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Rationale for the Project, 1992-1993.

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RESPONSE

by

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The timing of this symposium on the Report of the Commission on Jewish Education in North America is particularly appropriate, as the process initiated by the Commission has now entered into a new phase. From the beginning, the Commission explicitly viewed its mission as

- a) to study the problems of Jewish education,
- b) to develop strategies for addressing them,
- c) to issue a report, and then
- d) to see to the implementation of its recommendations.¹

At this juncture, the first three phases have been completed, and we have moved forward to the stage of large-scale implementation.

In this paper, we will briefly review the status of this implementation process, and then respond to some of the important ideas and issues raised by our colleagues.²


Implementation work is presently underway on all five of the Commission's recommendations.³

1 "From the outset, all the Commissioners shared the determination to make a concrete impact on Jewish life. We agreed that we would not conclude the work of this Commission without beginning the implementation process the very day we issued our report." (*A Time to Act*, p. 22.)

2 The first annual progress report of the Council for Initiatives in Jewish Education will be published in January, 1992.

3 See summary of recommendations, (*A Time to Act*, pp. 17-18).

Specifically:

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- The Council for Initiatives in Jewish Education has been created,⁴ to serve as the implementing authority for the recommendations of the Commission.
 - The Lead Communities Project is now in the process of recruiting 3-5 communities for participation. Detailed plans for the improvement of Jewish education in those communities are being designed. The emerging plan involves each community in multiple simultaneous efforts, affecting the two key building blocks of personnel and community support, as well as youth trips to Israel.⁵ These multiple programs are designed to complement each other, based on the assumption that a cumulative impact is likely to lead to significant change.
 - In preparation for the Lead Communities Project, a program has been launched to identify and characterize best practices in key areas of Jewish education.⁶
 - A monitoring and evaluation program has been initiated, designed to offer continuous feedback to educators and planners staffing the various projects, facilitating ongoing improvement, change, and fine-tuning of implementation. This program will require a definition of the desired outcomes of projects, as well as the development of indicators for the objective assessment of Jewish education. It is reasonable to expect this effort to yield tools that will equip the Jewish community to engage in systematic analysis and planning for Jewish education.⁷
 - We are beginning to approach foundations with a view to their funding elements of the implementation program in areas of interest to them, first in Lead Communities and then throughout North America. Thus, it is hoped that Lead Communities will become testing grounds for new and experimental programs which can subsequently be diffused to communities across the continent.
 - The Mandel Associated Foundations have allocated major grants to Jewish institutions of higher learning and the JCCA for the development of their personnel training programs.⁸
 - The Commissioners, early in their deliberations, insisted that all investment, innovation, and experimentation be accompanied by research and evaluation, so that impact could be carefully considered. A plan is being designed for the development of a research capability

4 It has assembled a staff including Stephen H. Hoffman, acting Executive Director, Dr. Shulamith Elster, Education Officer, Henry L. Zucker and Virginia F. Levi; and Seymour Fox and Annette Hochstein as consultants.

5 Dr. Jacob B. Ukeles, Columbia School of International and Public Affairs, President of Ukeles Associates Inc. is planning the recruitment and selection of the Lead Communities.

6 Project director: Dr. Barry Holtz, Co-Director, the Melton Research Center for Jewish Education, The Jewish Theological Seminary of America.

7 Evaluation consultant: Dr. Adam Gamoran, associate professor of sociology and educational policy studies at the University of Wisconsin, Madison.

8 The Mandel Associated Foundations have now awarded grants of \$750,000 each to Yeshiva University, The Jewish Theological Seminary, and the JCCA; a grant for Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion is currently in the planning stages.

in North America, to ensure that the field of Jewish education will consistently operate according to an adequate theoretical and practical knowledge base.⁹

It is significant that the implementation of the Commission's recommendations comes at a time when additional foundations are taking important steps on behalf of Jewish education. The CRB Foundation, in its program of Youth Trips to Israel; the Wexner Foundation, in the recruitment of personnel, training grants, and institutional planning grants; the Crown Foundation, in its Covenant Program grants; and others are together showing a new receptivity and creating a new momentum that make this an opportune time for undertaking the Commission's program.

