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A Time to Act / עת לעשות

CIJE Council for Initiatives in Jewish Education

June 4, 1996

Dear Friend,

I am happy to enclose the latest publication of CIJE's Best Practices Project, *Jewish Education in JCCs*, by Dr. Steven M. Cohen and Dr. Barry W. Holtz. As you may know, the Best Practices Project represents an effort to document outstanding examples of Jewish educational work in a variety of settings. The Project seeks to tell the "success stories" of Jewish education at a time when many are looking for hope about the Jewish future. We believe that there *are* important lessons to be learned from the good work that has already been done in the field. Building on that work, we can move forward toward revitalized institutions and inventive new approaches.

This is the third in our Best Practices series. The previous volumes are: *Best Practices: Supplementary School Education* and *Best Practices: Early Childhood Jewish Education.* These two books are being revised and reprinted this summer in the new format of the enclosed book.

The volume on Jewish Education in JCCs tells a remarkable story. In the past decade and a half, the JCC movement has refocused its mission to emphasize the Jewish Community Center's potential role as a Jewish educating institution. This commitment has led to important changes in JCCs across the country. The enclosed Best Practices volume documents the educational advances made in six outstanding JCCs.

As efforts to improve Jewish education continue across a broad range of fronts, it is clear to our researchers that JCCs can have a major role to play. The volume on Best Practices in JCCs helps delineate some of the ways that Jewish Community Centers have the potential to contribute to a renewed emphasis on Jewish education across North America. We hope you will find this volume both instructive and encouraging.

I have also enclosed for your interest an updated description of CIJE's current work.

Warmest wishes,

Alan D. Hoffmann
Executive Director

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Draft: June 26, 1995

COMMENTS INVITED

BEST PRACTICE IN JEWISH EDUCATION: JEWISH COMMUNITY CENTERS

by Steven M. Cohen and Barry W. Holtz*

Sponsors:

Council for Initiatives in Jewish Education
and
The Jewish Community Centers Association

*Names ordered alphabetically.

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INTRODUCTION

Do JCCs Jewishly Educate?

Do Jewish Community Centers engage in Jewish education? If so, how do they educate? What are the signs of an educationally effective JCC, and what are the key ingredients in making good Jewish education possible in a JCC?

These are some of the central questions we address in this investigation. They are raised at a time when the organized Jewish community, perhaps more concerned about its prospects for creative survival than ever before, has placed renewed emphasis upon Jewish education in its many forms. At the same time, the Jewish Community Center movement has undertaken a variety of steps -- some dating back to years before the recent wave of concern for Jewish continuity -- to expand the scope and heighten the quality of Jewish education in JCCs.

As two researchers whose professional and personal lives have been close to the practice and study of Jewish education in conventional settings, we came to this study with a great degree of skepticism. Not only did we wonder whether serious Jewish education was taking place anywhere in the Center movement. Our doubts ran deeper: we questioned whether it was even possible for a JCC to engage in serious or effective Jewish education.

For, as even champions of Jewish education in the Center movement readily concede, JCCs face a daunting number of obstacles if they are to be taken seriously as a "player" in the world of Jewish education in North America. At its heart, the typical JCC is a market-driven, service-oriented, recreational facility. For decades, Jews have come to Centers for specific services that are only tangentially related to Jewish education, as it has been traditionally understood. Moreover, Jewish education in the JCC context is not a "money-maker," at least in the short-term. The historic mission and design of the JCC, then, certainly militates against a strong commitment to conventional Jewish education.

Moreover, the JCC suffers from other limitations as a Jewish educational institution. Putting matters most simply, it is not a synagogue. For the most part, Jews do not come to Centers to pray; they do not celebrate their most momentous life cycle events in the Center context; they do not participate in a "Holy Community" (to translate the term classically appended to the names of synagogues); and they do not expect to be confronted with a particular religious ideology. In short, the secular nature and ideology of the Center limits its ability to Jewishly engage its clientele in certain ways (although, as we shall see, the same features facilitate its educational outreach in other ways).

If the recreational and secular character of the JCC impede its educational potential, so too does the character of the staff. From executive directors to line workers, JCC professional staff have historically been selected for skills other than their proficiency in or dedication to Judaism. For the most part, JCC professionals have not been extraordinarily well-educated Judaically, nor are they particularly imbued with a professional or personal commitment to enhancing the Jewish commitment of their clientele, except, perhaps, as an indirect consequence of involvement in one or another JCC activities. In addition, it could be argued that aspects of their professional ethic as social workers can be seen as running contrary to their serving as Jewish educators. Social workers are inclined to accept the validity of their client's legitimate values and beliefs; educators -- especially religious educators -- generally see themselves in the business of challenging, if not changing, fundamental values and beliefs.

Our investigation did not set out to determine the extent of Jewish education in the entire JCC field. Rather, we sought out examples of excellence in Jewish education. In the course of our investigation, we came to learn of numerous examples of good Jewish education taking place within the confines of Jewish Community Centers throughout North America. Thus, at least a piece of our initial skepticism was allayed: in theory, JCCs can be effective instruments of some forms of Jewish education. In reality, without looking very hard, we found several examples of what may be called "best practices" in Jewish education in JCCs.

The Best Practices Project

In describing its "blueprint for the future," A Time to Act, the report of the Commission on Jewish Education in North America, called for the creation of "an inventory of best educational practices in North America."[1]

Accordingly, the Best Practices Project of the Council for Initiatives in Jewish Education (CIJE) documents exemplary models of Jewish education, in the hope that doing so will help improve the quality of Jewish education. Up to this point, the Project has published volumes in two of the areas it has identified for intensive examination: the supplementary school, and early childhood Jewish education programs. This volume on Jewish Education in

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[1]Commission on Jewish Education in North America, *A Time to Act* (University Press of America, 1991), p. 69.

Jewish Community Centers, then, is the third in the series.

What do we mean by "best practice"? One recent book about this concept in the world of education states that it is a phrase borrowed

> from the professions of medicine and law, where "good practice" or "best practice" are everyday phrases used to describe solid, reputable, state-of-the-art work in a field. If a doctor, for example, does not follow contemporary standards and a case turns out badly, peers may criticize his decisions and treatments by saying something like, "that was simply not best practice."
>
> ... [I]f educators are people who take ideas seriously, who believe in inquiry, and who subscribe to the possibility of human progress, then our professional language must label and respect practice which is at the leading edge of the field.[2]

We need to be cautious about what we mean by the word "best" in the phrase "best practice." The literature in education points out that seeking perfection will be of little use as we try to improve actual work in the field. In an enterprise as complex and multifaceted as education, these writers argue, we should be looking to discover "good" not ideal practice.[3]

"Good" educational practice is what we seek to identify for Jewish education, models of the best available practice in any given domain. In some cases, best available practice will come very close to "best imaginable practice;" at other times the gap between the best we currently have and the best we think we could attain may be far greater. But, in all areas, this project aims to document the "success stories" of contemporary Jewish education.

Main Purposes and Intended Audience

This particular study has a number of goals. We wanted, first of all, to document and analyze elements of Jewish educational excellence in JCCs. In what areas do we find Jewish

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[2]Steven Zemelman, Harvey Daniels, Arthur Hyde, *Best Practice* (Heinemann, 1993), pp. Vii-viii.

[3]See, for example, Sara Lawrence Lightfoot, *The Good High School* (Basic Books, 1983).

educational excellence? Who are the "students" and who or what are the "teachers" and what is being taught? Where are the particular educational strengths and weaknesses of JCCs, especially within the educationally superior Centers?

But beyond describing areas of Jewish educational excellence -- a concern that has been addressed in a number of previous publications -- we also seek to understand what goes in to making an educationally successful Center. Earlier studies[4] have pointed to the director, the board, the Jewish educator, the staff, the institutional environment, and other elements of success in JCC Jewish education. We sought a deeper understanding of these elements than has been presented in earlier writings.

