

“WhY Israel” – The New Shul’s 2010-2011 Teen Program:

Program Assessment

Description of the project

Post Bnei-Mitzvah students (ages 14-17) take part in a year long Israel education program, which meets on a bi-weekly basis between the months of October and May.

The program consists of 4 different mini-mesters, each lasting 3 lessons long. During each mini-mester a different medium is presented, and with it, a different complexity Israel is dealing with. The 4 media which are used throughout the program are: Cinema; Photography; Visual arts; and newspaper comics. The four topics chosen to be dealt with through each respective medium are: The Israeli-Palestinian conflict; Different religious (and secular) view points; Left and Right wing political views; and Immigration and “Kibutz Galuyot”.

During each mini-mester the students are presented with a number of examples portraying the chosen topic in different ways. They have a chance to analyzing the source of the messages, the target audience of the messages, the affect of the messages on the target and non-target audience, the light in which Israel is portrayed in each message, the question of whether “The Medium is the message” etc.

At the end of each mini-mester, students create their own representation of Israel using the specific medium they have studied, and ultimately collect at least 4 different media products. As the school year comes to an end, the students will present their products to their own community, as well as to the Jewish community at large in both a physical and a virtual forum. Students can use these forums to try and raise money for an Israeli social action cause of their choice, or in order to pay for their own trip to Israel.

Each mini-mester is facilitated by a teacher as well as an external expert in each field, who helps in exposing the students to factual knowledge, to critical media consumption, and to forms of expression and creation with in the medium.

Rationale for using arts and media to engage teens

This program allows students to confront difficult aspects of life in Israel, and seeks to strengthen the bond they feel to the land by gaining a deeper understanding of it and by not shying away from controversy and criticism. The program also introduces students to experts in each medium (an apprenticeship) who help students express their own views on these diverse topics through arts.

It was designed with an emphasis on the community in which it will be used. The New Shul is a progressive, non-Zionist, art-oriented congregation, located in Downtown Manhattan. The program allows students to tackle different aspects of Israel rather than accepting what is, while expressing themselves through art.

New Shul teens (as many other teens) are highly exposed to different media channels and admit to being influenced by them. Seeing as the media doesn't always provide an objective well rounded take on the topic which are presented, it seemed essential to tackle critical media consumption throughout this program, in addition to providing a full picture of each complexity which shows the issues at different angles and from different view points.

How the project was implemented

Aspects of the program to be done differently:

- ❖ During the first session, collect students contact information in order to send updates and communications directly to them, as well as share their contact info with one another to enhance their personal relationships. In addition' this is a good time to present the program blog to the students so that they would be familiar with it, understand its possibilities, and get excited about it.
- ❖ While coordinating with external experts, make sure to fill them in on what has been done on the topic at hand before their arrival: how much information the students know about the media and about the complexity being dealt with; which media portrayal students have already been exposed to; Students input thus far etc.

- ❖ Many students are interested not only in the current day situation in Israel but in the history of it as well – It’s best to begin each mini-mester with a short historical over-view of the issue and present in a visual time line drawn on poster board so that the teacher and students can reference it during the different sessions of the mini-mester. When possible, try and add the visuals that correspond to the media used during each mini-mester on the time line (for instance: photographs representing the different time periods in the tear between orthodox and secular Jews, or comics of the different political stages the Israeli government has had).
- ❖ In order to get students involved and excited about the program it’s a good idea to send out email reminders not just of the time and date but of the topics which will be dealt with along with special guests or things that will take place. At the beginning of each mini-mester try to send out a “brain teaser” to get students thinking about the topic at hand: A short video clip showing the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in a biased light, and asking the teens to express an opinion on it; A single photo showing orthodox and Secular Jews together in some way, and asking the students to try and guess which situation the picture is captioning; etc.
- ❖ Find incentives for students to ensure participation – Trip to Israel at the end of the program, Gallery presentation of arts created, etc.

Ways in which the program can be adapted by others:

- ❖ Use existing lay-out and media to deal with new current topics and complexities Israel is dealing with, or one that particularly interest students.
- ❖ Use existing topics with other media that particularly interest students.
- ❖ Find experts in each medium from within the community who will volunteer to host a session in order to save on expenses.
- ❖ Use parts of the program (a single mini-mester or two) if a year long program is not an option.

Quotes, stories, or observations from participants, or others involved in the project

"As opposed to facts and information, a photograph can capture a raw moment - raw tension, raw fear, raw passion. It's true that a photo can push an agenda, but there is something to be said for the power of a photograph, even a staged one. The photos we looked at today were compelling. It seemed like no one tried to doll these images up, make them look pretty (with the exception of a few), and I think that's highly reflective of the conflict itself."

"When I was in Israel myself the tension between religious and secular Jews was very apparent - you walk through the old city and Orthodox Jews are everywhere...but at the holiest of sites you also see secular Jews, right there beside them. The irony of that just dawned on me with this activity. Photography is such a beautiful way to capture it because the conflict between the two ends of the spectrum is age-old and photography has the ability to freeze it in time, static, like the tension itself in many ways."

How Participation in Project InCite informed the project

Once the basic layout of the program was decided upon, many different contacts made through Project InCite were reached out to. A large percent of these contacts (in the fields of arts, media and Jewish education) was made with the help of coach Adam Stewart. Each contact was extremely helpful in providing content ideas and resources which have added to the diversity of the program and its success. Other contacts which were helpful throughout the design and launching stages of the program were several experts we came across during the InCite trip to Israel. These individuals were also extremely valuable to my own professional journey, and I am hopeful they will continue to be now that I have moved to Israel, in terms of remaining engaged in the field of Jewish Education.

I believe WhY Israel is a program which will continue to run and to improve within The New Shul in years to come, and am hopeful it will indeed be duplicated and used in other Jewish educational organizations as well.

It has been a privilege and an honor being a part of Project InCite, and I look forward to a continued professional relationship with each and every one of its members.