* * * * *

Participants in this symposium have raised several important issues concerning the Commission's work. Four major themes run through the various comments; therefore we have chosen to organize our response according to these four questions:

1. *Why does the report not present a definition of the goals of Jewish education?*
2. *What is new or different in the report of the Commission as compared to other reports that have been issued in the area of Jewish and general education?*
3. *Why did the Commission choose to concentrate its efforts on those options it termed enabling—the shortage of qualified personnel and the mobilization of community support—rather than on programmatic areas such as the preparation of curriculum materials or the development of family education?*
4. *What is the strategy for the improvement of Jewish education adopted by the report, and why did the members of the Commission believe that it could succeed and make a difference?*

1. The Goals of Jewish Education

The Commission on Jewish Education in North America carefully and consciously avoided dealing with the goals of Jewish education in its report, for several reasons:

- a. The composition of the Commission reflected the diversity within the North American Jewish community. It would have been more than surprising if such a variegated group of educators, rabbis, heads of foundations, and community leaders, representing the entire spectrum of religious and ideological viewpoints, had reached agreement on a joint conception of the goals of Jewish education. The papers included in this very symposium clearly demonstrate that even among a group of distinguished Jewish educators there is no consensus on goals.

⁹ Principal investigator: Dr Isa Aron, associate professor of Jewish education at the Rhea Hirsch School of Education at Hebrew Union College in Los Angeles.

- b. The Commission's diverse composition was designed to support a broad range of views on Jewish education. If this pluralism were to have been replaced by a uniform definition of goals — something of a party line — much of the vitality of the Commission and its ability to consider the complex realities of the Jewish community and of its educational system would have been lost.
- c. We believe that the goals of education are of theoretical and practical concern, worthy of serious and systematic attention. However, the articulation of goals requires a long-term, systematic process of collaborative effort between scholars in Jewish thought and in Jewish education and practitioners. Such an application of talent and energy in an intensive, long-term, joint effort may offer descriptions of goals that could inspire and guide the field. Currently such efforts are weak in general education¹⁰ and practically non-existent in Jewish education.¹¹

2. *What is new or different in the work of this Commission?*

Only the future will tell what this Commission will contribute to the field of Jewish education and what impact its work will have. We would only like to point here to some aspects of the work of the Commission which distinguish it from other such endeavors:

a. Composition:

The Commission was a private-communal partnership: though convened by one foundation,¹² it brought together in a joint study and decision-making effort — for the first time on the subject of Jewish education — educators, scholars, rabbis, heads of the institutions of higher Jewish learning, outstanding community leaders, major philanthropists, principals of family and private foundations, and heads of major communal organizations. The underlying assumption was that this joint effort of the communal and private leadership of the Jewish community would be able to muster the human and financial energy necessary for implementation of change. This approach contrasts with individual efforts and links private efforts to communal priorities and values. In the words of the report, “enormous power can be marshaled when the different sectors of the Jewish community join forces, develop a consensus, and decide on a plan of action.”¹³

10 See Arthur G. Powell, Eleanor Farrar, and David K. Cohen, *The Shopping Mall High School*, Houghton, Mifflin Co., Boston, 1985, pp. 305-308.

11 At the Mandel Institute for Research and Development of Jewish Education in Jerusalem, we have undertaken a long-term project aimed at formulating alternative conceptions of the Educated Jew. Participants in this effort include scholars such as Professors Menachem Brinker, Seymour Fox, Moshe Greenberg, Michael Rosenak, Israel Scheffler, and Isadore Twersky, and educators such as Ami Bouganim, Dr. Howard Dietcher, Beverly Gribetz, Annette Hochstein, Daniel Marom, Dr. Marc Rosenstein, and Debbie Weisman. This is a collaborative project with the Philosophy of Education Research Center at Harvard University.

12 Convened by the Mandel Associated Foundations of Cleveland, Ohio, JCCA and JESNA in collaboration with CJF.

13 *A Time to Act*, p. 21.

b. High stature of leadership:

There are examples of outstanding lay leaders working for Jewish education. However, in the past, only a few of the top leaders in the organized Jewish community treated the field of Jewish education as a high priority; most tended to choose for themselves other areas of endeavor. This Commission placed Jewish education at the top of the agenda for the highest level of communal leadership.

c. Method:

The Commission chose a thoughtful, planning-based process for its work, based on the careful gathering of data, on the polling of experts, the commissioning of research, and an intensive ongoing dialogue among Commissioners, scholars, and staff. Each of the six well-attended plenary meetings of the Commission was the culmination of extensive preparatory work: Before and after each meeting a staff member spoke with each commissioner to discuss progress and consider next steps. Frequent exchange of views occurred through letters, telephone conversations, and individual meetings of commissioners with scholars and staff, thus engaging all involved in a joint learning process. This process was deemed an essential part of the work of the Commission.

The initial commitment of the Commission that its work would lead to implementation, and that implementation was to start the day the report was published, required that each suggestion, recommendation, and alternative offered for discussion be considered according to the twin criteria of likely impact in achieving the desired change and feasibility. This, as explained below, led to decisions concerning the content (e.g., the specificity of the personnel and community components), to the conclusion concerning the need for a local and community-based setting for implementation (Lead Communities), and to the need for an intermediary organization charged with implementation¹⁴ (the CIJE).

