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Series B: Commission on Jewish Education in North America (CJENA). 1980–1993.
Subseries 2: Commissioner and Consultant Biographical Files, 1987–1993.

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Elkin, Joshua, 1988-1990.

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COMMISSIONER CONTACT SHEET

Name Joshua Elkin Assigned to JR

Mailing Address 74 Park Lane Off. phone 617-332-2406

Newton, MA 02159 Home phone _____

Fax _____ Telex _____

Comments _____

<u>Date</u>	<u>Nature of Contact/Status</u>	<u>Next Steps/Action Needed</u>

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RABBI JOSHUA ELKIN

(N.B. Feel free to do whatever you want with titles.
In my work, I use the rabbinical title, but I am
comfortable if you decide to drop all titles.)

Joshua Elkin is currently the Headmaster of the Solomon Schechter Day School of Greater Boston. After completing undergraduate studies at Columbia College, he completed his doctoral studies at Columbia Teachers College, and was ordained by the Jewish Theological Seminary of America. Prior to assuming his current position in 1978, Josh spent many summers on the staff of Camp Ramah, and was the educational director of a synagogue religious school for three years. He is a member of the Executive Board of the Jewish Educators Assembly (Conservative) and is the immediate past chairperson of the Solomon Schechter Day School Principals' Council. In addition, he is now serving on the Board of the Independent School Association Of Massachusetts. He is also an Adjunct Lecturer in Jewish Education for the Hornstein Jewish Communal Service Program at Brandeis University. Most recently, he has just returned from a Sabbatical year in Israel where he was a Jerusalem Fellow.

MI-NA: TOWARDS THE FIRST COMMISSION MEETING

INTERVIEW OF COMMISSIONER

Commissioner: JOSHUA ELKIN
Interviewer: Annette Hochstein
Date: June 13, 1988
Place: Jerusalem, Nativ Offices
Duration: 3 hours
Focus: Content

Anticipated Participation : active. All Commission meetings and active role in taskforce. Will help spread the word of the commission amongst educators.

First Meeting Arrangements: Arriving from Seattle by nightflight (family wedding there the night before). Will need pickup arrangements.

Category: Educator. principal Solomon Shechter School, Newton Mass.; leading principal amongst conservative day schools. Jerusalem Fellow.

Atmosphere: eager, interested, hopeful, anticipating both the process and the outcome of the work of the commission.

Summary

The focus of the discussion was on Problems and opportunities for Jewish Education in America today.

1. Mr Elkin immediately turned the conversation to the question of Who should our client population be? Should we give priority and reach out to people who do not avail themselves of Jewish Education today? Or should our efforts go towards improving the quality of existing endeavours. Today Mr Elkin believes outreach will solve itself when the quality of educational services quality goes up. He hypothesises that demand for good education will follow initial quality supply. We have many children in our institutions - both part-and full time. The problems within current programs and institutions, for current consumers of Jewish education should get priority.

2. The Conversation then turned to early childhood, because it appears that demand there far outweighs supply (thus outreach is not the problem): Mr Elkin suggests that the pre-school element of Jewish education warrants enormous attention. By investing in pre-schools -- early childhood programs -- we will reach out naturally.

There is a dearth of places in pre-school programs under Jewish

auspices, in the face of growing demand. There are waiting lists and people are being turned away from day-care centres, nursery schools, kindergartens in JCC's, in synagogues, independent institutions.

At the same time the quality of what is being offered is often unsatisfactory with enormous opportunities being missed. There are some outstanding programs, but too often the programs are staffed by teachers with no early childhood training, Jewishly ignorant directors, warm people with no training. Thus pre-school staff are often unable to begin answering Hebrew, children's questions, use music and art effectively for Jewish content, etc... While there is a dearth of pre-school places the lack of quality staff and good programs is enormous. Moreover the salary picture is apysmal, probably worse than in the supplementary schools system. [Note: this data about the quality of pre-school teachers and the salary levels should be checked].

Mr Elkin went on to suggest three possible areas of response:

- Upgrade the quality of personnel
- Create more places to answer current demand
- Set up demonstration centres -- in existing or new institutions.

3. The discussion of personnel for pre-schools led to the general issue of personnel. Mr Elkin thinks that personnel should be a key focus of the work of the commission. The teaching picture is - in his word - horrendous. The dearth of talented and qualified ~~teachers~~ ~~places~~ every principal in every institution. While the problem of Senior Personnel also warrants attention, this attention must not be exclusive.

Mr Elkin says that in the teaching profession the people are simply not there. (The problem is critical in the area of teaching texts. There are just no people to teach bible etc.).

