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BUILDING THE PROFESSION: In-service Training

- I. In-service training as a focal point of the CIJE effort of "Building the Profession" implies at least three things: Jewish education is a profession; a significant number of practitioners of Jewish education, in all its various settings, have had little or no professional training; professionally trained personnel will make Jewish education more effective and attractive. I think it important to note that the first of these propositions is arguable, as is the case with education in general; the second is demonstratable; the third is supported by a growing body of research which indicates that there is a positive relationship between their effectiveness and the subject-matter knowledge and training which teachers bring to their work - we do not, however, know how that knowledge and training are best acquired.

The Policy Brief of CIJE which deals with the background and professional training of teachers in the schools of the three Lead Communities - Atlanta, Baltimore and Milwaukee - reports that " ... only 40% of the day school Judaica teachers are certified as Jewish educators [and that] in supplementary and pre-schools the proportions are much smaller. Overall, only 31% of the teachers have a degree in Jewish Studies or certification in Jewish education."

Inadequately trained personnel has been one of the most persistent, and even intractable, problems of Jewish education in the United States. It is instructive, I think, to compare the data gathered by CIJE with the 1959 report of the Commission for the Study of Jewish Education in the United States. The earlier study found that "Only a minority (40%) of the Jewish teachers in all schools - one-day-a-week, mid-week afternoon, and day - had received pedagogical

training." Teachers, particularly in smaller communities removed from metropolitan centers, lack not only an adequate knowledge of the material they teach and a solid grounding in the theories which point to the methods most appropriate for teaching that material, they also - and particularly so in non-orthodox settings - do not accept or observe the beliefs and practices they attempt to transmit to their students.

It is important to note that an all too high number of those engaged in Jewish education of all kinds and at all levels are part-time personnel. This is less a function of commitment and interest than a consequence of the way in which the enterprise is organized. The overwhelming majority of children enrolled in Jewish schools in the United States are "part time" pupils in "part-time" schools. Only a combination of jobs - a day school and an afternoon school or a weekday school and a weekend school - brings a teacher, and sometimes even an administrator, close to what might reasonably be considered full time employment. These circumstances make it difficult to create a sense of professionalism, both among practitioners and the public they serve. Whether or not training can change the image even while the structure remains the same is, it seems to me, an important question.

Questions of structure and organization are outside the scope of this paper. The concern here is to remedy the lack of Jewish knowledge and skills of pedagogy which characterize a troublesome proportion of those engaged in Jewish education. No less important is the matter of the educator as a person - the personal behavior and attitudes he/she brings to the tasks of Jewish education. Employment patterns which offer entry to unqualified personnel and provide only part-time work for even the properly trained cannot, however, be altogether ignored. Why should anyone who works in such circumstances make an

investment of time, effort and probably money as well to acquire new knowledge and skills? What might be appropriate incentives?

II. A program of in-service training for teachers, not unlike pre-service programs, must be based on a conception of the domains of knowledge which constitute the basis of professional teaching. Despite some differences about detail, there is today a general agreement regarding the basic elements of "teaching knowledge:"

1. Content knowledge
2. General pedagogical knowledge, including principles and strategies for classroom organization and management
3. Curriculum knowledge, including materials and programs
4. Pedagogical content knowledge, an amalgam of content and pedagogy that is teachers' special form of professional understanding
5. Knowledge of learners and their characteristics
6. Knowledge of educational contexts, including the characteristics of classrooms, schools, communities, and cultures
7. Knowledge of educational ends, purposes, and values, and their philosophical and historical grounds

In addition discussions about the knowledge base for teaching have begun to emphasize the importance of helping teachers develop a reflective stance toward teaching. Similarly thought should be given to creating settings which provide opportunities for practice under supervision.

