MS-831: Jack, Joseph and Morton Mandel Foundation Records, 1980–2008.
Series C: Council for Initiatives in Jewish Education (CIJE). 1988–2003.
Subseries 3: Lead Communities, 1988–1997.

Box	Folder
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MEF. Informal education, 1995-1996.

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

To: CIJE staff
From: Adam G.
Re: Thoughts on the study informal education

The purpose of this memo is to stimulate discussion at the meeting we
have scheduled for June 7. I discuss issues from the standpoint of
MEF, but it is important to bear in mind that we don't want the MEF tail
to wag the CIJE dog. It would be best to have firm convictions about
what CIJE wishes to accomplish in the area of informal education, and
let that drive what we are going to study. That leads me to the following
starting point: Does CIJE wish to improve the quality of personnel
in informal education? If so, we have to figure out what is meant by
informal education, what is meant by personnel, and what is meant by quality.
I will give that a shot in the first part of this memo. Then, I will
raise some questions about whether this should be CIJE's major concern
in the area of informal education, and I will propose some alternatives.

The importance of informal education for Jewish continuity goes without
saying, so I won't say it.....

I. Studying Personnel in Informal Education

A. What is informal education?

Barry was undoubtedly correct at an earlier meeting that the formal/informal
distinction is a false dichotomy, in that there are informal aspects of
formal education (e.g. school clubs), and formal aspects of informal education
(e.g. Hebrew classes at camp). For CIJE's purposes, the main thing is to
address the important settings in which Jewish education takes place. So far,
we have studied educators in pre-schools, supplementary schools, and day
schools. (By selecting these settings, we have implicitly rejected synagogues
and JCCs as settings, because they are too broad. We have decided to get
inside synagogues and JCCs.) In starting with these settings, we have focused
on places where education is mainly formal, and have ignored settings in which
education is mainly informal. It is time to examine settings in which education
is mainly informal, such as summer camps, youth groups, teen Israel trips,
and synagogue family programs. I would argue that these are the four most
important in terms of participation, although something else may be more
important in a particular community (e.g. Cleveland has a community retreat
center that plays a big role there). I would place lower priority on other
settings, such as community cultural programs, adult discussion groups,
retreats that are not part of youth groups or synagogue family programs,
virtual Jewish education (in cyberspace), and college campus activities.
(I could be convinced to change "synagogue family programs" to "family
programs" to incorporate programs sponsored by JCCs as well as synagogues.)

I can think of two criteria that may help us prioritize among informal settings:
(a) Participation -- Which settings involve the most people? (b) Continuity --
Which settings are ongoing, consistent, coherent, sustained, as opposed to

sporadic, infrequent, disconnected? On these criteria, which settings are most important for us to work with? Probably summer camps and youth groups.

Another criterion might be impact: Which settings have the most impact (or potential impact)? This would also lead me to study summer camps.

B. Who are the personnel of informal education?

By personnel we mean anyone who is staffing the program, i.e. the counselors, camp directors, youth leaders, family education directors, Israel trip leaders, etc.

In studying schools, we held standards of professionalism for all staff. We expected teachers as well as principals to have formal training in Jewish content and education. This commonality of standards does not hold in the informal realm: Whereas we might hold camp directors to some professional standard (it's not clear what that standard might be), we would not have the same expectation for the "front-line" educators in informal education (camp counselors, youth group advisors, etc.).

C. How might we recognize quality among informal educators?

We avoided this question in our studies of schools by relying on certification (i.e., degrees, majors, licenses) as proxies for quality. It's hard to justify a similar approach for informal settings. (Obviously we wouldn't expect camp counselors to have college degrees in Jewish studies!) Consequently it is not clear how we would assess the quality of staff in an informal program. Some possibilities:

1. Program leaders (e.g. camp directors, youth directors, Israel trip coordinators, retreat program directors, museum directors -- perhaps we would call this leaders, or supervisory staff):
This group could respond to a survey and/or interviews about their professional backgrounds. Unfortunately we have neither an absolute nor a relative standard (as we did in formal education) to hold up to these leaders of informal Jewish education. What backgrounds would we want them to hold?