Beyond these issues, we seek to take the discussion of Jewish education in the Center world to a deeper level and ask probing questions of this endeavor. Insofar as is possible, how can we describe the educational and Jewish philosophy of the Center movement? How do elements of these approaches facilitate or inhibit achieving Jewish educational goals? Most pointedly, what will Centers need to do to take their recent venture into Jewish education to the next level and, perhaps, begin to make both a lasting and widespread impact on the Jewish lives of their members and, indeed, the larger Jewish communities in which the Centers are situated?

As should be obvious by this point, our ambitions for this document extend beyond the world of analysis to the world of real practice. Quite simply, we hope that our study -- even if only in a small way -- will promote better practice in this important area of Jewish education. Ideally, JCCs which are currently less advanced in this domain will be inspired to change their practice and advance their commitment to Jewish education.

We hope that this report will be read carefully by key personnel in the JCC movement. We believe it will be useful to Board members, executive directors, department heads, Jewish educational personnel, and all those who work professionally for their JCCs. If this document truly succeeds, it will help provoke renewed and deeper thinking on the part of even the most expert and thoughtful practitioners and policy-makers in the Center movement.

To no small extent, this report is also directed to policy- makers, Jewish educators, and others outside the center movement who may be unaware of the significant recent developments in JCC Jewish education. Since the early 1980's, the JCC movement has effected enormous changes in the ways that Centers view their role as Jewish educational

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[4]See, for example, Barry Chazan and Steven M. Cohen, *Assessing the Jewish Educational Effectiveness of Jewish Community Centers-- The 1994 Survey* (New York: JCCA, 1995). Also Barry Chazan and Mark Charendoff, *Jewish Education and the Jewish Community Center* (Jerusalem: JCCA, 1994).

institutions. We believe that this report will help lend recognition to a significant process of development and re- conceptualization among JCCs. As we have come to learn through the course of our research, JCCs ought to be taken more seriously as a locus of Jewish education -- certainly possibilities exist, even if they have not always been actualized. The recognition of these successful endeavors by established Jewish educators can only help advance the agenda to which they are committed, namely, the expansion of Jewish educational opportunities to a wider Jewish population.

Finally, the developments within JCCs charted in this volume are part of larger effort to shape a Jewish education appropriate for modern, American society. The experience of the JCCs relates to domains of Jewish education beyond the Center world, and, to the extent that this is so, we believe that this report can help bring those insights to a wider public.

Method

We began our research by consulting with several experts (both individually and as a group) to discuss the issue of best practice in Jewish education in the world of the Jewish Community Center. Based on those consultations, along with our reading of the literature published in recent years about this topic, we chose an initial group of a dozen JCCs that are reputed to be among the best in the field.

Our expert consultants helped us winnow that list down to comport with our constraints of time and resources. We sought diversity with respect to several characteristics: geography, size of community and Center, structure (i.e., a metropolitan system as well as local units), and personnel (i.e., status of Jewish educator). Eventually, we chose six sites to study in depth:

The Jewish Community Centers of Chicago
The JCC on the Palisades, Tenafly, New Jersey
The Memphis JCC
The Jewish Community Centers Association of St Louis
The JCC of the Greater St. Paul Area
The YM&YMHA of Suffolk in Commack, New York (Long Island)

We wish to underscore that these six particular Centers are not the only examples of best practice in this arena. We chose them because they represent the best Centers from our

point of view, but do not exhaust them. Taken together, they constitute a diverse group along the lines stated above. We specifically excluded some Centers with a deserved reputation for excellence in part because they are so unusual that other Centers might regard them as "sui generis."

Beyond the six sites for in-depth investigation, our expert consultants helped us choose a group of "stand-alone" programs operating within other Jewish Community Centers. These specific programs are among many around the continent which offer examples of excellence in particular domains of JCC activity. This group consists of the following:

The 92nd Street Y (New York)
The Atlanta JCC
The JCC of the Upper West Side (New York)
The Metrowest JCC (New Jersey)
[cleveland?]

The JCC serves many purposes and plays many roles. It is at once an institution which is social, recreational, communal, and educational. Exemplary practices surely exist in important JCC domains such as services to the elderly, physical education, budget and fundraising, staff training, health programs, among many others. Our concern, however, is with the JCC as a Jewish educational institution, and it is in this realm that we sought to document best practices.

With this said, we define the concept of "Jewish education" quite broadly. Education includes schoolrooms and classes, to be sure, but education takes place in many different ways -- in the gym, in the art gallery, in early childhood and family programs as well as by way of the very ambiance of an institution, the decorations on its walls, and the music one hears in its corridors.

The notion that education is broad-based and multi-dimensional, that it goes beyond schooling (formal education), is an idea explored with great depth and insight by the great historian of American education Lawrence Cremin, for many years the President of Teachers College at Columbia University. Cremin's defimition of education certainly deals with schools, but it also includes "the multiplicity of individuals and institutions that educate--parents, peers, siblings, and friends, as well as families, churches, synagogues, libraries, museums, summer camps, benevolent societies, agricultural fairs, settlement houses. . . ."[5]

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[5]Lawrence Cremin, *Traditions of American Education* (New York: Basic Books, 1976), p. 136.

Perhaps no institution in Jewish life today reflects the notion of an "ecology"[6] of diverse educational opportunities better than does the JCC. And there are few institutions that have so much potential to educate. As we shall see, how well it manages this potential and these opportunities is the great challenge facing Jewish education in the Jewish Community Center.

The mode of work in this study was qualitative, but the study is not "ethnographic" in the way that term is conventionally used in social research.[7] Ethnographic methods would have given us a rich description of the JCCs. Such an approaches would be ideal in studying the social framework, power structures, activities, and educational processes of the Centers. Inevitably, true ethnographies demand a lengthy period of "participant observation" in which the researcher becomes a virtual member of the society or institution which is being investigated. Such a study of a JCC would be extremely useful, but our time and resource limitations did not permit it. Accordingly, we had little contact with the day to day users of the JCCs, nor did we meet with local rabbis or federation officials. In other words, neither did we extensively observe JCCs in action nor did we interview key people outside the system.

Our goal was to learn as much as we could from insiders about how these particular JCCs -- recognized as "best practice sites" by some experts in the field -- did their educational work. To assist us in this work we used criteria developed by a recent national JCC task force on Jewish education, the "COMJEE II" report, described later in this essay.

After selecting the six sites, we informed them of their selection and asked their permission to pursue the project (all agreed). We asked them to send us a host of documentation including catalogues, reports, minutes of board meetings, and publicity materials.

The two of us conducted our first site visit (at the JCC of the Palisades) jointly to learn how we might conduct the interviews and to allow for mutual self-reflection and analysis. Another researcher, Julie Tammivaara then joined Steven Cohen in the visit to Suffolk; afterwards, Tamivaara visited Memphis, Holtz went to St. Louis, and Cohen visited Chicago and St. Paul.

In each Center we asked the director to arrange interviews with the Jewish educator, assistant directors, department heads, and, where possible, board members and other staff. In all instances we met with the Jewish educator and, most often, with the pre-school director. Aside from certain key professionals, whom we felt we had to meet, we gave the executive

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[6]Lawrence Cremin, *Public Education* (New York: Basic Books, 1976).
[7]See, for example, H. Russell Bernard, *Research Methods in Anthropology* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1994)

director a considerable amount of flexibility in choosing those aspects of his or her Center that were deemed most outstanding. This was, after all, not an evaluation study, but an attempt to highlight the best in each siteand we believed that the executive director was the person most likely to have the best information about the success stories within his or her institution.

In each Center, then, we followed the following steps:

1) We examined the literature produced by the Center. (We had received quite a bit in advance and more when we got there.)

2) We interviewed the executive director.

3) We interviewed the Jewish education staff, in particular the senior educator.

4) We interviewed those division heads that the director felt were involved in areas significantly related to Jewish programming.