In-service training for teachers in Jewish schools can be organized in at least two

ways: 1) programs which lead to a degree from an accredited institution; 2) short-term programs of varying time span which planfully deal with various aspects of the "teaching knowledge base." The first is preferable if for no other reason than the way in which a degree contributes to the image of the Jewish teacher; the second seems more feasible and likely of implementation. The full benefits of that alternative demand long-term planning which views particular courses, workshops and other learning experiences as part of an embrative conception which systematically engages teachers with the different domains of the "knowledge base" of teaching.

- III. Programs of in-service training intended to enrich the knowledge base of teachers in Jewish schools do not require new institutions. The available resources include: Colleges of Jewish Studies, central agencies of Jewish education, general universities, professional organizations and, conceivably, Israel's Open University. The Colleges and the central agencies currently conduct in-service programs for school personnel in their immediate vicinity. In the case of central agencies, participation is sometimes limited to personnel serving in schools located in the geographic area served by the Federation with which the agency is affiliated. To my knowledge there is no reliable data available regarding these programs - their content and form, the target populations and number of participants, intended purposes and actual effect. It seems to me that "Building A Profession" might well investigate this area of activity - not only to get a picture of what is going on but also in order to think about improving practice. The vast majority of Jewish educators are located in the areas directly served by these institutions.

The centers of Jewish life in the United States are surrounded by smaller

communities which do not have easy access to either a College or central agencies, even though they are often located in places where there is a general college or university. In-service training for personnel in these communities - together they count approximately 20% of the total Jewish population in the United States - requires a special effort.

The Colleges of Jewish Studies should be placed at the center of the effort to reach these smaller communities - the other agencies mentioned above are resources to be used when occasion dictates. In-service training can be conceived as a partnership based on a contractual agreement between a College and a community or communities. The active role of the community is critical - recruitment, provision of incentives, public recognition; it is unlikely that many teachers on their own will respond to a general announcement of an in-service program in another community. The Colleges for their part may perhaps require some prodding; the expansion of their activities into the area of in-service programs would strain reflectively meager resources. Both the communities and the Colleges need an intervener from the outside - CIJE?

The design of a program requires careful attention. Even in a small community there may be different populations - those who want to work for a degree and others who look to periodic participation in short term seminars or institutes. Questions of venue are critical - how much of the instruction will take place in the community and how much at the College. The formats of instruction similarly require consideration - courses as organized in regular college settings, modules of concentrated time spread out over a semester, a higher percentage of independent study than is ordinarily the case, etc. Perhaps we need to study similar efforts in general education - not just for educational personnel but training for all manner of occupation and profession.

The increasing importance currently ascribed to the pedagogic practices component of the "knowledge base" suggests that a College designate a school in its vicinity as a professional development institution. I will not here describe in detail all that is involved in the creation of such a setting. I raise the matter to call attention to the fact that significant improvement in the quality of instruction in Jewish schools is unlikely without a serious investment in pedagogic training.

I think we must also examine the use of technology in in-service programs. Indeed efforts to reach teachers in outlying communities must remain small scale and high cost labor intensive without the techniques of the technology of distance education.

Cleveland is a case point. The College of Jewish Studies is currently involved in discussions with a number of communities regarding in-service training for teachers. Without additions to faculty the spread of the effort is necessarily limited; even were faculty available, there remains the question of how much time an instructor should or can spend "on the road." The traditional patterns of adding to faculty do not seem to me to be adequate to the task of providing high quality, ongoing - not one shot deals - in-service training to personnel in outlying communities. Technology currently available can help overcome this problem. Indeed it is possible to think of a "national" faculty - instructors from similar institutions all over the United States engaged in a common project of in-service training.

- IV. The Cleveland College of Jewish Studies has, as indicated, initiated contact with a number of communities in its hinterland in order to explore the possibility of collaborative efforts in in-service training. The willingness of the institution to

engage in such activity recommends it as the site for a pilot program. Steps should be taken to establish a formal relationship between the College and CIJE for the purpose of designing a format of in-service training for teachers along the lines described above.

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