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Hirschhorn, David, 1991-1994.

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## **BUILDING A RESEARCH CAPABILITY FOR JEWISH EDUCATION**

Prepared by Dr. Isa Aron  
November, 1991

The purpose of this project is to present the Council for Initiatives in Jewish Education (CIJE) with a set of proposals which would lead to the enhancement of research in Jewish education. The starting assumption of the project is that current research efforts in the field of Jewish education are highly inadequate, in terms of both quantity and quality, as is discussed in Section A.

In its first phase, this project aims to explore a broad array of potential components of a research capability, to explore the basic assumptions and to raise certain empirical questions relating to their feasibility. In the second phase, the options will be winnowed down to a small number of the most desirable; following this, the cost of each option, in terms of money, personnel, institutional support, and other factors, will be projected.

The components presented in Section B deal primarily with the institutional changes which will be required to produce more and better research, and not with the content of the resultant research. When specific topics for research are cited they are intended only as illustrations. The components are not conceived of as mutually exclusive; on the contrary, it is assumed that some combination of several options will be required.

The outline of this document is as follows:

- Section A describes the current state of research in the field;
- Section B presents an array of potential components for enhancing our current research capability;
- Section C sets forth the underlying issues which will have to be discussed before a choice between the various components can be made.

### **A: THE CURRENT SITUATION**

Research on Jewish education in North America has been carried out for at least 50 years. Most researchers in the field have been trained in American research universities, and have held Ph.D.s or Ed.Ds. Their studies have drawn heavily on educational research paradigms and methodologies in the field of general education, and have included work in history, philosophy, psychology, sociology, anthropology, and political organization. However, the entire enterprise of research in Jewish education has been hampered by the following factors:



- At the present time, there is no routine collection of even the most basic data on enrollment, staffing patterns, or finances. There are no generally accepted and validated achievement tests. Little, if any, monitoring or evaluation of programs is undertaken. Moreover, the voluntary nature of Jewish education and the loose organizational structure of its institutions, militate against the collection of this data.
- There are only 20 full-time academic positions in the field of Jewish education. Of these, 12 carry with them administrative responsibility, and most of the others require involvement in community education projects, thereby curtailing the time available for research. At least 75% of the research that exists, was conducted by Ph.D. or Ed. D. students as part of the requirements for their dissertation.
- There is no infrastructure to support research in Jewish education:
  - no regular sources of funding exist; occasional funding is disbursed by agencies or foundations on an ad hoc basis.
  - there are no centers for research in Jewish education.
  - there exists no journal devoted to research in Jewish education. Those conducting research must either attempt to publish in journals devoted to general education, publish abridged versions in the one or two journals devoted to Jewish education, or seek out venues for "occasional papers."
- A significant number of studies are planned, and even partially executed, either by Bureaus or individual researchers; most of them are ultimately abandoned due to a lack of time or funding. The annual conferences on research in Jewish education, of which there have been five, receive submissions of only 5-10 papers per year; in addition, they receive 10-12 reports of research in progress, but many of these studies do not seem to be completed.
- There is only one Ph.D. program in North America (at Stanford) which is geared towards research in Jewish education.
- There are perhaps two dozen practising Jewish educators, or people with a deep interest in Jewish education who are enrolled, at any given time, in Ph.d. programs in education at their local universities. Often these people do not write their dissertations on topics related to Jewish education, either because they cannot find faculty advisors, or because it is recommended to them that a dissertation in general education would make them more "marketable."



**B: POSSIBLE COMPONENTS OF A RESEARCH CAPABILITY****1. RESEARCH CENTERS**Rationale for organizing research in centers

- encourages collaboration
- allows for continuity and long-term projects
- creates an "address" for certain types of research

Different types of centers -- variation according to:

- a) Funding
  - endowment
  - competition for grants
  - individual fundraising
  - some combination of these
- b) Affiliation
  - independent
  - located within an existing institution (a Jewish or general university, Bureau, JESNA, denominational agency, etc.)
  - composed of a consortium of institutions
- c) Research agendas
  - a programmatic agenda set at the outset by some coordinating or governing body
  - affiliated researchers select their own research topics
  - monitoring and evaluation
  - field testing of curricula and/or programs
  - reflective practice
  - action research
  - collection of data on enrollment, staffing patterns, finances, etc.