In order to deal with the problem the following elements should be dealt with:

*Develop Quality Institutions and programs to train teachers

*Vigorous Recruitment Campaigns to encourage talented young people to choose to be educators. Recruitment must be put on everyone's agenda. The climate is essential to this. Recruitment should also take place amongst the young people in day-camps, high-schools, youth movements. Young people have time. They can go to programs in Israel, take courses, do practicum, etc. We should recruit candidates for training the way colleges recruit law-students into pre-law programs. Perhaps devise pre-training practicum to inspire, etc. The reform movement has devised interesting methods for feeding people through the system. Look at HUC's recruitment. [Note: we should look at this]. Maybe pilot some of these ideas to show that there is real potential

* Unlike in general education, salaries are a real stumbling block and the issue will have to be addressed.

*In-service training should be strengthened for both formal and informal educators. It is critical - and insufficient at present - for both teachers and senior personnel. M Elkin suggest that amongst other benefits, good in-service training programs will help deal with the feeling of isolation that educators often have. He believe this feeling increases burnout phenomena. In general education peer-observation, principals centres, summer institutes, are all effective in-service activities.

Mr Elkin views in-service training as part of the broader issue of the climate of the educational institution, the quality of the professional's life at work, the status of the educator. He believes these elements need careful attention.

4. From the general issue of personnel, the conversation led to the Supplemental Schools. Issues of both personnel and content were raised. About the need to upgrade the personnel, Mr Elkin asks:

"How can you build a profession with a job that starts at 3 p.m. and has at most 15 hours of work per week?" He suggests we look at various experiments and success stories (note: he mentioned one Supplemental school in Lexington, Ma that he thought worth looking a

To deal with personnel Mr Elkin believes will require taking a multiple-cut approach: build jobs from a variety of assignments ("community educator"). Take part-time people. Look again at the idea of para-professionals for some tasks.

It was suggested that the lack of administrative support for senior personnel in supplemental schools is a real problem.

Salaries in supplemental schools are very low: "Even with patchwork combinations of informal and formal job-parts, salaries only reach \$15,000 - \$20,000 per year." [Note: check this data]

From personnel-relate issues the discussion moved to the question of content. Mr Elkin says: "A program of 8 hours a week alone, cannot accomplish the job of Jewish education.

"One of the goals of Jewish Education in the USA should be to re-create a sense of Community that has Jewish content as its soul ("Yidishkeit-Community"). One should simulate a sense of community through the creation of linkages amongst various institutions of Jewish learning and experience, that offer various learning experiences: thus supplemental school would become much more effective if it were combined with summer camp, with home support, with Friday-night meals at the JCC, with synagogue experiences, etc. "People feel themselves very isolated Jewishly. Linking the various opportunities in a planned

process could be very beneficial." Part of the opportunity offered by the Mandel Initiative resides in its conception of bringing together the major players, thus creating possibilities for linkages towards increased planned exposure to Yiddishkeit.

Mr Elkin remarked that for all the issues raised, the situation might be very different in each denominational network.

5. At the end of the conversation Mr Elkin raised a number of points and issues that we did not elaborate upon for lack of time. The issue of the relationship between lay-leaders and educators is often difficult and would benefit from a systematic approach. It has been identified as a major factor of job-dissatisfaction amongst educators and has been documented as being a major problem. [Note: see the S.M.Cohen and S.Wall study for the Jewish Education Committee.]. The quality of the communal ownership of Jewish education should be dealt with. Both sides -- educators and grass-roots lay-people would benefit from being trained about working together.

6. Mr Elkin believes the historical perspective on Jewish Education in America is critical for our understanding of today, and for avoiding repeating past mistakes.

7. Mr Elkin pointed to the importance of hearings as political vehicles for the work of the commission, and to the general need of p.r. throughout the work - in order to prepare communities and educators for the implementation ahead.

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**Mandel
Associated
Foundations**

1750 Euclid Avenue • Cleveland, Ohio 44115 • (216) 566-9200

Jack N. and Lilyan Mandel Fund
Joseph C. and Florence Mandel Fund
Morton L. and Barbara Mandel Fund

July 18, 1988

Dear Mr. Elkin:

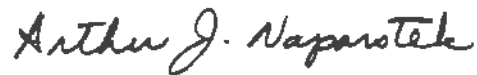
The first meeting of the Commission on Jewish Education in North America will take place on Monday, August 1, from 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. with a continental breakfast available. The meeting will begin at 10:30 a.m. The location has been changed to UJA Federation of Jewish Philanthropies of New York, 130 East 59th Street, Conference Room B, New York, NY 10022.

If you need to be reached during the day, messages can be left at (212) 836-1793. The caller should indicate that you are with the Commission.

We have reserved a block of rooms at Madison Towers Hotel, 22 East 38th Street, New York, NY 10016. You can reserve a room by calling 1-800-225-4340 and indicating that you are with the Mandel Associated Foundations group. Reservations must be made by July 24.

