



THE JACOB RADER MARCUS CENTER OF THE
AMERICAN JEWISH ARCHIVES

MS-831: Jack, Joseph and Morton Mandel Foundation Records, 1980–2008.
Series B: Commission on Jewish Education in North America (CJENA). 1980–1993.
Subseries 1: Commission Meetings, 1988–1990.

Box
2

Folder
10

14 June 1989 Meeting. Minutes, June 1989.

For more information on this collection, please see the finding aid on the
American Jewish Archives website.

MINUTES
COMMISSION ON JEWISH EDUCATION IN NORTH AMERICA
JUNE 14, 1989
AT HEBREW UNION COLLEGE
NEW YORK CITY
9:30 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.

Attendance

Commissioners: Morton L. Mandel, Chairman, David Arnow, Mandell Berman, Jack Bieler, Charles Bronfman, John Colman, Maurice Corson, Joshua Elkin, Eli Evans, Alfred Gottschalk, Arthur Green, Robert Hiller, David Hirschhorn, Carol Ingall, Mark Lainer, Norman Lamm, Sara Lee, Seymour Martin Lipset, Haskel Lookstein, Matthew Maryles, Florence Melton, Donald Mintz, Charles Ratner, Esther Leah Ritz, Harriet Rosenthal, Alvin Schiff, Ismar Schorsch, Daniel Shapiro, Peggy Tishman, Isadore Twersky, Bennett Yanowitz

Policy Advisors and Staff: David Ariel, Seymour Fox, Annette Hochstein, Stephen Hoffman, Virginia Levi, Arthur Naparstek, Joseph Reimer, Carmi Schwartz, Herman Stein, Jonathan Woocher, Henry L. Zucker

Guests: Norman Cohen, Felix Posen, Richard Scheuer, Paul Steinberg

Not Present: Mona Ackerman, Ronald Appleby, Lester Crown, David Dubin, Stuart Eizenstat, Irwin Field, Max Fisher, Irving Greenberg, Joseph Gruss, Ludwig Jesselson, Henry Koschitzky, Robert Loup, Lester Pollack, Lionel Schipper, Harold Schulweis, Isiah Zeldin

I. Introductory Remarks

Mr. Mandel called the meeting to order at 10:05 a.m. He welcomed the commissioners and introduced some guests: Richard Scheuer, Chairman of the Board of Hebrew Union College, Norman Cohen, Dean of the New York School of Hebrew Union College, Paul Steinberg, Vice President and Dean of the Faculty of Hebrew Union College, and Felix Posen, a leading business executive from England who is very active in the field of Jewish education.

Mr. Mandel stressed the importance of commissioner input and indicated that the agenda for the day was designed to elicit their input. He explained that a presentation on background materials would be followed by the division of participants into three discussion groups. It was hoped that by the end of the day commissioners would have provided a sense of direction in advancing the goals of the Commission.

It was noted that the formal life of the Commission, in its present form, is scheduled to conclude by June 1990. At that point, we hope to have a report that would help to set the agenda for Jewish education in North America for the next ten years. In addition to such an agenda, it is expected that the Commission will have put some form of mechanism in place to help serve as a catalyst for action.

Mr. Mandel noted that at the December 13, 1988 meeting there was agreement that there are two preconditions for across-the-board improvement in Jewish education: (1) a systematic attack on the improvement of personnel and (2) the establishment of a community environment in which key community leaders are supportive and adequate funds are available for Jewish education. Action on these preconditions is necessary if we are to impact program. We are seeking ways to test new ideas--to seek and identify best practices. Our ultimate findings must lead to action. We want to cause change to occur in North American Jewish education.

In considering ways to impact Jewish education, we seek to strengthen the roles of continental bodies with an interest in Jewish education and to provide them with the means to accomplish their missions effectively. Most important, we must involve the foundation community and the federation movement more fully.

II. Presentation by Annette Hochstein and Seymour Fox, Consultants to the Commission

A. Overview

Ms. Hochstein elaborated on the background materials distributed prior to the meeting. She noted that two major questions had emerged from the December 13 Commission meeting:

1. Do we know what can be done to bring about significant change?
Are there important ideas?
2. Do we have strategies to implement change?

She noted that the first meeting of the Commission (August 1, 1988) resulted in a series of suggestions--ideas of programs which, if improved, could impact favorably on the future of Jewish education. At its second meeting, the Commission focused on personnel and community as preconditions for change with the understanding that a continued interest in the identified programmatic options is important. The purpose of today's third Commission meeting is to establish strategies for impacting on the identified preconditions.

It was noted that there is a range of possible strategies for action. The Commission might proceed in any of the following ways:

1. Establish a comprehensive development plan.
2. Focus on selected elements of the preconditions.
3. Establish demonstration projects.
4. Some combination of the above.