5) We interviewed some significant lay leaders. The lay leaders were interviewed in a group; with the professionals the interviews were one on one.

6) We closely examined the building, looking for visible evidence of Jewish education in action.

We spent from one to three days in each Center. We prepared separate reports on each of our visits. People spoke to us in confidence and, for that reason, throughout this report we provide few specific names. In addition, we conducted phone and face to face interviews with key figures from the "stand-alone" programs.

In the course of our work, we came to realize that we could not adequately address an important research issue: exploring the *processes of change* in these JCCs, namely, how these best practice places (and others as well) came to emerge as arenas of Jewish educational excellence. We offer a few speculative inferences toward the end of this report on the sorts of conditions that promote the growth of Jewish educational commitment in a JCC, but we can say little about why seemingly similar Centers vary so widely in their involvement in serious Jewish education. That topic remains for another piece of research.

We want to say a word about three possible distortions that may have affected the results of this report. First, a geographic bias may obtain in the selection of the sites. We tried to get a mix of various locations, but the fact that both researchers reside on the East coast certainly influenced the choice of sites.

Second, the JCCA experts may have introduced a selection bias, as they freely admitted. The JCCA professional staff are well-traveled and have developed a good understanding of the field. Nonetheless, their expertise and awareness may be influenced by factors other than the inherent excellence of one or another Center. As a result, we may have overlooked

Centers that would have served as better exemplars of good Jewish education than the six we selected.

Finally, the report itself was surely influenced by the background and professional orientation of the two researchers. Although both of us have had experience in various forms of Jewish education, neither of us is a qualified Center professional. We believe that the study has been enriched by the fact that one of us is a professor of Jewish education who has focused primarily on formal (school) settings and that the other is a professor of sociology who has studied a variety of Jewish communities and populations. However, we may bring biases to our work of which we are unaware. These biases may have influenced our perceptions of the Centers and programs that we studied as well as the inferences drawn from our observations.

Background and Issues

The Jewish Community Center movement has had a long and complex relationship to the question of its role as an educating institution. Originally created as a social and intellectual meeting place for Jews in the mid-19th century, Centers came to play an important role in the "settlement" and integration of the huge waves of immigrants that came to American shores in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.[8] As Jews became well integrated in American society by the post World War II period, the settlement role diminished (although we have recently seen its re-emergence in the settlement of Russian immigrants), and Centers began to function much more in their social and recreational roles. In time, they moved out to the suburbs -- often in beautiful new facilities -- following the migration of their upwardly and outwardly mobile constituents.

The question of a specifically Jewish mission for the JCC has been debated back and forth throughout the entire history of the Center movement. Even in the earliest days of Centers, significant voices within the Center movement advocated for more Jewish content and education. Figures such as Louis Marshall, Mordecai Kaplan and Horace Kallen represented with great power the potential of a primarily Jewish focus for the Center.

However, as Oscar Janowsky, in his ground-breaking survey of JCCs published in 1948,

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[8]The best history of the early years of Jewish Community Centers is a recent doctoral dissertation by David Kaufman entitled *"Shul with a Pool"* (Brandeis University, 1994). It is currently being prepared for publication in book form.

pointed out, "practice fell short of precept in this regard."[9] In describing settlements during the early part of the century, he wrote, "when allowances are made for. . . necessary concessions, and for lip-service to the positive views of [some], the Jewish settlements remained throughout this period lukewarm, if not hostile to Jewish emphasis."[10] He quotes Boris Bogen in 1916 who concluded that many Jewish settlements were still emphasizing the non-sectarian, rather than the Jewish aspects of their mission. In a remarkable aside Janowsky adds, "The experience of the present Survey would lead one to believe that this was an understatement, and as an understatement it describes adequately the present situation in most Jewish settlements."[11] Even when one includes the JCC itself, not just the Jewish settlement house, Janowsky states: "In the main, while there has been great emphasis upon the Jewish center as a unifying agency, the cleavage of previous decades has remained: some have envisaged a distinctively Jewish purpose for the Jewish center, while others have leaned toward non-sectarianism."[12]

In the years following the Janowsky report, many of the same tensions about the issue of the Center's Jewish mission remained. But as Jews became more at home in America -- both more integrated and more assimilated -- the Center began to re-evaluate its role and purpose. This process culminated in the JWB's Commission on Maximizing Jewish Educational Effectiveness of Jewish Community Centers (COMJEE) that began deliberations in 1982 and published its report in 1984.[13] In a clear and direct fashion, the report argued for the centrality of Jewish education to the mission of JCCs and asserted the unique role that Centers can play in lifelong Jewish learning.

A small number of Jewish Community Centers had placed Jewish education on their agenda several years before the COMJEE report (in fact, informants at most of our six sites claimed that they had done so in the 1970's). With that said, the Commission's work certainly galvanized the Center movement and represented a dramatic shift in the priorities and mission of Jewish Community Centers across North America. Despite earlier efforts to improve the Jewish educational mission of Centers, "what we are now witnessing is different in depth and intensity than anything that has preceded it. More resources, effort, support and passion have been injected into the Jewish focus of centers than ever before."[14] Recent

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[9]Oscar I. Janowsky, *The JWB Survey* (New York: Dial Press, 1948), p.237.
[10] Ibid., p. 242.
[11] Ibid.
[12] Ibid., p. 244.
[13]In JCC circles COMJEE is often called "the Mandel Commission" after its lay chair, Morton L. Mandel.

research has documented the expansion of Jewish educational programs in the Centers, consistent with the COMJEE recommendations.[15]

The potential role of JCCs as places for Jewish education was given further impetus by the new concerns in the Jewish community at large about intermarriage, assimilation and the future of the Jews as a viable and dynamic community in North America. The 1990 National Jewish Population Survey[16] and the report of the Commission on Jewish Education in North America[17] raised serious questions and challenges about Jewish education and Jewish "continuity."

In May of 1995, the JCCA released a follow-up report to the original COMJEE. This second effort, "COMJEE II: The Task Force on Reinforcing the Effectiveness of Jewish Education in JCCs," delineated fourteen specific recommendations to help move the educational mission of JCCs forward. In an introductory section of this report, entitled "Maximizing Jewish Educational Potential," COMJEE II outlined a set of outcomes for a Center which "seeks to reach its potential as an institution of creative Jewish continuity"--including items such as "have an ambiance that is warm, embracing and visibly Jewish," "make budgetary provision for Jewish educational experimentation and innovation," and, engage "Jewish educators as part of its staff."

These 18 paragraphs of descriptive outcomes helped form a set of criteria for our research in evaluating best practice in JCCs. Although no single Center has all 18 factors in place, the good Centers that we studied (and, undoubtedly, others like them) scored well in a number of these measures and showed a commitment toward improving precisely in these domains.

In essence, the description of the the Jewishly effective JCC boils down to three words starting with the letter "P": Personnel, Program, and Philosophy. We examine each in turn.

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[14]Barry Chazan and Richard Juran, "What We Know About Jewish Education in Jewish Community Centers," in *What We Know About Jewish Education*, edited by Stuart L. Kelman (Los Angeles: Torah Aura, 1992), p. 171.

[15]*Assessing The Jewish Educational Effectiveness of Jewish Community Centers.*

[16]Barry Kosmin and others, *Highlights of the National Jewish Population Survey* (New York: CJF, 1991).

[17] *A Time to Act.*

PERSONNEL

Committed and Knowledgeable People, Both Lay and Professional

We found that Jewish educational excellence begins with a committed leadership, coupled with a committed and knowledgeable staff. The key components here (in relative order of importance) are:

- the executive director;
- the board;
- the professional Jewish educator; and
- the staff, particularly those who serve in explicitly educational capacities.

With the appropriate lay and professional players in place, a Jewish educational commitment and program will follow. With serious gaps at any of these levels, what passes for a Jewish educational program will, despite some appearances to the contrary, lack the depth, seriousness, and passion necessary for a Jewishly effective educational environment.