The only point that seems obvious is that we would want them to have strong Judaic backgrounds. I would make a case that such leaders need professional training in Jewish content areas if they are to administer and supervise Jewish educational programs, whether formal or informal.

Probably there would be some value in knowing the basic facts about the leaders of informal Jewish education. What are their backgrounds? Are they Jewish? (The director of Camp Shalom in Madison, WI is not Jewish.) Have they studied Judaica? Have they studied formal or informal education? Do they have experience in informal education? These seem like reasonable questions. If CIJE wants to create a profession of _informal_ Jewish education, these questions are essential.

2. Front-line staff (camp counselors etc.):
Clearly it does not make sense to think about a profession of informal
education at this level. Camp counseling, staffing trips to Israel,
etc. is not a profession, and the number of persons who can move from
e.g. counselor to director is very small. What then, would we want
to know about these staff members? Again, I'm sure we'd want to
know about their Jewish backgrounds, although we'd not expect
professional training. In addition, we'd want to hear about what
sort of training they received in preparation for their work on
staff. In particular we'd want to know if they learned anything
about the Jewish content of their program (for programs that have
some Jewish content).

I'm not sure what CIJE would do with this knowledge. Start campaigning
to have more knowledgeable counselors hired in Jewish camps etc.?
Make a case for staff content study as part of staff orientation?
Maybe.

3. The working conditions of informal educators could also be
scrutinized. Do supervisors work full-time? Do they earn a
living wage? Do front-line workers have enough time for sleep?
Do they feel ownership of the programs they are working on?

D. What questions would this study address?

This study, using survey and/or interview methods, could help address
questions such as the following:

* Is there a shortage of qualified personnel for informal Jewish education?

* Does a profession of informal Jewish education exist? If one wished to
  build such a profession (or to _extend_ the profession of Jewish education
  to the informal arena), how far would one have to go?

* What is the nature of staff development in informal education?

* Is the level of staff knowledge of Judaica related to the degree of
  emphasis on Jewish content in informal programs?

Are these the right questions? That's the question we need to answer
first.

II. Other questions we might consider, which would lead to different studies

A. Let's start with a theory of informal Jewish education: I would
argue that the impact of informal Jewish education on Jewish continuity
depends on three conditions: (1) Jewish content; (2) Sense of community;
(3) Extent of participation. By "Jewish continuity," I mean strength
of Jewish identity, Jewish religious participation, Jewish knowledge,
etc.

1. Jewish content:
Informal Jewish education can be divided into three categories:
(a) secular programs attended by mainly Jews; (b) Jewishly
sponsored programs attended by mainly but not necessarily
exclusively Jews, with minimal Jewish content; and (c) Jewishly
sponsored programs, attended by Jewish, with strong emphasis
on Jewish content. These distinctions are typically made for
summer camps, but on reflection, one can see that they hold
for a large variety of informal programs, including JCC family
programs, Israel trips, youth groups, etc.

I predict that the greater the emphasis on Jewish content in a
program, the greater its impact on Jewish learning and practices.
I would argue further that emphasis on Jewish content depends
more on the mission of a program than on the characteristics of
its front-line staff.

2. Sense of community:
Informal programs succeed by building a strong sense of community
among participants. I predict that programs that are more successful
at creating a sense of community, and which pass a minimal threshhold
of Jewish content, will have greater impact on Jewish identity and
practices. There would likely be some synergy between content and
sense of community, in that strong content and strong community work
together to increase dramatically the effects of informal education
on Jewish continuity.

Creating a sense of community depends to an important extent on
the quality of staff. However, if this issue were pursued one would
ask very different questions from those listed above. Instead of
asking about formal backgrounds, one would want to know about the
mission, traditions, and culture of the programs. What are the
relationships among staff members, between staff and the program,
and between staff and the learners?