The work of the Commission was accompanied by an extensive data-collection and research program, aimed at providing commissioners with a knowledge base useful for their decisions. Several research papers produced for the Commission have already been published.¹⁵ To the best of our knowledge, this was the first time that such systematic methods were applied by a commission in the field of Jewish education. Indeed, even in the larger context of general education, which has known many commissions and reports during the past decade, the link of the Commission's work to specific proposals and to a mechanism charged with their implementation is unique, as is the conception of a Lead

14 Intermediary organizations are conspicuously absent from the field of education. They have played an important role in major social reform programs over the past decades.

15 Walter Ackerman, "The Structure of Jewish Education in North America," 1990; Isa Aron, "Towards the Professionalization of Jewish Teaching," 1990; Aryeh Davidson, "The Preparation of Jewish Educators in North America: A Research Study," 1990; Joel Fox, "Federation-Led Community Planning for Jewish Education, Identity, and Continuity," 1989; Joseph Reimer, "The Synagogue as a Context for Jewish Education," 1990; Bernard Reisman, "Informal Education in North America," 1990; Henry L. Zucker, "Community Organization for Jewish Education—Leadership, Finance, and Structure," 1989. Also, see in this issue "A Time to Act: A Research Perspective," by Prof. Stuart Schoenfeld.

Community as a setting where major systematic change can be introduced and systematically monitored.¹⁶

c. Content:

A review of the recent reports on general education in the United States, or of past reports on Jewish educational renewal reveal the extent to which their recommendations are general, often failing to present a clear, specific agenda of required changes. This Commission has attempted to avoid this pitfall by focussing on the specific areas of personnel and community support, detailing not only what needs to be done, but also how it should be done. In particular, the unique content of the Commissions work can be characterized by two major themes:

- i. Specific ideas and detailed recommendations;¹⁷
 - ii. Comprehensive, coordinated treatment of personnel and community.
- i. Already at the second meeting of the Commission, the Commissioners addressed the need for specificity, challenging themselves and the Commission staff to spell out, in detail, what would be involved in creating change in the areas of personnel and community support. As a result, at its meeting of June 14, 1989, the Commission considered a large number of suggestions, including:
 - programs for the recruitment of key leadership to the area of Jewish education; encouragement of the establishment of additional local commissions for Jewish education;
 - specific communications programs aimed at creating more understanding, knowledge, and support for Jewish education in the community at large;
 - the recruitment of Judaic studies majors for the field of Jewish education;
 - the expansion of in- service training opportunities and the recruitment of the institutions of higher Jewish learning to offer more in-service programs;
 - the establishment of new positions for professors of Jewish education;
 - the recruitment of Jewish professors in university departments of education, psychology, philosophy, and sociology, to teach in the education programs of institutions of higher Jewish learning;
 - the development of portable benefits packages for both full-time and part-time teachers;

16 Marshall S. Smith and Jennifer O'Day, *Systemic School Reform, Politics of Education Association Yearbook*, 1990, pp. 233-267.

17 "The Report is impressive . . . in its specificity: no other major reform document that I can think of indicates clear-cut and short-term changes along with the long-term and more abstract goals. One has only to compare *A Time to Act* with "America 2000" (President Bush's recent education manifesto) to appreciate the specificity of the former." (Personal correspondence, Dr. Adam Gamoran, associate professor of sociology and educational policy studies, University of Wisconsin, Madison, May 6, 1991).

- the development of career ladders in Jewish education which are not simply linear, offering options other than advancement to administrative positions;
- the development of additional networks of collegiality: publications, meetings, conferences, and computerized networking.

Each of these recommendations has been linked to a specific framework for implementation, and efforts are being made to secure appropriate funding.

- ii. After considering the specific ideas suggested, the Commission concluded that dealing effectively with the shortage of qualified personnel for Jewish education requires that recruitment to Jewish education, training, profession-building, and retention be addressed simultaneously, as none of these can be separated from the others, and no one factor is the limiting factor. Clearly, a multidimensional approach—not a simple solution—is in order. Similarly, the Commission learned that for Jewish education to benefit from the resources necessary for appropriate development, it must become a major priority of the community. This will only happen if outstanding community leaders take positions in support of such priority, and if members of the community understand and support these efforts. Thus, the Commission decided that a strategy needed to be developed to deal with both personnel and community in a comprehensive fashion. Moreover, the Commissioners realized that personnel and the community were interrelated, each being dependent on the other for success. For Jewish education to attract talented and dedicated Jews to the field, these individuals must believe that the Jewish community will give them the support and resources necessary to make the difference. The community, on the other hand, will only mobilize for the cause of Jewish education if it believes that a highly qualified profession of Jewish educators is being developed. It is therefore necessary to develop a program that includes simultaneous treatment of both the shortage of personnel and the community's support for Jewish education.

