

"MAKE CHINUCH YOUR SHLICHUS!™"

Menachem Education Foundation is here to help

Yehuda Sugar

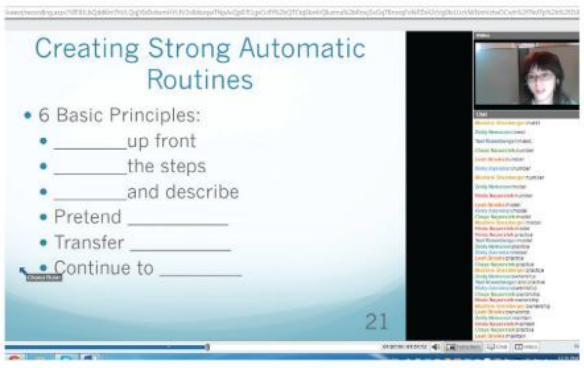
A cool fall night in 2011 found Yehoshua Einbinder sitting in a rented classroom at Empire and Bedford in Crown Heights. He was surrounded by a group of other pioneering young enrollees of the boot-camp-like teacher training program created by the Menachem Education Foundation (MEF), sipping on a glass of water and listening intently to the facilitator, while taking notes. He was used to standing in front of the class with a group of *talmidim* listening to him. But on this night, *he* was the student.

He recalls a self-confident yet sensitive facilitator, sporting a conspicuously inspirational spark in his eye, early in the presentation, pointing to one of the dozen participants, and saying: "The first half of the room *until you*, please stand up." Dutifully, the person he pointed to stood up, along with the first half of the room. "*Until you*," the presenter repeated, giving the selected individual the clear sense he should not have stood up. "*Until you*," the presenter persisted, now managing to confuse the whole group.

Whatever else was going on, one thing was clear. The presenter had the whole room's attention and this was the point.

"A fundamental teaching tool is being able to hook students into the lesson," Einbinder said, sharing the message embedded in this demonstration, one of many teaching techniques he was to learn that night and during







(Previous Page) Rabbi M. Greenbaum takes notes on a classroom observation.(Clockwise)(1) Educators and supporters saluted Mechanchim at MEF's annual event.(2) Women's Teachers Induction Program for women meets online from around the world.(3) At this summer's Unlocking the Chumash workshop, Mrs. Sara Rosenfeld gave a crash course on Dikduk to eager educators.(4) Rabbi Y. Rosenblum presents the Zekelman Standards for Chumash at a workshop that took place both in Crown Heights and L.A.



MEF's ensuing year-long training program that he now uses daily to the benefit of all of his students.

As it turns out, the ploy was more than an attention-getter.

"Now that he had our attention, he explained to us that there is a discussion in *Gemara Brachos* which discusses what the *Mishna* means when a *Tanna* says *'ad,'* meaning 'until.' Does it mean including or not including that number? Or in relation to *chatzos*, does it mean until and including *chatzos,* or until and not including *chatzos*?

"This was the hook to get the attention of the class to introduce an upcoming concept in *Gemara*."

Before he would complete MEF's intentionally out-of-the box program, Einbinder would be brimming with a host of new capabilities—from modern classroom management methods to sophisticated data-driven assessment routines, grade-specific learning benchmarks and tested remediation strategies tailored to the individual student.

Most importantly, he said, he would learn how to build rapport with students —an area previously underemphasized in his teaching education—to the students' and their parents' delight.

In support of the individualized teaching emphasis, he said he learned about four learning styles (the VATK Inventory) and five ways of relating (Gary Chapman 1997) —borrowed from sources some may consider avante garde for the Chabad chinuch world, but that MEF believes fit right in with the Rebbe's directives regarding *hishtalmus hamorim,* professional development for educators.

Excited to share the information as if he learned it yesterday, Einbinder provided a bit more detail about ways to teach other than by looking into a *sefer* or at a paper: "Auditory types prefer to listen to lectures, visual types need to see something about what they are learning, let's say a PowerPoint presentation with pictures. Kinesthetic types need to do something to absorb the information, like acting out a scene in the *Chumash*, and tactile types need to touch to learn."

Since taking the MEF journey, Einbinder went on to become a model teacher at Yeshiva Darchai Menachem in Crown Heights, where he was promoted post-MEF training from part-time assistant teacher to full-time assistant teacher to teacher of his own 5th grade class.