Ms. Hochstein identified some of the characteristics necessary for any strategy:

1. Comprehensiveness

- a. Personnel has four components: recruitment, training, profession building, and retention. The criterion of comprehensiveness assumes that the four should be dealt with simultaneously. It is assumed that improvements in personnel would favorably impact on programs.
- b. Personnel and community are interrelated and must be addressed simultaneously. Community comprises leadership, structure, finance, and climate. The conditions for creating and maintaining good personnel must be created by the community and serious leaders will be attracted to Jewish education if strong personnel is available.

2. Across-the-Board Impact

The impact on personnel and community must take place across-the-board. This requires creating a means for the diffusion of innovation and change and a sustained effort carried out over a significant period of time.

3. Concreteness - Learning by Doing

Because most education occurs at the local level, it is suggested that any effort must have a significant local component. At the same time, certain aspects including training and funding require a continental or international approach. Therefore, our efforts must be a balance of the two.

We seek concrete results. It is proposed to try out real programs, learn by experience, make revisions and try again.

B. Recommendations for Action

It is suggested that the Commission adopt an approach to allow for ideas to be developed, tried and demonstrated. Community Action Sites are proposed--where ideas and programs that have succeeded (best practices) as well as new approaches could be undertaken in such a way as to be visible and to allow for the translation of visions into best practice.

Professor Fox described what might happen in a Community Action Site. In order to set implementation in motion, he proposes to work with local communities. Among the possibilities that could be considered is that an entire community might decide to become a Community Action Site--where personnel and community could be approached simultaneously.

A city might emerge as a Community Action Site in the following way: A local federation would convene the community players who would determine what must be done to help existing programs rise to their potential. If exciting ideas are offered, an effort would be made centrally to find funding. A major challenge would be to recruit and retain the personnel required to implement the plan. It was noted that the establishment of a Community Action Site should improve the chances of recruiting quality personnel because of the visibility of the project. Staff would be empowered to set policy and to innovate--a fact which might attract people from other fields. The pool of personnel might be supplemented by paraprofessionals--people with other career goals who might be willing to work within the field of Jewish education for a limited period of time. It is anticipated that national and regional training institutions would train personnel for Community Action Sites while, at the same time, developing a training program for personnel. Through the Community Action Sites we hope to answer the question of what works in Jewish education.

III. Discussion Groups

At the conclusion of the presentation of the progress report, commissioners met in discussion groups. At the conclusion of the discussion period, each group reported on the main points of discussion and agreement or divergence.

A. Group A - Charles R. Bronfman, Chair; Bennett Yanowitz, Co-Chair

Mr. Yanowitz reported that this group supports the concept of the Community Action Site. The group noted that the development of personnel and the means to building a profession are dependent upon the availability of quality training and of career ladders for professionals.

The group noted that there are models for Community Action Sites. Many communities have had successes, but these have been isolated and seldom reported in a way that these successes might be replicated. It was suggested that successful efforts be studied and publicized--it is not necessary to start from scratch.

It was suggested that we should define community carefully--is it a city, a group of organizations, or some other subset of the continent? In order to successfully build community, lay leaders must be included and should be involved as early as possible in the process. Further, existing institutions within the denominational communities play a vital role in Jewish education and should be tapped. In addition, there should be a mechanism for reporting outcomes to other communities.

Members of the group felt that we need a data base to support action. It is important to know what is currently working in Jewish education. The climate in the Jewish community is right for change in Jewish education; there is an openness to trying new approaches. Data will be important to support these efforts. While supportive of research, some members of the group felt that we cannot afford the time to conduct research before beginning to act. We must move to implementation as quickly as possible. Both the gathering of data and a process of evaluation based on high standards will be important components of the Community Action Site concept.

In discussing how to move from Commission to implementation, this group noted that the Commission itself is special and should be built upon. The Commission should oversee the ultimate outcome of

its recommendations in some manner. The outcome should be more than a program of Community Action Sites to guide the field of Jewish education toward innovative programs. We should consider how national and local agencies can work together to accomplish these goals. Use of existing resources is important.

The group endorsed the four elements identified as critical to personnel (recruitment, training, profession building and retention) and suggested adding curriculum as a fifth element. Building the profession by raising the esteem of professionals and their programs was emphasized.

The group suggested that there are two tasks to be accomplished before the next meeting of the Commission: 1) to begin to prepare an outline of the Commission's report, and 2) to develop detailed statements defining the Community Action Site concept and the means of implementation.

B. Group B - Esther Leah Ritz, Chair; Donald R. Mintz, Co-Chair

Ms. Ritz reported that this group agreed to the concept of the Community Action Site as a starting point to test programs that could be replicated elsewhere. The group proposed a means of inviting communities to become Community Action Sites. Criteria would include a willingness to look at new ideas, a comprehensive view of community, the involvement of coalition building within the community, a willingness to accept monitoring and evaluation, a willingness to provide some funds, and the support of local lay leadership. Community Action Sites should be established in a variety of communities of varying sizes and levels of sophistication. A means of training lay leadership at all levels for formal education should be a component of the Community Action Site.

