

Evaded Issues

in Jewish Education

A Resource Guide for Jewish Educators



A compilation of national programs and resources for Jewish education on body image, healthy relationship building, gender identity & sexuality

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PREFACE

“Every two and a half minutes, someone is sexually assaulted in the United States...44% of rape victims are under eighteen. Some women don't even realize that they've been raped.”¹

“In both 2001 and 1993, ‘eight in 10 students experience some form of sexual harassment at some time during their school lives.’”²

The Evaded Curriculum

In 1992, the American Association for University Women published a ground-breaking report entitled “How Schools Shortchange Girls,” in which they named a variety of topic areas that, while typically avoided in the formal classroom environment, are central to learners' lives (AAUW, 1992). They coined these topics the “evaded curriculum.” These topic areas include issues that our students confront and negotiate in their daily lives: harassment and bullying, sexuality, gender and sexual identity, eating disorders, body image and substance abuse.

The AAUW (1992) urged the immediate transformation of classrooms from venues that solely value conveyance of facts and content knowledge to sites that encourage sharing of feelings and personal experiences. The AAUW recognized that the exclusion of subjects relating to the emotional lives of learners sends an implicit negative message to learners that the areas of their daily struggle, which very well might be on their mind as they sit in our classrooms, are irrelevant to their schooling. In Jewish education, how much more so? Are our educators equipped to relate school content to these adolescent realities, as well as create space for content areas that might not readily emerge from a Jewish educational curriculum?

“There is simply not enough time in the school day” is a common lament of educators in Jewish day schools and synagogue schools. In day schools, the extensive listing of curricular subjects includes state-mandated general studies as well as school-designed Judaic studies requirements. Jewish synagogue and supplementary schools often focus upon preparation for *b'nei mitzvah*, as well as areas related to the mission of the specific institution, such as Israel education, biblical literacy or background in the denomination's theology. Both educational situations have challenges with implementing an overwhelming amount of curricular material in a small amount of time. In crafting their school curricula, educators strive to balance the varied expectations of their learners, parents and supervisors. With such a vast amount of content to cover, selection of material can become an overwhelming task. This challenge is heightened when topics are suggested that appear to fall outside of the school's

¹ Valenti, Jessica, *Full Frontal Feminism*, Seal Press, Emeryville, CA, 2007, p. 65.

² AAUW's “[Harassment Free Hallways](#)”, a publication of the American Association of University Women Sexual Harassment Taskforce, 2004.

explicit and sanctioned curriculum. One such area of contention is subject matter related to what has been labeled the *Evaded Curriculum*.

The response from Jewish educators has been multifaceted. Through hands-on training seminars with Jewish educators and education directors from a variety of Jewish educational settings³, we have learned that Jewish educators are hesitant to adopt the role of facilitating "evaded curricular areas." There seems to be a variety of inhibitors preventing these educators from addressing the "evaded issues" in their teaching:

- ✧ A belief that problems related to these issues rarely affect learners;
- ✧ Limited class time to address the issues;
- ✧ Concern that schools will not support their choice to address these topic areas
- ✧ Limited knowledge with these complex issues;
- ✧ Personal discomfort with the topic areas; and
- ✧ Limited access to resources designed specifically for *Jewish* educational settings.

In a time-challenged environment where there exists little to no formal training in these curricular areas, does an opportunity exist to better equip educators to address these "evaded issues"?

As the proliferation of programming in this guide demonstrates, evaded curricular issues do affect our learners. Jewish educational settings possess an opportunity to address them holistically through the lens of Jewish values. As educational institutions become more open to addressing "evaded issues," they are challenged by how to equip their educators with content and techniques or methods for best practice to help them engage in these critical topics. This Guide suggests resources to aid Jewish educators in taking up these sensitive issues; the hope is that as a Jewish community, we will shift from "evading" to "*engaging*."

³ Educator trainings on the Evaded Curriculum were held at the Ma'yan conference on girls, October 28, 2008; and at the Ivry Prozdor School at the Jewish Theological Seminary on February 24, 2008.