The Executive Director

> The people most responsible for defining the school's vision and articulating the ideological stance are the principals. ... They are the voice ... of the institution. ... The literature on effective schools tends to agree on at least one point -- that an essential ingredient of good schools is strong, consistent, and inspired leadership. The tone and culture of schools is said to be defined by the vision and purposeful action of the principal.[18]

As researchers have found in a variety of domains -- in education, in business, and in government, to name just three -- the role of the top professional is central in making any system work well. So too in Jewish Community Centers, the executive director is clearly the key player in creating a best practice site for Jewish education.

In addition to the diffuse task of projecting a Jewish educational vision and commitment

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[18]Lightfoot, p. 323.

that permeates the agency, we can identify three key responsibilities successfully undertaken by executive directors of educationally effective JCCs. These include:

1) Bolster the Board's commitment to the Center's Jewish educational mission.

2) Advocate the creation of the Jewish educator line and extend personal and concrete support to his/her functioning.

3) Assure that the staff grows in terms of Jewish knowledge and commitment.

The particular ways in which the executive manages and achieves these goals differs from place to place and from person to person. There is, in other words, no single "correct" way to lead a Jewish Community Center toward greater quality in its Jewish educational program. But no matter how the executive expresses his or her leadership, and no matter what kind of personality and background the executive brings to the position, certain dimensions of the job seem to be constant across all sites.

The executives we studied were all imbued with the importance of the Jewish mission of their Center and Centers in general. In some cases, these directors have been well known for years as advocates -- sometimes in print -- for the Jewish mission of Jewish Community Centers. They have a vision about what they want to accomplish and can articulate that vision to their staff and their members. In some cases the executive has a well worked out theory - - one might even say a philosophy -- for Jewish education in the JCC. In other cases, the executive director works instinctively and relies on the wisdom of other staff members, most importantly the Jewish educator, to provide the theory. But without a firm belief in the Jewish educational mission of JCCs, it is unlikely that anything significant in Jewish education could happen in a Center, no matter what other factors were in place, even a committed lay leadership and staff.

(Although, by intent our research excluded JCCs that under- achieve in terms of Jewish education, we heard stories of directors in such places with a weak commitment to their own Jewish involvement and, commensurately, a weak commitment to Jewish education in their Centers. We were told that some of these directors are quite capable of presenting a compelling case for their Center's investment in Jewish education, one that might well convince all but the most sophisticated observer. In reality, though, their Centers do, in fact, maintain little of true depth or substance in the sphere of Jewish education.)

Flowing from this personal and professional commitment, what we call the "successful" executive director advocates for the creation of a Jewish educator position at the Center. As

we shall see below, the educator position is probably the single most important "proximate cause" in bringing about advances in Jewish education in a JCC. Part of what the director must do is create that position. He or she must believe in the importance of the job, understand the function of the position, and advocate for it within his or her staff and board. Directors spoke of how they re-arranged budgets or raised additional funds in order to pay for the position, for example, by raising endowments specifically for that position.

The next step is to find the right kind of person for the job. Having a clear understanding the nature of the Jewish educator role and the possibilities for the Center at that point in time is crucial in making correct decisions in hiring. In all the places we visited, we were impressed with the apparent suitability of the particular educator with the particular environment. Someone (the director?) made sure there was a good fit between the educator and the needs and culture of their particular Center at that point in its development as a Jewish educational institution. As we will point out later, there are a variety of legitimate models for the the Jewish educator role in Centers. Accordingly, the executive needs to have the right concept to match both his or her Center and the person hired for the position.

Once the slot has been filled, the "good" director helps integrate the Jewish educator into the life of the Center in supportive and significant ways. The educator must be supervised appropriately and positioned well both in the Center and in the community. To some extent, executives decide how much authority and influence -- both formal and interpersonal -- the educator will exercise.

In Centers that we studied, executives provided helpful, supportive supervision. In some Centers, the executives shared access to the Board with the educator. As a result, the executive helped position the educator to interact well with Board members, such as by creating study opportunities at Board meetings or at Board members' homes. Generally, such executives helped the educator develop his or her own relationship with Board members. Rather than viewing this access to the board as a threat to their own leadership, these executives encouraged such encounters.

Good executives attend well to a variety of time management issues. Those most committed to the Jewish education agenda assure opportunities for staff to study Judaica with the educator during work time. As one Center executive put it, "If it doesn't take place during work time, it can't work and it can't send the message you want to send."

In addition, the use of time is critical to the life of the educator. In some cases (though not all), Center executives in these sites conceptualized the time demands on the educator in a manner different from that of other staff. For example, some educators were encouraged to pursue their own personal study and preparation as an integral part of their work day, even though they were not being "productive" as a administrator, programmer, or classroom teacher

during those hours. Almost all the educators identified a need for time for their own continuing Jewish study. The Center environment is an activist one and unlike a university or school, it is not particularly attuned to the need for preparation time. They felt that such time for reflection and learning was especially important if job is to serve as teacher or resident scholar at the JCC.

Next, many of the Center directors at the sites we visited made Jewish commitment a specific, stated requirement in hiring new staff and in promoting veterans. In some places, the Jewish contribution to the Center was part of each staff member's regular evaluation and a clearly stated criterion for promotion. One director reported that over the years staff had left his Center because they felt that they could not conform to that standard, and the director was pleased that they had left.

Executives in "good" Centers work to enhance the Jewish knowledge and commitment among the staff. They assured opportunities for staff study by way of study groups or sessions with the Jewish educator. Sometimes they encouraged their staff to enroll in existing curricular programs such as the Melton Mini- School or Derekh Torah; in other places this Jewish study revolved around specific situations that Center staff might encounter in their work and the Jewish responses to such situations. For example, some Centers schedule regular sessions on topics such as death and suffering ("why bad things happen to good people"), abortion or alcohol and drug abuse, so that staff members will come to appreciate a Jewish perspective on these matters. In many places, the director personally attends these study sessions, further indicating their importance in the culture of the JCC.

Perhaps the most dramatic example of the executive's commitment to enhancing the Jewish knowledge and commitment of the staff has been the staff trip to Israel. These trips can have a profound, personal impact on both Jewish and non-Jewish staff members, and they can also generate programming ideas like participating in a Macabiah program, creating displays of Israeli art, or sponsoring trips to Israel for Center members. During the course of our interviews, several staff members reported how they (or their colleagues) underwent a significant turn toward a Jewish educational commitment after a JCC-sponsored trip to Israel. Executives whom we interviewed spoke of their on-going efforts to subsidize and organize staff trips to Israel, a budgetary item that can readily be dropped in hard times.

Some Centers have instituted a self-evaluation in which the executive (often using the Jewish educator as a content resource person) embarks on a critical and ongoing examination of the Jewish content, and potential for Jewish content, in all programs, activities, and departments of the Centers. This analysis prompts a search for changes to improve the Jewish program in these domains. For example, the residential camping program at one Center went through such an evaluation and its internal report (quoted below) urged the hiring of

> a person on staff with a strong Jewish background (Rabbinical student or person getting a masters in Jewish Studies), who could be a source of Jewish programming and Jewish knowledge and who could also serve in some other capacity at camp. Besides a functioning staff member, few, if any Jewish resources are available at Camp. . . Resource books, tapes and videos would be valuable for staff. . .

The recommendations of this report were already well on the way toward implementation (beginning with the hiring of the Judaica resource person) when we visited.

In addition to assuring the enhancement of the staff's Jewish knowledge and commitment, the executives in these sites worked to assure a Board committed to the Jewish education agenda. One technique for doing so emphasizes building and attending to long-term relationships with individuals. In addition, some executives encourage Jewish study by the Board members, either at the formal meetings or by creating other contexts. We learned about examples of Jewish study evenings designed primarily for the Board members, or classes exclusively for Board members conducted by the Jewish educator, or, of course, the Israel trip for the Board. In one place the Board trip served as the launch for the entire Jewish educational rethinking of the Center.