3. Why did the Commission choose to concentrate its efforts on those options it termed "enabling"?

There are so many aspects of Jewish education that urgently need attention that the task of choosing among them was an exceedingly difficult one. In August, 1988 the Commissioners listed as many as 27 areas on which the Commission's work could concentrate, each important enough to warrant a commission of its own. Between August and December, 1988, staff and consultants developed a methodology to analyze each of these areas.¹⁸ This methodology required that the best available information on each area be gathered and analyzed in terms of several criteria of importance, feasibility, benefits, cost, and time involved for implementation. The outcome of this analysis revealed the difficulty of assigning relative priorities to programmatic areas. All are important and it is difficult to rank the benefits that would accrue from investment in each. The analysis, in the end, did not provide guidance in selecting any particular populations, age levels, or institutional settings for intensive work; the Commission

¹⁸ See Commission on Jewish Education in North America, Background Materials for the Meeting of December 13, 1988.

was left with the question of how to decide set priorities for action, among all the competing claims. Ultimately, the criterion of "importance"—both relative and absolute—helped the Commission reach a decision.¹⁹ The critical questions turned out to be: "Are there any interventions in Jewish education on which improvement in many or all areas depends? Is there any intervention without which improvement in many or all areas is not likely?" Analysis revealed that almost all areas need personnel and community resources as conditions for improvement. It became clear that for across-the-board improvement in the field of Jewish education to occur at this time, a heavy investment in educational personnel and a major effort to mobilize community support is required. The Commission reached the understanding that the key to change lies in developing a feasible strategy for addressing these building blocks of Jewish education.

4. What is the strategy for the improvement of Jewish education adopted by the Commission?

The need to deal with personnel and to mobilize community support has been stated many times in the past, without this articulation leading to significant change. This Commission, several of its members wise from the lessons of the past, took steps to plan a strategy for change. This strategy was developed with two questions in mind:²⁰

1. What should be done concerning personnel and the community; and
2. How should it be done?

We have dealt above with the first question: we now turn to the second. The core of the Commission's plan is to infuse Jewish education with a new vitality by recruiting and training large numbers of talented and dedicated educators. To succeed, these educators need to work in a congenial environment, supported by a Jewish community that recognizes Jewish education as the most effective means for insuring Jewish continuity and creating a commitment to Jewish values and behavior. The Commission recognized the enormity of the task. Thousands of educators, working in scores of institutions, are involved. In addition, the field is beset by doubt and skepticism. Therefore, the Commission decided to include demonstration as a major element in its strategy. Demonstration provides a means to develop solutions, to demonstrate feasibility, and to allow for results within a reasonable period of time. Moreover, education takes place locally, within communities, in schools, centers, and synagogues. The most recent literature on educational change points to the need to link educational change to community-wide processes.²¹ Thus, the cornerstone of the Commission's strategy is the setting up of several Lead Communities, followed by the diffusion of innovations shown to be successful, throughout the continent. At the same time, however, systemic change requires continental efforts. Matters such as salaries and benefits are of concern for all communities in North America, and answers to the financial and organizational issues involved require continental policies. Similarly, though some training can be done locally, much will have to be

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Commission on Jewish Education in North America, Background Materials for the Meeting of June 14, 1989.

²¹ Smith and O'Day, *Systemic School Reform*, pp. 233-267.

done in major centers in North America and Israel. And candidates for the profession will have to be recruited on a continental basis.

The Commission adopted a strategy for change which posits two criteria for evaluating possible actions:

- a) the likelihood of having broad systemic impact on the field of Jewish education; and
- b) the likelihood of implementation.

Hence, the central foci of the Commissions work:

- personnel, since the shortage of qualified professionals affects every area of educational endeavor;
- community support, since leadership, moral support and material resources are vital to change;
- major local efforts (Lead Communities) since this is where education takes place (a bottom-up approach);
- the need for a continental, multidimensional perspective and effort, based on the recognition that problems, programs, and communities cannot be dealt with in isolation (a top-down approach).

In conclusion, we would like to thank the editor of *Jewish Education Magazine*, Dr. Alvin Schiff, for inviting us to participate in this symposium. As a member of the Commission on Jewish Education in North America, he made a significant contribution to its work. By organizing this symposium, he has helped to disseminate its findings and recommendations and to stimulate further discussion on the issues that the Commission considered.