Empirical questions

- a) How many researchers does it take to have a well-functioning center?
- b) What are ancillary costs, in terms of research assistants, support staff, equipment, other?
- c) How many existing institutions (in universities, research centers in general education) have a critical mass of researchers willing and able to engage in research in Jewish education? Alternately, what would it take to attract researchers to these institutions?
- d) What are the additional costs, in terms of both money, time and energy, of a consortium arrangement?



## 2. (RATHER THAN FUNDING RESEARCH CENTERS) CREATING POSITIONS FOR INDIVIDUAL RESEARCHERS

- e.g., research professorships at Jewish or secular universities

## 3. FUNDING MECHANISMS

### Possible Variations

- a) A centrally administered research endowment. Researchers submit proposals to a review panel, composed of some combination of the following:
  - funding agencies and foundations
  - researchers (in both Jewish and general education)
  - other stakeholders
- b) Special funds designated for certain groups, e.g.:
  - doctoral students
  - post-doctoral fellows
  - established researchers not previously involved in Jewish education research
- c) Research funds available from foundations and/or donors on a project-by-project basis

## 4. ENLARGING THE POOL OF RESEARCHERS

### Possible Variations

- a) Ph.D. programs specifically for researchers in Jewish education.
- b) Post-doctoral programs
  - in Jewish education, for researchers trained in research universities
  - in research, for Ph.D.s in Jewish education
- c) Institutes and/or stipends for reflective practitioners.

### Empirical Questions

- a) What does it take to mount a high quality Ph.D. program in research? Are any of the Jewish universities able to offer programs of this caliber?
- b) What is the feasibility of a Ph.d. program offered jointly by two institutions?
- c) What are the costs of a post-doctoral program? What would Jewish universities/secular universities require in order to mount post-doctoral programs?



- d) What kind of training and support would "reflective practitioners" require?

## 5. VENUES FOR DISSEMINATION

### Possible Variations

- a) scholarly
  - journals
  - book funds
  - conferences
  - sessions at conferences such as the AERA, AJS, etc.
- b) popular
  - a magazine
  - articles in the Jewish press
  - sessions at conferences such as the GA, CAJE, denominational groups, etc.
- c) bibliographic resources
  - creation of an annotated bibliography
  - clearing-house modeled after ERIC

## 6. ONE OR MORE GOVERNING BODIES/COORDINATING COUNCILS

### Possible Functions

- a) to award and administer grants
- b) to set priorities for programmatic research centers
- c) to undertake joint dissemination projects
  - publish a journal
  - sponsor conferences
  - schedule sessions at the conferences of other organizations, such as the GA, AJS, AERA, etc.
- d) act as an advocate/spokes-person for research
- e) seek new sources of funding for research

### **C: QUESTIONS AND ISSUES WHICH COME INTO PLAY IN DECIDING AMONG THE OPTIONS**

- 1) Some research topics may be deemed worthy of being assigned highest priority. These are likely to fall under the rubric of the social sciences, and to benefit from multi-site, multi-methodology research. These type of studies are best conceptualized and coordinated within a research center. On the other hand, some have argued that research of the high quality is best obtained when scholars are left to set their own agendas; this tends to be the view of those operating



from a humanities perspective, though numerous social scientists also subscribe to this view. What is the optimal balance of programmatic and more individualized research?

- 2) Existing institutions of higher learning in Jewish education ought to form an integral part of the research effort. However, this research cannot be allowed to detract from their other functions, such as training and outreach.
- 3) The institutions of higher learning in Jewish education have much to benefit from cooperation and the pooling of resources. The existence of funds for research ought not to serve as a divisive element.
- 4) Involving researchers from large research universities would enhance both the quantity and quality of research. What these researchers may lack in the way of first-hand knowledge of Jewish educational institutions may be compensated for in a number of ways.
- 5) Competition for research funds is healthy, spurring individuals and institutions to marshal their creativity and effort. On the other hand, established researchers (or even less-established researchers who are very busy) may not be inclined to enter into competition; these researchers might only be enticed to devote their energies to research in Jewish education if they are invited to do so. The quality of the resultant research is of paramount importance. The question is: which is likely to yield research of the highest quality -- invitation or competition?
- 6) The world of Jewish educational research is small and insular -- inclusiveness and democracy ought to be guiding values, though not at the expense of quality.
- 7) Research efforts undertaken by practitioners (whether in the form of "reflections on practice" or, more elaborately, as action research) are worthy investments, for a number of reasons:
  - they add a new dimension of knowledge and understanding
  - they serve to enlarge the pool of researchers
  - they allow for closer linkage between research and practice



August 4, 1992

Mr. David Hirschhorn  
The Blaustein Building  
POB 238  
Baltimore, Maryland 21203

Dear David,

It was a great pleasure meeting with you on Wednesday July 22nd.