The executive who is deeply committed in his or her own Jewish life serves as a powerful role model for Board members. The director need not be Jewishly knowledgeable at an advanced level. Those who are not advanced demonstrated their personal commitment to Jewish learning by hiring a Jewishly learned educator and by visibly participating in staff programs. Of course, in the small number of cases where the executive was learned, the impact on Board members could be even more powerful. As one such executive put it, "I'm their rabbi," particularly for Jews who are not comfortable with "shul" rabbis. One director said that he sees his own role as challenging the laity toward adopting more Jewishness in their lives. He feels that he can do that in ways that rabbis cannot since he comes unburdened with the "philosophical agenda" that a rabbi might have.

Finally, in addition to their other functions within the JCC itself, Center executives have an "external" role to play as well. It is the director who must manage relations with local synagogues, Jewish schools, Federation, and other relevant institutions. These relationships have become thicker -- and in some cases more complex -- as Centers have taken on more responsibility for Jewish education.

The Board

A Jewishly committed executive cannot go very far in instituting Jewish educational excellence without the acquiescence, if not the full support, of the Board. The Board plays several crucial roles:

1) It hires (and fires) the executive.

2) Its level of commitment to the Jewish educational agenda influences numerous decisions large and small, affecting the whole tenor of the agency.

3) It exerts ultimate authority over the budget affecting such decisions as whether to employ a professional Jewish educator, how much to invest in Jewish educational programming, how much to charge the clients for those services, and all sorts of other decisions.

4) Individual Board members can become the enthusiastic sponsors of specific Jewish programs, facilitating them through their credibility, insights, and financial support.

Prior to undertaking our research, we had suspected that the Board members in educationally effective Center would contain a core group with extraordinary personal commitment to Jewish life. Instead -- and , perhaps paradoxically, we found this circumstance impressive -- Board members were typical at lay leadership in Jewish communal life. They are Conservative and Reform synagogue members, who send their children to religious schools, and support the Federation campaign. But they are not distinguished by high levels of personal Jewish involvement in the home or synagogue or with a great degree of prior Jewish learning. The very ordinariness of these Board members' Jewish involvement and learning testifies to the strength of their Centers' commitment to Jewish education) and to the leadership of the executive who has nurtured Boards that support their Centers' Jewish mission.

Indeed, with respect to the Jewish education agenda, some Board members were simply non- obstructionist; insofar as support for Jewish education did not compete with needed resources, they would offer no objection. At the other extreme, we met leaders who were insistent upon the Jewish education mission as essential to Center and to their own ongoing participation. When pushed, not a few of these said they would drop off the Board in the unlikely eventuality that their Center abandoned its commitment to Jewish education.

The latter were the sort of Board members who were open to personal learning and participation in Jewish education. They were either genuinely interested, or saw such participation as vital to their successful "career" as a Jewish leader in the Center and community. We sensed that the Jewishly involved Board members over-estimate the extent of support for their position on their own Boards. This observation is consistent with the possibility that the impact of committed key Board members bring to the Jewish educational endeavor, such that on the Center as whole may extend far beyond their small numbers.

Effective support for the Jewish educational mission can be maintained by the perpetuation of an inner leadership group (albeit an influential and respected minority) that is willing to defend that mission in hard times, and broaden it in good times.

In that regard, one significant activity that we saw in more than one place were leadership development projects to socialize new Board members to the Jewish mission. One site, for instance, conducts a special 3-4 session program (for 40 people) to move new leadership toward support for the Jewish mission of the Center.

For the most part, Board members seem to stay out of day to day management of Jewish educational programming. Rather, they allow for the professional autonomy of the educator or Jewishly committed director.

We tried to determine how the Board came to adopt a strong commitment to Jewish education. Beyond the influence of the executive director (the single most important factor), we identified the following alternative factors:

1) two national "leadership development" programs (the Wexner Heritage Program and CLAL) entailing study of Judaica with highly proficient teachers;

2) Board trips to Israel, where specific teachers and programs (Melton Centre of the Hebrew University, Melitz, the JCCA Israel Office) seemed to have left strong, positive memories; and

3) the original COMJEE process, entailing the report and its dissemination during the 1980's by way of personal visits of the national JCCA staff and lay leaders, and through the Biennial Conference of the JCCA.

Boards viewed the executive as the key to implementing their vision. Some Boards came to the Jewish mission and then went out to hire the right executive to realize their dream; in other cases the director was already in place and he or she (often inspired by the original COMJEE report or some personal experience) moved the Board along this path.

The Jewish Educator

The COMJEE II report highlights the Jewish education specialist as the central figure in improving a Center's educational program. Our research confirms the importance of the Jewish educator in a variety of roles in Jewish Community Centers. These include a combination of the following:

1) Programmer -- the specialist plans and administers a variety of educational activities, be it in a specific department or throughout the Center.

2) Resource -- he or she serves to provide Jewish educational advice and materials, generally to other department heads, and particularly to the pre-school and camp.

3) Advocate -- the educator explicitly lobbies for change among staff and lay leaders, trying to raise the Jewish profile of the agency.

4) Teacher -- the educator conducts classes personally, generally with a heavy emphasis on staff and Board development (rather than for the members at large).

5) Scholar -- the educator devotes considerable time to study and, sometimes, to writing, and assumes a more respected and influential role within the agency as a result.

WHICH ROLE IS BEST? The recency of this position (Jewish educator within the JCC) may explain why JCCs have individually adopted diverse definitions of the job. In any one place, the responsibilities draw upon some, but not all of the roles outlined above. Most often, the educator serves as programmer, resource and advocate. In one instance, the educator does everything but programming. In another case, the educator serves only as a "scholar-in-residence" and occasional resource person, but with no formal administrative or line responsibility whatever; at his Center, an education specialist handles adult programming. Currently, JCCs have numerous ways of structuring this position and may make their decisions based upon their needs, their current personnel, and the candidates available to fill the position.

The COMJEE II report picks up on the plurality of job definitions by differentiating two main types of educators-- "Advanced Jewish Educators and Jewish Programming Specialists."[19] As noted, we saw both "types"-- but even within the types we find significant differences in job definition, as well as previous training and experience.

The main distinction within the Advanced Jewish Educators group was between those with significant administrative responsibilities and those who were essentially "scholars in residence." The educator's administrative duties may include both "educational" tasks such as planning the adult education program and signing up the teachers, and more mundane activities such as serving on general committees and handling other day to day business matters of the Center.

Each job description bears distinctive advantages. The scholar in residence is freed from the daily administrative issues of the JCC and is able to concentrate much more on study, preparation, and teaching. The central task, as one such person puts it, is "to push for Jewish content" in the JCC program. Locating a scholar in residence at the JCC is especially

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[19]COMJEE II, p. 18-19.

advantageous to the wider Jewish community. The Center tends to be centrally located and accessible, in both geographic and philosophical terms. Its neutral trans-denominational character allows for the right kind of base for such a scholar. The very existence of these scholar-in-residence positions attracts unusual, interesting and serious individuals into the Center field.

Nonetheless, most of our informants were dubious about the value of the the scholar in residence position per se. Obviously, it is something of a luxury for a Center to have a staff member with no administrative tasks, but this issue was not the one most commonly raised in our discussions. Instead, many felt that limiting the educator's role to serving as a free-floating scholar also limited the person's ability to make a wide-ranging impact on the Center. It is precisely through the administrative programming decisions, the policy- and program-oriented interaction with many departments, the educational planning meetings -- that educators have a chance to influence policy throughout the JCC.

BUILDING TRUST, INSIDE AND OUTSIDE THE CENTER: The Jewish educator serves important roles both inside and outside the Center's walls. Within the Center itself, as noted, the educator may serve as direct teacher of staff and lay people. Indeed, the educator may be a kind of quasi rabbi for lay leadership and professional staff of the JCC. The job embraces a very important "outside" dimension as well: like the executive director, the educator must develop relationships with local rabbis, federation professionals, and others in the community.