As for MEF, since that night, against a backdrop of a rising tide of ardent supporters along with some questions about its use of some non-traditional teaching theory and strategies, MEF has become an increasingly popular address for teacher training in the Lubavitch *chinuch* world. Its goal is to fully revamp schools' educational approaches through its institutional consultation programs.

What seems to be catching on is the organization's dedication to providing both teacher and student with opportunities for unforgettable learning and teaching episodes, promotion of student-teacher relationship-building, well-defined learning goals, and rigorous data-driven assessment and remediation techniques. This is all in juxtaposition to what some might describe as the status quo—insufficiently inspired rote learning, devoid of proficiency milestones and sufficient assessment and remediation techniques, with students being fed the same material at the same pace regardless of capability and individuality.

"Our end-goal is to create a rejuvenation of how we approach *chinuch*," said MEF founder Rabbi Zalman Shneur, whose over-sized challenge builds on the work of his parents and grandparents who were all educators, including his maternal grandfather, Rabbi Leibel Kramer, appointed by the Frierdiker Rebbe to direct the Montreal educational system, and his paternal grandfather, beloved *mechanech* Rabbi Mordechai Shneur of Lod, Israel.

"Education has to be a value-added proposition, where every day matters," Rabbi Shneur said. "To make every day matter, we have to examine and see if we are accomplishing what is important and helping students reach their potential."

His mission includes putting *chinuch* more prominently on the map for aspiring Shluchim who often opt for the more alluring Chabad House Shlichus. The theme ranks high on the organization's agenda as is made clear by its logo tagline: "Make Chinuch Your Shlichus."

Shneur decided to go forward with his vision in 2008—incidentally while standing at the corner of President and Kingston, a block and half from the Rebbe's house, while talking to a friend, who politely requested of him to stop talking about the idea and move forward. "I made the decision then and there," Shneur said, "as it was clear to me that the future of Chabad was in bolstering *chinuch*."

Motivators also included *sichos* and numerous letters from the Rebbe calling on educators to be more accountable to the personal and learning needs of students, and a specific letter that could serve eerily as a personal directive for MEF's work from the Frierdiker Rebbe:

"Anyone who knows the field of *chinuch* and is seriously involved in guiding children recognizes and feels that even the most qualified and experienced educators need to speak with one another from time to time about the methods of education and guidance that are most suited to the type of students they are educating," reads the letter, written in 1947 to the heads and *melamdim* of Central Yeshivas Tomchei Temimim Lubavitch and other Lubavitch schools. "And how much more so is it true that *melamdim* and teachers who are young and lacking

experience are obligated to strive to expand their knowledge of education and guidance, and much of their success in this most responsible task, with Hashem's help, depends on this."

Since MEF's launching, the unassuming yet driven rabbi, who has a Dayan certificate alongside his *smichah*, has been busy recruiting new school clients, including some of the biggest in the Lubavitch system (Oholei Torah in Crown Heights and Cheder Menachem of Los Angeles, to name just two), raising money for the cause and surrounding himself with a dedicated staff to see his mission through from MEF's offices on the corner of Kingston and Montgomery.

He stresses that he could not have accomplished what he has without the support and counsel of seasoned and dedicated Chabad *chinuch* leadership figures such as Rabbi Yossi Rosenblum, principal of the Yeshiva Schools of Pittsburgh, whose forward-looking ideas were a clear match for the MEF mission.

"For Jewish education to be successful," Rabbi Rosenblum writes in a handbook prepared for MEF's Zekelman Standards for *Chumash* and *Talmud*, "educators need to begin with the end in mind. Day schools need to assess not the presence of teachers teaching, but of students learning. This is a major paradigm shift from the way many think about education."

Between a new online women's version of the teacher training program that has trainees logging in from both sides of the Atlantic and the men's onsite summer and year-long programs, 125 teachers have experienced MEF's training to date. The men's program consists of an initial two-week summer immersion, followed by monthly follow-up forums and in-school mentoring sessions at a subsidized cost of $2,000. The women's program meets bi-weekly throughout the year in live interactive virtual classrooms. The program is called the Teacher Induction Program (TIP), as teachers must be within their first three years of *chinuch* to qualify. An additional program to coach and train management-level educators is also offered.

Current women's program participant Mrs. Yael Rosenberger compared the training to "getting a college degree in teaching in Jewish schools with all of the *chassidishe* values in place."

She is particularly taken with the Zekelman Standards, the set of grade-specific learning milestones for *Chumash* and *Talmud* at the core of MEF's offerings that were devised by Rabbi Rosenblum and a global committee of other educators, and funded by Alan Zekelman, a staunch MEF supporter and businessman from West Bloomfield, MI.