3. Extent of participation:
To me it is axiomatic that informal programs with strong Jewish content
and a strong sense of community foster Jewish continuity. Consequently,
preserving Jewish continuity in the broad sense requires creating more
access to such programs for young people. I doubt that personnel
deficiencies are the problem here.

Greater participation in effective informal programs would probably
improve the effectiveness of formal programs, since the young persons
would feel more positively about being Jewish and would be more
would be more motivated to join in Jewish activities.

B. Policy research in light of the theory

One direction for research would be to find out if this theory is correct.
I do not recommend that, for the same reason we didn't wait to find out
whether more trained teachers fostered greater learning among students,

before advocating more training for teachers. We assume that training is good for teachers, and are working on increasing and improving that training. Similarly, I propose we assume that informal programs with strong Jewish content and sense of community are effective, and work on increasing participation in such programs.

From a policy perspective, the "lever" that can most likely be "pulled" is improving the Jewish content and, where necessary, sense of community of existing programs in category (b) above, i.e. Jewishly sponsored programs attended by mainly Jews with minimal Jewish content. How can we enhance the Jewish content of such programs? Is it realistic to try? Alternatively, can we create new programs with strong Jewish content and a sense of community? I think these are the most pressing questions.

A study of personnel might be part of the research required to address this question, but observations of programs seem essential. For example, in Wisconsin one can find all three types of the summer camps listed above. How do the camps differ in their Jewish programs? How does being Jewish feel in the different kinds of camps? What would leaders, staff, campers, and/or parents think about greater emphasis on Jewish content? Is weakness in Judaic backgrounds among staff a significant barrier to increasing the emphasis on Jewish content?

Conditions outside the informal programs are likely to have substantial impact on the potential for change. Informal programs are generally embedded in larger institutions, such as synagogues, JCCs, federations, and national movements. How do these broader organizations define the missions of their informal programs? What conditions support stronger Jewish content in the missions? What are the supports and obstacles to delivering a strong Jewish content, given a Jewish mission? Here we might ask whether there is a shortage of personnel who are capable of implementing a program's Jewish mission.

Another external condition consists of the perceptions and preferences of the potential participants in informal programs. What leads individuals to participate in informal Jewish education? What is the role of formal organizations such as synagogues and JCCs? How important are informal networks such as kinship and friendship groups? How do these formal and informal collectivities facilitate participation through communication, funding, etc.?

In sum, given my assumption that informal programs with strong Jewish content and sense of community are effective, the key questions are (a) how to make more programs like these and (b) how to get more people to participate in such programs. Obviously these are simply the supply and the demand side of the same issue.

TO: SEYMOUR FOX

FROM: GAIL DORPH

CC: ALAN HOFFMANN

July 12, 1995

In this packet you will find an assortment of documents that will give some
sense of our thinking and our plans for beginning to create capacity for the
enterprise of professional development. These documents have either been
prepared as part of the development of the Cummings Grant or as updates to
Lester and Mort. Some are agendas, minutes, notes. Others are letters which
have been sent to consultants and participants. Taken together, they begin to
capture part of the story of our thinking about this project has been developing
over time. Additionally, I have enclosed the minutes of and papers prepared
for our March lead community consultation. This consultation was
devoted to issues of professional development and in a way, frames
what we found as missing when we began to work with these
communities to create personnel action plans.

I welcome the opportunity to talk together both about this project and about
the issues that we are trying to address through this project. Because the
enclosed documents were not created in order to tell the story of our thinking
or of any of these projects, they will hopefully give you an impression of
what's going on -- albeit not a coherent picture.

FROM: Alan, 73321,1220
TO: Adam Gamoran, INTERNET:GAMORAN@ssc.wisc.edu
CC: Debra abcPerrin, 76322,2406
DATE: 1/30/96 9:48 AM

Re: survey of informal educators in Atlanta?