In both domains -- within the Center and in relation to outside agencies and people -- one recurrent theme we discerned was the need for the educator to develop a sense of trust in those with whom he or she interacted. Particularly given the JCC tradition and culture, staff members who came into the work under the "old" model of the JCC as recreational and social center might wonder, as one staff member put it, "Who is this guy and what does he want from me?" One of the educators, for example, remarked that he needed a good deal of time to show the key professionals and lay leaders that he *was* worthy of their trust, and that he was not out to make them "religious." What is complicated, of course, is that the educator does, indeed, have an educational mission, and though the suspicions of the staff may be overblown, educators do want to influence and change the people with whom they interact.

The issue of trust is related to the educators' needs to build relations around the Center by personal connections and relationships with the entire staff. Educators in the best practice sites try to find a variety of ways of meeting with the various staff members -- in some cases through being a teacher and in other cases by developing informal friendships with a whole range of staff members. In one of the Centers that we studied, for example, the Jewish

educator makes a point of taking a regular turn at the "information and welcome" desk at the front door of the Center. He also goes out to lunch on a monthly basis with a number of staff members including those seemingly remote from his work, such as the maintenance director of the Center. In these ways he gets to know many people around the JCC -- both staff and members -- and is able to develop real relationships that help him do his job more effectively.

Trust plays an important role in the educators' relationships with the "outside" community as well. Clearly the most complicated of these relationships is with the local rabbis. These relationships become more complicated still when the Jewish educator at the Center is a rabbi, as was true in three of the sites that we studied. Local rabbis worry about the Center becoming a competing Jewish institution, "a pool with a shul," as the old saying (quoted to us by more than one Center professional) has it.**[?add the discussion from Boston book]** To avoid conflicts with rabbis, Center educators refrain from performing ritual functions, and channel their JCC "students" toward various synagogues for life cycle events and conversions to Judaism. One educator (a rabbi) who has become particularly close with members of his Center's Board told us that he is scrupulous in not performing weddings, funerals, and other rites of passage, even for Board members who find he is the one rabbi to whom they feel close.

Despite their self-imposed constraints, it is also clear that rabbis working in Jewish Community Centers come to play a kind of rabbinic role. Although one such educator reported that he very rarely is asked for halakhic rulings (questions of Jewish law and ritual), it is clear from our observations that he is asked to be an authoritative teacher and a repository of information and ideas about Judaism. He is often asked to address Judaism's relevance to contemporary situations. In that he quite closely resembles his rabbinic peers in other JCCs. If more rabbis begin to enter the field -- something implied in the recommendations of COMJEE II -- this issue will need to be addressed even more directly.

PLURALIST ORTHODOX RABBIS: We were struck (and surprised) by the fact that all three of the Center educators in our study who were themselves rabbis were Orthodox; and a fourth educator was a JTS-educated wife of a Conservative rabbi. At the other sites, we also noted a preponderance of Orthodox or traditional Conservative personnel. In other words, in denominational terms, the leading educational professionals are (as a group) far more traditionally situated than their clients. To be clear, these educators were extraordinarily pluralist in their professional outlook, a rare feature among younger Orthodox rabbis today.

Nevertheless, the traditional bent of the Center movement's leading educators demands note, if not explanation. Perhaps it derives from the needs and opportunities of educators who are personally pluralist and Orthodox. The Center movement may be one of the few places

(campus Hillels may be another) where the pluralist-Orthodox rabbi can function as a Jewish educator to a multi-denominational Jewish population.

We suspect that in the near future a certain type of Orthodox job applicant will continue to seek out emerging positions in the Center movement Jewish education around the country. Possibly, Center boards or directors may find Orthodox personnel more credible than those of the more liberal denominations. In addition, graduates of the Conservative and Reform seminaries may face better job prospects in their movements (as pulpit rabbis or day school principals), giving them less incentive to seek work within the Center movement.

A satisfactory and compelling explanation for this phenomenon certainly eludes us, but it is noteworthy, nonetheless. We wonder whether this trend will continue as the Center movement begins to recruit more actively from the rabbinic training institutions.

Rabbinic training was not the only preparatory path for the educators in our survey. There was a wide range of models including educator and social worker. In some ways the training of the educators was related to the nature of their jobs.

Staff Development: Deepening Knowledge and Commitment

All JCCs encounter difficulties in recruiting and retaining ideal staff members. The key issue is not merely budgetary constraints. Rather, it is in finding and developing staff who will meet the new and expanded set of criteria that flow from a commitment to Jewish education. When hiring group workers or teachers, a Center dedicated to programmatic excellence alone -- without a specific commitment to Jewish education -- need concern itself only with such concerns as group skills, or pedagogic abilities. Only a minimal level of Jewish commitment (and even less Jewish knowledge) will generally suffice for most of the professional line positions in such a Center. In fact, some Centers regularly turn to non-Jews to serve as pre-school teachers, youth workers, camp counselors, and related personnel; and, by definition, non-Jews, at least initially, lack both Jewish commitment and Jewish knowledge.

However, the pool of available, skilled candidates for professional line positions shrinks considerably once Jewish commitment becomes a desideratum, if not a pre-requisite, for hiring. Moreover, one can assume that the vast majority of current Center staffers at this level lack the extent of Jewish learning desirable to satisfactorily address the Jewish educational mission. Under these circumstances, Centers committed to a Jewish education agenda have no choice but to institute vigorous, comprehensive and effective programs of staff development with the twin goals of enhancing Jewish commitment and deepening Jewish

knowledge.

In the places that we studied, we saw staff involved in a variety of study opportunities to increase their own Jewish knowledge. These programs included staff classes on a monthly basis and staff classes every week. The program of study, more often than not, was based around one of the two major adult study curricula currently in use in JCC adult education, the Florence Melton Adult Mini-School or Derekh Torah. Both of these programs provide a structured curriculum in "basic Jewisb literacy" and are not specifically "job-related." In other words, the idea here is to improve the Jewish knowledge of the staff irrespective of its immediate relationship to the staff member's work.

These Centers believe that improving the Jewish knowledge of the staff will ultimately lead to improvements in the JCC program. A more knowledgeable staff is more likely to introduce innovations on their own or be inspired to ask the Center Jewish educator for help in implementing new ideas. Hence staff members from a wide range of departments attend. Both Jewish and non-Jewish staff participate.

Ideally, participation in some of these programs comes to be seen as a matter of professional recognition. One Center we visited is about to launch a Derekh Torah course for its staff. This new class will require staff members to apply and be accepted, and it involves a considerable amount of commitment in coming to the sessions, and preparing for classes. Nonetheless, when announced there was already a considerable amount of interest.

It seems likely that the enthusiasm expressed emanates from a combination of a number of factors that may be instructive: the respect the staff holds for the Center's Jewish educator (who will teach the class), the fact that the executive director supports the course and views Jewish learning as a desideratum in his staff, and the fact :hat the course is considered part of one's work and takes place during working hours.

Another Center has made Jewish study mandatory for its pre- school teachers, all of whom are studying Jewish texts for two hours a week. One key ingredient here: the teachers are paid for their time learning. The executive director made it a priority to raise the additional funds necessary (many thousands of dollars), to keep the entire system's teachers on salary while in the classroom.

Directors and educators at the more educationally effective Centers viewed staff development and enrichment as a long process taking place over several years. At one point we felt as if we were talking to field generals in a military campaign as they spoke about how they, in effect, captured or converted one department after another to the cause of Jewish education. They reported both major and minor victories. A major victory might entail replacing a Jewishly weak with a Jewishly committed department head, either by way of change in personnel or the result of nurturing a growing commitment to Jewish life through

classes, personal relationships, and a trip to Israel. A minor victory would entail small gains in strengthening Jewish commitment and content in a particular staff member and his or her program. In all instances, directors and educators had made penetrating assessments of the extent to which each key staff member was committed to the Jewish education agenda. (Upon speaking with the staff members, we were also impressed with the seeming accuracy of these assessments.)