Referring to the boost in her classroom capabilities provided by the Zekelman *Chumash* Standards, Mrs. Rosenberger, originally a pre-school and early elementary teacher recruited recently to teach 7th and 8th graders, said: "I really love *Chumash* and Chassidus, but I had not tried to teach them before. I had no idea where to begin. I now have learned how to present the information so they can really learn it and retain it."

The nitty gritty of the Zekelman Standards are that they provide *Chumash* and *Talmud* grade-specific learning goals in each of several areas, including vocabulary and language, content and comprehension, and Rashi and other *meforshim* for grades 1-8.

Together with a rather technical-sounding tool, Data Driven Instruction, also borrowed from cutting-edge mainstream methodologies like some of MEF's soft-skill teachings, the two provide the goals and benchmarks for what is expected to be learned in each grade and ways of assessing and fixing progress problems.

The system also solves another perennial problem for teachers and schools: The tendency for overlapping or omitting of material between each grade for lack of clear yearly milestones. Though very technical, teacher trainees learn each of the methodologies throughout the yearlong program. They can also be bought by schools for a price or a partnering option, requiring schools to share with MEF newly added innovations and results from the use of the tools.

Rabbi Rosenblum received support in the development of the Zekelman Standards from a team of educators representing *chinuch* from around the world, including Rabbi Mendy Greenbaum, principal of Cheder Menachem in Los Angeles; Rabbi Meir Perelstein, Director of Curriculum, Yeshiva Darchai Menachem; and Mrs. Sara Rosenfeld, Director of Curriculum, Yeshiva Beth Rivkah Colleges in Melbourne. Rabbi Meir Fachler, of Gemara Berura, an organization pioneering innovations in teaching *Gemara,* was instrumental in partnering with MEF to create the *Talmud* Standards. Mrs. Chanah Rose, former Curriculum Director of the Shluchim Online School, was brought on board in the summer of 2013 to contribute to the *Chumash* standards, and also went on to direct the women's online branch of the Teacher Induction Program.

Another significant contributor to MEF's overall success is Rabbi Zelig Silber, the dynamic and knowledgeable facilitator of the men's teacher training programs, and star of Rabbi Einbinder's MEF experience, who holds a master's degree in education and is 5th and 6th grade teacher at Monsey Cheder.

In sharing a trove of educational concepts and hands-on techniques, Rabbi Silber landed on a favorite theme: The dispelling of the notion that a teacher has to wrestle with students to control or change their behavior.

To drive the point home, he said he shares with teacher trainees a fictional

conversation of a carpenter who quit his job to be a teacher and a teacher who quit his job to be a carpenter. The carpenter, when asked by the teacher why he left teaching, replies: "The boards of wood don't fight back." The teacher responds when asked why he became a teacher: "The boards of wood can't change themselves into a new product, but with the proper direction, children can."

"That's the major lesson they walk away with," Silber said about one of the biggest gifts he believes MEF leaves teachers with. "It's not about fighting the children. It's about channeling their energies so they can be developed into a finished product."

That message, according to the feedback MEF receives regularly from parents and school officials, is clearly making it past Silber's teacher trainees to their students. In a video recognizing Rabbi Einbinder's receipt of this year's Eisenberg Award for excellence in education from MEF, a parent of one of Einbinder's students read a stirring letter of thanks he had sent to the teacher earlier in the year:

"I have to tell you that aside from the actual learning that he is doing, *B"H*, so well, I was thoroughly impressed more than that with the *derech halimud* and the fundamentals being taught to him right now. These are things that were not taught to me when I was in yeshiva and the more I see it now, the more I see how essential it is for any student to learn this way in the future.

"Please keep up the good work. I want you to know that he is picking up a tremendous amount of learning and he even seems to be enjoying the learning, *B"H*."

Silber says the increased joy and increased learning— referred to in the letter—go together, as MEF trainees learn in one of the key "aha" moments of the course: That an engaged, happy student is a better learner.

To the enlightenment of all, the teachers are drilled on the theme that they must engage their charges on all human levels—the intellectual, emotional and physical—to perform their jobs properly, Silber said.

"Without that, learning cannot really take place." ■

Can we do a good job as educators without a clear vision of what we should be doing? Through intensive discussion with educators and mashpiim, MEF was able to come up with 7 things that every Chabad educator should take responsibility for. We would love to hear what you are doing to bring this vision to fruition! To share feedback and request more copies, email us at corp@mymef.org.