ADAM,

I LIKE THE IDEA OF A COMMUNITY PILOT WHICH FORCES US TO
ASK SOME OF THE BIGGER QUESTIONS ABOUT INFORMAL EDUCATORS -
AN ISSUE WHICH WE KEEP AVOIDING.

MY CONCERN IS ABOUT HOWMUCH OF YOUR AND ELLEN'S TIME (AND
BILL'S TIME) THIS WILL TAKE UP, BUT EVEN MORE THE QUESTION OF
THE ONGOING QUALITY CONTROL AT THE CONCEPTUAL LEVEL.   IF WE
HAVE HAD SO MUCH DIFFICULTY DEFINING THE FIELD, WHY SHOULD
THEY BE MORE SUCCESFUL?

A.

DSP: MEF FILE
---------- Forwarded Message ----------

From: INTERNET:GAMORAN@ssc.wisc.edu, INTERNET:GAMORAN@ssc.wisc.edu
TO: Alan, 73321,1220
CC: (unknown), INTERNET:ANNETTE@VMS.HUJI.AC.IL
        (unknown), 76322,2406
        (unknown), INTERNET:GOLDRIEB@CTRVAX.VANDERBILT.EDU
        (unknown), 74104,3335
DATE: 1/26/96 9:34 AM

RE: survey of informal educators in Atlanta?

Sender: gamoran@ssc.wisc.edu
Received: from robin.ssc.wisc.edu (robin.ssc.wisc.edu [144.92.187.200]) by
dub-img-2.compuserve.com (8.6.10/5.950515)
        id JAA18278; Fri, 26 Jan 1996 09:24:52 -0500
From: <GAMORAN@ssc.wisc.edu>
Received: from ssc.wisc.edu by ssc.wisc.edu (PMDF V5.0-5 #12975)
 id <01I0GK0ZPJKWQT5TWV@ssc.wisc.edu>; Fri, 26 Jan 1996 08:24:30 -0600 (CST)
Date: Fri, 26 Jan 1996 08:24:30 -0600 (CST)
Subject: survey of informal educators in Atlanta?
To: 73321.1220@compuserve.com
Cc: Annette@vms.huji.ac.il, 76322.2406@compuserve.com,
     GOLDRIEB@ctrvax.Vanderbilt.Edu, 74104.3335@compuserve.com
Message-id: <01I0GK0ZQM5UQT5TWV@ssc.wisc.edu>
X-VMS-To: ALAN
X-VMS-Cc: ANNETTE, DEBRA, ELLEN, BILL
MIME-version: 1.0
Content-type: TEXT/PLAIN; CHARSET=US-ASCII
Content-transfer-encoding: 7BIT

Alan,

As you can see from the message below, youth group directors in Atlanta are interested in a self-study. This could be an opportunity for us to develop and pilot a survey of personnel in informal education. I suggest that we give Bill the green light to work on this, and that Ellen and I keep close tabs on it, particularly with regard to survey development.

Adam

From: IN%"74104.3335@compuserve.com" "Bill Robinson" 25-JAN-1996 13:52:14.23
To: IN%"gamoran@ssc.wisc.edu" "Adam Gamoran",
IN%"goldrieb@ctrvax.vanderbilt.edu" "Ellen Goldring"
Subj: Informal education

Adam and Ellen,

Steve Chervin met with the youth group directors in Atlanta (last week) and they are interested in participating in a study of themselves (somewhat like our Educators Study).

Steve would like our help and support in doing this (as I mentioned to Adam over dinner).

It seems that this would be a good place to begin thinking in a practical manner and with informal educators about what should a study of informal educators include. We could use the experience to develop and pilot test a set of instruments for a larger study.

I suggest we use this opportunity, and if I'm still spending some of my time for Atlanta then this is the obvious project to work on.

The next step is for Steve to arrange a meeting with the head of the youth directors council in Atlanta, himself and me to discuss "the why and the what" of doing this survey.

Bill