While the techniques may differ from one Center to another, the Jewish enrichment of the staff occupies (or should occupy) a central place in the process of turning Centers into Jewishly effective educational institutions.

THE PROGRAM

Jewish Community Centers are complex and wide-ranging institutions, offering a variety of programs. Of course, virtually any JCC program has potential as a Jewish educational venue, given the right blend of support, knowledge, creativity, skill, and time. No JCC that we saw taps the Jewish educational possibilities in all areas and certainly some programs have more obvious potential for Jewish education than others. For example, the Physical Education program does lend itself to some features of Jewish education (e.g., through posters of Jewish athletes, scenes of Israel; a Jewish sports heroes hall of fame; Hebrew signage). But, no one would argue that it is as centrally related to the Jewish education mission as, say, early childhood education or classes for adults.

Focusing on the prime areas for Jewish education, we identified five distinct areas where one could say that Jewish education was an explicit part of the program. They are roughly definable in terms of the age of their principal target populations: early childhood education, summer camps, teen programs, adult education (with several varieties), and senior adult programming.

Of all the features of Jewish educational success in JCCs, programming may constitute the one area where the most has been published. Thus, we have no intent here of describing specific programs in great detail. Rather we seek to provide a synthetic overview of some of the principles which seem to guide the most educationally effective programs of their type.

Some of these principles cut across the board and are worthy of mention at the outset:

1) The program is directed by an educationally oriented department head who is personally committed to the Jewish education agenda.

2) The Center's Jewish education specialist and the department head maintain a good working relationship, such that the specialist can exert significant influence over the program content and the training of the staff.

3) The staff is recruited, trained, supervised, and developed in line with the goal of securing enhanced Jewish commitment and greater Jewish knowledge.

4) The department head has developed, adopted, and transmitted to the staff a detailed "curriculum" containing the Jewish educational objectives of the program.

5) The program succeeds in "general" terms. That is, clients are attracted to the school, camp, etc. because it is a good school, camp, or whatever. In this context, they find the distinctive Jewish content acceptable, if not attractive.

6) The program opens up possibilities for Jewish growth, leading clients to opportunities for more intensive Jewish living or learning, be it at home, in the JCC, or in

other settings (synagogue, school, Israel, etc.).

7) The program capitalizes upon and addresses the clients' need for community and recreation; in other words, it uses all of the special educational tools peculiar to informal education, even within more traditional Jewish educational programs at the Center.

8) The program's director establishes and makes frequent use of open channels of communication with the learners and their families so as to learn of any difficulties and immediately take corrective action.

Throughout our discussions of the five major areas of Jewish educational programming, we will see many of these eight points emerge. Our primary goal in these discussions below is to try to understand just how and why certain programs stand out above the others in the Center movement.

Early Childhood Education

Recent research has amply demonstrated what Jewish educators have known instinctively: parents of young Jewish children constitute an ideal target group for educational intervention[20]. Accordingly, early childhood Jewish education is certainly an area with great potential for Jewish Community Centers. In fact, as some of the Center professionals who spoke with us argued, the pre-school children and their parents comprise the number one target group for JCC educational efforts.

All of the Centers that we studied have preschool programs, some of which are quite extensive. These schools appear to excel in their general, non-Jewish, programs, a fact that makes them attractive to a wide range of parents -- both those seeking excellent early childhood education and those whose emphasis is on the Jewish dimension of the school. The ability to draw families into a Jewish program through Early Childhood Jewish Education is one of the most obvious and important "gateway" possibilities that JCCs can offer. Some JCCs that we observed have begun to place an emphasis on the Jewish aspects of their pre-schools precisely because of the potential for the schools to have an impact both on children at an early age, and even more importantly on parents and families. Most of the Jewish family education programs that we saw in JCCs are related to the early childhood programs in

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[20]SusanWall, *Parents of Preschoolers: Their Jewish Identities and Implications for Jewish Education* (unpublished doctoral disseration, Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1994.)

Centers.

The preschool rooms are decorated with Hebrew letters, holiday materials, pictures of Israel and ritual objects. In general, the annual Jewish holidays, Shabbat and some Hebrew language form the basis of the preschool Judaic curriculum.

Moreover, consistent with the observations made earlier in this report, the better pre-school directors take pains to Jewishly educate and motivate their staffs. For the most part, these efforts are tailored to the individual teacher. After all, some are non- Jewish, some are only marginally Jewish, and a few come from very strong Jewish backgrounds; moreover, newcomers to the profession need more intensive work than veterans of 10 or 20 years. The diversity of background and experience among pre-school teachers with respect to Jewish education presents a serious obstacle to "wholesale" staff development; nevertheless, we are certain that there is a possible market for some uniform in-service training in Jewish education.

Another difficulty is presented by the extent to which non-Jews permeate the JCC pre-school system. Depending on the location there was a fairly extensive number of non-Jewish youngsters, though the claim was made that their presence does not impede Jewish educational mission. It was hard for us to judge whether this claim is true. The staff could contain high proportions (as much as a third) of non-Jews as well, who, understandably, lack familiarity with Jewish holidays and customs -- as do, for that matter, a large fraction of the Jewish staff members.

Despite their avowed (and apparently genuine) interest in reaching parents, most pre-school directors with whom we spoke described very modest success in this area, commensurate with their primary emphasis upon providing the children with a top-flight education. Schools seem to have only sporadic contact with most parents with respect to Jewish subject matter. They offer regular workshops (with modest turn-outs), and provide a stream of attractive materials that are sent home with the children (usually focusing upon the upcoming Jewish holidays). On a more positive note, we did hear of occasions (perhaps quite frequent) where parents would turn to pre-school directors or teachers (and other JCC staff) as Jewish resources for home activities and for direction in the community. Our sense is that for the most part, JCCs are just beginning to grapple with the complexity of providing an intensive Jewish pre-school education for toddlers (is that even possible?), while, at the same time trying to influence the Jewish homes in which they are being reared.

In this type of study, we are unable to judge the "organic" impact on families of children coming home with songs, lessons in holidays, and with materials for use in the home. We suspect that this may have the effect of leading parents toward adopting a more positive stance toward Judaism, but we doubt that the effect will be more than passing if it is not

supported by activities for families initiated by the early childhood programs themselves.

Despite the focus on the holidays, most of the Centers did not have an articulated curriculum nor did they seem driven by a clear vision of outcomes, in terms of the knowledge, values, and the affective dimensions of being Jewish that they wanted to communicate. In addition, most of the programs did not appear to feel comfortable in advocating continuing Jewish education as a goal for their "graduates." This last point was not universally true and may be changing. So we saw, for instance, a Jewish education fair that sought to present the various future day school and synagogue school options for the preschool parents.

A notable exception to what we have mentioned above is found in one Center which operates what may be seen as a model program for JCCs in this area. The Early Childhood Program at the Metrowest JCC (New Jersey) is directed by a skilled and learned Jewish educator who works closely with a highly motivated, stable teaching staff. Pedagogically the teachers present outstanding child-oriented approaches to young children in which general and Jewish studies are blended and integrated in creative and organic ways.

The teachers do not all come in with strong Judaica backgrounds, but the director manages to devote a considerable amount of time working one on one with the staff to help them prepare lessons which are rich in Judaic content. The success of the program is dependent on three interrelated factors: the teachers are skilled early childhood educators, the director herself is deeply committed to the Jewish mission of the program and has a very strong Jewish background which enables her to deepen the Judaic dimension of the program; the program is *structured* in such a way as to free up the director's time for close, educational supervision of the teachers, rather than the more typical situation in which early childhood director's are almost entirely engaged by administrative management issues. In our view this program offers an image of the potential as yet untapped in most JCCs; seeing it in place leads to the conclusion that other Centers could move in similar directions, given the right leadership, vision and commitment.