Update from Adam Gamoran

January, 1993

RATIONALE FOR THE PROJECT

How will we know whether the lead communities have succeeded in creating better structures and processes for Jewish education? On what basis will CIJE encourage other cities to emulate the programs developed in lead communities? Like any innovation, the lead communities project requires a monitoring, evaluation, and feedback component to document its efforts and gauge its success.

By <monitoring> we mean observing and documenting the planning and implementation of changes. <Evaluation> means interpreting information in a way that will strengthen and assist each community's efforts to improve Jewish education. <Feedback> will occur in the form of oral and written responses to community members and to the CIJE.

Two aspects of educational change need to be addressed: The <process> of change and the <outcomes> of change. At present, we are in much better position to study the process of change, because the outcomes have not yet been defined. What results are we expecting? Increased participation? Gains in Judaic knowledge? More ritual practices?

Better affect towards Jewish institutions? We will use our study of

the process of change to elicit the goals of the project that are particular to the three communities taking part.

The lead communities project is a direct result of A TIME TO ACT. Although that document provided the essential blueprint for the project, it was silent on the question of outcomes.

One contribution of the early stages of the evaluation project will be to enumerate the variety of specific goals envisioned within the lead communities.

Despite the ambiguity about goals at present, there are a few uncontroversial outcomes. For example, all would agree that increased participation in Jewish institutions by the Jews of the community is desirable. This type of measure can be monitored from the outset.

FIELD RESEARCH IN LEAD COMMUNITIES

Studying the process of change in lead communities should be a major component of the CIJE strategy. Documenting the process is especially important because the effects of innovation may not be manifested for several years. For example, suppose Community X manages to quadruple its number of full-time, professionally-trained Jewish educators. How long will it take for this change to affect cognitive and affective outcomes for students? Since the results cannot be detected immediately, it is important to obtain a qualitative sense of the extent to which the professional educators are being used effectively.

Studying the process is also important in the case of unsuccessful innovation. Suppose despite the best-laid plans, Community X is unable to increase its professional teaching force. Learning from this experience would require knowledge of the point at which the process broke down.

It is essential to begin monitoring the process of change as soon as possible -- ideally before the change process actually begins. There are three reasons to commence this study early on:

(1) In order to understand change, it is obviously essential to gather baseline information before the change has occurred. Baseline information means not only essential quantitative data, such as enrollment figures, but understanding of the structure and culture of the community at the outset. What ideas about Jewish education are prevalent? How are these ideas, or visions, distributed through the community? What is the nature of leadership and communication in this community? To what extent is the community mobilized for Jewish education?

What characterizes the professional lives of Jewish educators? Answers to these questions must be chronicled to strengthen the collective memory for later comparison.

The earlier the evaluation staff is present, the sooner they can obtain a general background understanding of the community, and can also establish a positive rapport with community members. That way they are less likely to miss or misinterpret changes that occur once the implementation begins.

(2) The early presence of evaluation staff can help stimulate new visions for Jewish education and can heighten the mobilization of the community. Lead communities have the opportunity to consider dramatically restructured approaches to

Jewish education in addition to modifications of existing programs. By asking community members about their visions for the future, and by providing feedback that facilitates communication about such visions, the evaluation project can encourage a constructive dialogue within the communities.

(4) The CIJE is a long-term enterprise, not a one-shot deal. There is every chance that more lead communities will be created in the next three, five, or ten years. We need to learn about the launching and gearing-up process so other communities can learn from this

experience. For example, very little is known about mobilizing lay persons in support of education. We need to watch how this occurs so other communities can follow.

To carry out this task, we have hired a team of three FIELD RESEARCHERS.

One researcher is based in each community, but they will all spend time in all three communities. This is because they have complementary strengths -- they differ in their expertise as researchers, and in their knowledge of Jewish education -- and because keeping more than one pair of eyes on a situation provides both a check and a stimulus for deeper interpretation.

The design of the lead communities project calls for each community to carry out a self-study, which presumably would include information on community composition, population trends, and enrollment figures. The field researchers are prepared to assist in this process, but they cannot be its primary agents, lest they have no time for their other activities.

For next year, we are proposing a survey component to the evaluation

project, which would gather baseline data on affective, behavioral, and cognitive outcomes, probably from a selected youth cohort within each community. We hope to proceed with the surveys despite the lack of consensus about goals, because of the overriding importance of gathering some form of baseline data on outcomes which can be tracked over the years. The surveys would incorporate community input into their design.

February 1993

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