative demonstrate this point. The students ( $n=7395$ ) were asked to respond on the *LDI* (Ben-Avie et al. 2001) to the following question: “Most of the time, when I do well in school the major reason is...” The response options were luck, ability, and being prepared. The students who indicated “being prepared” had the highest self-regulation scores, significantly

differing from those who said “luck.” Without a sense that they have the free will to determine outcomes and that they are responsible for their choices (or they are disappointed by past failures after unskilled effort), students will tend not to regulate their behavior and emotions towards these outcomes.

The Talmud (Berachot 63a) has an expression: “the kids become (adult) goats.” Students grow up to become adults on the basis of the qualities they have been helped to acquire as youth. We therefore have a great deal invested in the kinds of attitudes, values, and life skills of students. Yet, in practice it would seem that most of the focus is on providing students with an education that focuses primarily on one aspect of development, cognitive development, which often overlooks the developmental aspect of learning. Jewish tradition honors scholarship and education for the purpose of community advancement. In Jewish thought, every learner is learning on behalf of everyone else. Learning is always societal. Thus, the childhood roots of Jewish, adult quality of life research project has implications not only for urban schools and Jewish education, but also for the wider range of educative settings in the USA and abroad.

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Applied Jewish Values in Social Sciences and  
Psychology

Ben-Avie, M.; Ives, Y.; Loewenthal, K. (Eds.)

2016, XIII, 283 p. 9 illus., 8 illus. in color., Hardcover

ISBN: 978-3-319-21932-5