Please complete and return the enclosed card by July 25 to confirm your plans. I look forward to seeing you on August 1.

Sincerely,



Arthur J. Naparstek
Director
Commission on Jewish Education
in North America

Mr. Joshua Elkin
74 Park Lane
Newton, MA 02159

Enclosure

1. Commissioner: Josh Elkin
2. Interviewer: Joseph Reimer
3. Date: December 5, 1988
4. Duration: 1/2 hour in Rabbi Elkin's office

Rabbi Elkin really enjoyed the October meeting in Boston which he felt gave him a good sense of where the Commission is moving.

He readily accepts the distinction between "preconditions" and programmatic options, and agrees that the former need to take priority, as dealing with them will have the broadest impact. Yet he thinks that keeping some programmatic options available for the Commission may help in enfranchising commissioners who have specific interests in them.

Josh is concerned that the communal option remains ill-defined. This is his main interest: how to help Jewish educators learn to work more comfortably with lay leaders; how to build local cooperation between lay and professional leaders; and how to improve the public image of Jewish education by involving lay leaders.

Josh favors moving to a structure of 3 task forces and believes task forces should have a life of their own. He would look forward to being active on a task force on community. He is enthusiastic about the Commission and will attend the December 13 meeting.

TO: Henry L. Zucker
NAME
DEPARTMENT/PLANT LOCATION

FROM: Arthur J. Naparstek
NAME
DEPARTMENT/PLANT LOCATION

DATE: 6/30/89
REPLYING TO
YOUR MEMO OF: _____

SUBJECT:

As I was leaving the office on Friday June 30th, Josh Elkin called. He asked if it was true that I was leaving the Commission. I explained to him the circumstances of my leaving, that is, my having taken a leave of absence from the University and my strong desire to return to work on poverty-related issues in the context of Cleveland's neighborhoods.

Elkin reported that he had heard that I had been forced out of my role by Seymour Fox and Annette Hochstein. He was concerned that that would have a very negative impact on how lay leaders and professionals in the Jewish education community would perceive the Commission process and report. His fear is that the process and products would be perceived as being dominated by Israelis.

About a week ago I talked with Mort about writing a letter to the commissioners and other key stakeholders in the process, letting them know why I was leaving the Commission. Mort did not seem to want to inform the commissioners that way. He thought that it could be mentioned within the context of another letter. I think it would be in everyone's best interest if a letter came from Mort explaining why I was leaving and perhaps a follow-up letter from me reinforcing Mort's statement on my going back to the University. What do you think? Let's talk about it on Monday.

INTERNET-FFC-FCS-FCZ

MINUTE OF MEETING WITH JOSH ELKIN - 1/11/00

Prepared by Joseph Meiner

As I reviewed the draft recommendations with Josh Elkin, he commented on the following areas:

1) The training institutions

a) This is a ripe time for a number of the training institutions - eg. JTS, HUC in LA, University of Judaism - to grow. They have the faculty and the students to run substantial training programs and they are the way to impact the future of education in the denominational movements. The denominations have the greatest investment in Jewish education as their futures depend on its success. In that sense, the independent colleges are less integral to the future training of Jewish educators.

2) Research

a) The practice of Jewish education suffers daily from a lack of a body of research that could inform practice. We simply do not yet have the professors of Jewish education we need to create the body of research we need. The Commission should be investing in university programs in U.S. and Israel - that will create research-training tracks in Jewish education.

b) As an example of what could be done, Josh Elkin cites the research being carried out in Tel Aviv University in acquiring Hebrew as a second language. That is an issue that all Jewish day schools face in North America and yet we know very little about it. JESNA has created a link to Tel Aviv, and now it may be possible for schools to get concrete assistance in thinking through and evaluating their Hebrew instruction. Without this kind of scholarly input, practitioners are left "spinning their wheels" and make little progress in teaching Hebrew.

c) If the notion of a master teacher is to take hold in our schools, we can think of sending a master teacher to study at a university for an intensive period to become more expert in a given area of instruction. The teacher's input then can raise the level of discourse in the school around that topic. That is very important to the life of the school.

3. Implementation Mechanism

a) As Josh sees it, with the various Foundations each having its own agenda for funding, the IM will be devoting a lot of energy to coordinating these agenda and relating them to the creation of Community Action Sites. That will require a director with considerable political savvy.

Josh felt positive about these directions - felt they were mostly familiar - and will attend on February 14th.

JR:ls

September 14, 1990

TO: Stephen Hoffman
Virginia Levi

FR: Joshua Eikin

RE: Sept 16. meeting

I regret that I am unable to attend the September 16 meeting at LaGuardia.

The notice of the meeting given to me on September 10 simply did not give me enough time to arrange my schedule.

I remain interested in the Council. Please keep me posted on future meetings.

Shana Tova!