The group suggested that the Commission design a continuing body to create a network among participating communities and between them and all other interested communities. This entity would be responsible for the collection and dissemination of information and for creating a linkage between local efforts and national agencies, including JWB, JESNA, CJF, training institutions, congregational and rabbinic bodies, voluntary organizations, and others.

It was noted that there is a need for substantial financing to support Community Action Sites. The Commission should make clear its goals for Community Action Sites and should take responsibility

for selecting the sites without encouraging communities to present unrealistic proposals. The major rabbinic seminaries should be offered matching grants to train teachers who would commit themselves to Jewish education for a period of service in exchange for that training.

The group reported two areas of disagreement: 1) whether the emphasis of the Community Action Site should be on innovative development of new programs or on programs in place and in need of support and, 2) whether the focus should be on denominational approaches, on non-denominational approaches, or on those which are cross-denominational or inter-denominational.

C. Group C - David Hirschhorn, Chair; Mandell L. Berman, Co-Chair

Mr. Hirschhorn reported agreement on the necessity for research on community needs. The group warned against spreading funding too thin. It suggested an emphasis on the importance of family education. There was general agreement with the concept of the Community Action Site, but the group questioned how it might most effectively be accomplished. It suggested the need for a new community alignment to bring about change. The group raised questions about the role of the denominations in this effort as well as the issue of community accountability versus community autonomy.

It was suggested that training, recruitment, and benefits might best be handled at the national level. It is important that the people training educators themselves be well qualified. It was suggested that JCC leaders be better trained in Judaic content.

The group also noted the need for an effective process of evaluation in assessing how money is being spent in support of Jewish education initiatives.

Some members of the group warned against building "another bureaucracy." It was also noted that the group discussed the advantages and disadvantages of ambitious undertakings with great potential for success or failure, versus more modest approaches to implementation.

D. General Discussion

1. Recruitment

It was suggested that a national recruitment program be developed for high school and college students. Through such

a program, students would be recruited and funded to spend three months studying advanced Jewish education in Israel with a resulting degree as "junior teacher." This work would be for college credit and participants would be required to teach for one year following their return.

2. Final Report

It was suggested that the final report of the Commission should reflect the quality of the Commission itself. It should provide a high level of information, ideas and aspirations that can have an impact on Jewish education for many years to come. It should seek to find national solutions to local problems. The report should include a vision of what Jewish education might be in the future. One commissioner suggested disseminating the report, in part, through the media. Another noted that the use of the media is complex and requires experts and cautioned moderation in the use of the media.

It was suggested that the Commission has an opportunity to (a) serve as a catalyst for positive movement in definitive areas, (b) suggest ways to implement, identify resources, and help to develop those resources, (c) develop a mechanism which can ultimately impact upon the diverse elements within local communities to affect the status, stature, and funding of Jewish education and, (d) create coalitions within the community, and between the community and enhanced national bodies, involving all aspects of the Jewish community in steps forward.

It was suggested that the contents of the final report will depend on the audience for which it is prepared. If for a broad audience, it will be necessary to provide substantially more background information than if it is aimed at an audience already familiar with Jewish education. In any case, it should include a section on the state of the field of Jewish education today, a vision of the field for the future, and a strategy for accomplishing that vision.

3. Financing

It was suggested that funders and federations be followed up to address matters of funding. It was also suggested that an effort be made to list efforts currently being funded in the area of Jewish education. The Commission might conduct a survey of what foundations are currently doing to fund Jewish education programs. A general overview of the current and future funding patterns might be useful.

4. Denominations

A commissioner suggested that the matter of involvement of denominations is not an issue because personnel and community are not ideological matters. Improvements in these enabling areas will prove helpful across-the-board.

5. The Catalyst

It was suggested that federations serve an important role as the local catalyst for change in Jewish education. Among their roles would be to train new leaders in Jewish education on a regular basis.

It was suggested that we capitalize through national visibility on the existence of the Commission to serve as a catalyst on the local level. It is important to maintain both a national initiative and local implementation.

6. Research

It was noted that the gathering of data on the current state of Jewish education and on approaches which are showing success in the field is important to any future implementation approach.

Finally, we are advised to "think tachlitically."

IV. Concluding Comments

The chairman thanked commissioners for their involvement in the day's proceedings and noted that Commission staff will take the recommendations submitted at this meeting and begin to develop a plan for the Commission's report and for its next steps.

V. D'Var Torah

The meeting concluded with an inspirational D'Var Torah delivered by Dr. Alfred Gottschalk, President of Hebrew Union College.

Mr. Mandel adjourned the meeting at 4:00 p.m.