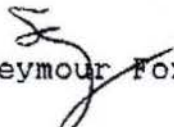
I returned to Israel and am devoting a good deal of my time to the Lead Communities project. In our various meetings and discussions we are constantly reminded that the Monitoring and Evaluation project could be a breakthrough for Jewish education. If successful, it will be the first time that any systematic evaluation has been undertaken in the field of Jewish education. It is likely to yield results that will shape the decisions, the implementation and the outcomes of the work in Lead Communities. In future years it will help community leaders decide what kind of Jewish education is most likely to have significant impact. In other words, we have in this project, a pioneering effort that could set standards for policy making in Jewish education.

I look forward to discussing this with you on August 24th after the meeting of the CIJE Lead Community Selection Committee. We agreed that I should send you a budget proposal for the Monitoring and Evaluation project and it is attached herewith.

It would be a pleasure to have dinner with you if that is convenient. I have asked Ginny Levi to call your office and try to arrange our appointment.

With best regards and looking forward to continuing our conversation.

Sincerely yours,

  
Seymour Fox





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*Executive Director*

Alan Hoffmann

TO: Participants of the Goals Seminar  
FROM: Alan D. Hoffmann  
DATE: August 4, 1994

Now that several weeks have passed, I hope you have had an opportunity to digest much of what we did at the Goals Seminar and to begin to think of ways it applies to your work.

I am pleased to enclose a copy of the proceedings for the final day of the seminar, as well as an article by Moshe Greenberg which was referred to during the seminar. We have asked the community representatives who reported on the final day of the seminar to provide us with summaries of their remarks and will forward them to you in the near future. For those of you who were not able to join us for the concluding dinner at which the biographical summaries were distributed, a set is enclosed.

I look forward to staying in touch with you as we undertake the next steps in this Goals project.

*Also enclosed - Background readings  
and documents distributed before  
and during the seminar*



Notes for David Hirschhorn

Comments on Monitoring and Evaluation

1. I am pleased that the North American Commission has decided to emphasize the importance of research for Jewish education.
2. I myself am interested in the issues of monitoring and evaluation. I am not sure of what should be done in other areas of research.
3. All of us have been involved in granting allocations for Jewish education--in our federations, in our private philanthropy, etc. I am sure that I am not the only one who is concerned about whether the programs supported by these allocations are doing what they set out to do.
4. Do we know how effective the programs are?
5. Do we know whether a program has the impact it hoped to have?
6. Are the programs cost effective?
7. This Commission, I hope, will help to launch new programs and will serve as a catalyst for important improvements in the field of Jewish education. Isn't this the time to begin to consider seriously and systematically what kind of evaluation and monitoring we need for Jewish education?



8. I was, therefore, particularly interested in the item called "best practices" number 10 in the index. I think it is terribly important for us to identify those programs that are working, that are having impact. But then I noticed that we are not prepared to undertake this in a systematic, thorough manner at this time because we have not:
  - a. determined a criteria for selecting outstanding programs. Nor do we have
  - b. methods of assessment so that we would know that a program was indeed successful and worthy of being replicated.
9. I am not even sure that sufficient work has been done concerning the objectives, the goals of Jewish education or at least of the goals of specific programs within Jewish education. It is obvious that we will not be able to evaluate programs unless we can specify goals and objectives.
10. These are some of the reasons why I want to encourage the Commission to place assessment, evaluation, monitoring very high on its list of priorities.
11. It might even border on the irresponsible for us to encourage a massive investment of energy and funding without a responsible monitoring capability.



12. We owe it to the Jewish community. As we argue for a new vision for Jewish education, it should be accompanied by as rigorous an approach to evaluation that we can responsibly suggest for a practical field like education.