Summer Camps -- Day and Overnight

For a half century and more, summer camps sponsored by synagogue movements, Zionist youth movements, and Yiddishist associations have served as Jewish educational instruments to tens of thousands of youngsters. Although no definitive studies have successfully measured the impact of these camps, anecdotal and impressionistic accounts of

these camps' "alumni" suggest that they indeed played a significant role in shaping the Jewish identity of many of their former campers and counselors.

In contrast with these ideologically sponsored camps, the JCC camps have historically adopted a less pronounced Jewish profile, in part because they have catered to a Jewishly and denominationally diverse clientele. Today, almost all Centers of reasonable size sponsor day camps during the summer; in addition, JCCs sponsor 22 residential (or "overnight") camps. The increasing emphasis on the Jewish educational agenda has begun to affect the camps, but, from what we can tell, the impact has been generally less pronounced than on other areas (such as early childhood education and formal adult education). In fact, when casually asked to mention areas of Jewish educational excellence in their Centers, hardly any directors volunteered their camps.

The problem with instituting a significant Jewish educational commitment in the camps does not derive exclusively from the multi- denominational client base, or the lack of identification with a specific Jewish ideology. (Although, truth be told, these circumstances are indeed impediments to developing a clear Jewish educational mission for the camps.)

Rather, the camps have lacked serious Jewish educational supervision by a full-time Jewish educator (recall that Jewish educators have only recently emerged in the Center world). Moreover, if year-round Center programs (such as the pre-school) encounter difficulties in recruiting, training, supervising, and retaining staff with a modicum of Jewish commitment and knowledge, the camps, especially the day camps, are in an even more tenuous position. Their staff consists of low-paid, local teen-agers with high rates of turnover, making them hard to train. As with pre- schools, JCC camps must often turn to non-Jews for a source of staff.

One of the cardinal principles in informal education, particularly with teen-agers, is that one wants the staff to serve as admirable and accessible role models. Non-Jews as counselors simply cannot fulfill that function, and non-committed Jewish counselors may be even worse.

These difficulties notwithstanding, some JCC camps are managing to make significant progress in boosting the Jewish educational content to their camp experience. Most conduct pre-Shabbat programs, teach Hebrew songs, and provide what may be called Israeli or Hebrew "decoration" to the program (e.g., Hebrew bunk names or sports teams). One camp devotes different weeks to different Jewish ethical themes (e.g., kindness to animals) that have universal appeal and that can be transmitted easily by non-Jewish staff or Judaically ignorant Jewish staff. Some regularly sponsor a group of Israeli counselors.

One Center we visited had engaged in a thorough and highly critical evaluation of its camp's Jewish content and personnel and had begun to take steps in line with the report's recommendations, such as by hiring a professional Jewish educator to supervise the Judaic

program.

Clearly much remains to be done in this area. Camps need to think through and institute a Jewish educational curriculum. They need to plan and budget for Jewish educational training of the staff. These and other steps will require a personnel pattern resembling that of the Center as a whole: a director (in this case, of the camp) who is committed to introducing Jewish educational content; a professional Jewish educator who is given the backing and support necessary to institute change; and a staff that is ready to accept training and supervision designed to enhance their Jewish commitment, Jewish knowledge, and the skills needed to transmit both to their campers.

Teen Programs

Through the 1960's (or thereabouts), urban JCCs served as major centers of Jewish teenagers' social lives. Many of today's JCC lay leaders got their start in Jewish life "hanging out" at the JCCs of their youth. Today, most directors with whom we spoke pointed to relatively weak services to Jewish teens, a circumstance all the more disappointing precisely because we were speaking with representatives of those Centers noted for achievement in Jewish education.

Although the Center likes to see it itself as the surrogate for the largely defunct Jewish urban neighborhood, it does not seem to function in such a fashion for most suburban Jewish teen-agers. Our disappointment at finding little to report in the area of teen-age activities was exacerbated by the potential that we see in Centers the potential to compete with the youth "mall culture" that is so prevalent in American suburbs.

Since the staff for this population tends to be young and transient themselves, executives reported difficulty in retaining staff in this area and finding personnel with sufficient Jewish knowledge to upgrade the quality of program. At the same time, few, if any, of the Center Jewish educators that we met currently were focusing their limited energies in this domain.

Aside from staffing issues there are some other factors that may account for the lack of programming for teens. The geographical dispersal of teenagers in suburban Centers has undoubtedly taken its toll on teen participation, making it unlikely that many 14-16 year olds will casually gravitate to the JCCs as their urbanized parents did. Moreover, synagogue youth movements can more readily appeal to the idealism of youth by lending religious purpose to their participation. A recent review article on informal Jewish education of teenagers concludes:

Some youth directors reported significant competition from synagogue youth groups.

Synagogues have several advantages. They draw upon friendship networks established during elementary school years and they are familiar ground to the teens.

> It is important for successful youth programs to espouse an ideology that expresses a certain amount of idealism. Such idealism calls upon the young person to give up some of his or her own needs to serve some nobler cause. For this idealism to be placed in the service of Jewish identity, it should relate to the Jewish people or religion.[21]

The classic recreational orientation of JCCs make it difficult for them to project a transcendent purpose for these kinds of programs. However, we recall that one Center (and we are sure that there are others), managed to recruit large numbers of teens for a variety of community service projects such as assisting the elderly or improving the environment.

Whether Centers will turn their attention to youth programming depends on several considerations. One possibility is that the very newness of the Jewish educator position implies that Center educators simply have not yet gotten around to addressing the youth area. In due course, as other more immediate and tractable goals are achieved, they will come to focus upon teen programming. The other possibility is that, given all the difficulties outlined above, the teen area represents an unproductive place for Centers and their Jewish educators to invest their energies. If so, then teens -- those Jews at the age when people typically shape their adult identities and make fateful life decisions -- may continue to fall outside the purview of the JCCs.

Given the legitimate concern about Jewish youth generally voiced among lay leaders and parents, we imagine that this area is one that needs more planning and thought by the Center movement.

Adult Education

In the six Centers that we examined closely, the most developed area of Jewish programming was in the area of adult education. The programs took a variety of forms:

1) Holiday workshops (usually connected with the pre-school, as noted earlier), and

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[21]H.A. Alexander and Ian Russ, "What We Know About... Youth Programming" in *What We Know About Jewish Education.*

other forms of Jewish Family Education.

2) Libraries: books, videos, magazines.

3) Cultural events (Israel fair, book fair, film festival, musical presentations, theater, exhibits).

4) Lectures.

5) Courses, a special sub-set of which consists of two structured programs for teaching basic Judaism.

Taken together, these programs lend a significantly different atmosphere to the JCC than in the time when Janowsky reached his down-beat conclusions. They even represent considerable progress over the pre-COMJEE I period.

To be sure, each form of adult education programming represents a distinctive attempt to engage Jewish adults in a particular fashion. Some of them merit special comment.

The field of Jewish family education (JFE) first began to emerge during the 1980's. One point of genesis for the field was with conventional Jewish educators who felt frustrated at attempts to educate children who returned to homes that did not or could not support the lessons being taught in the classroom. Moreover, parents seemed interested in learning what their children learned and in spending time with their children in a context that combined recreation with education. Today, both JCCs and synagogues sponsor various forms of Jewish family education.

As currently constituted, JFE revolves around the children in school, be it the toddlers in the JCC pre-schools or the grade school children in the day schools and supplementary schools. As a result, a large fraction of those attending JCC holiday workshops are the pre-school youngsters and their parents (community-wide events, such as Purim carnivals have wider appeal). Perhaps this is as it should be or must be. Yet Centers would do well to examine whether they can appeal to families outside of this life stage.

A more significant shortcoming of the JCC-sponsored JFE lies in its lack of continuity, that is, ongoing contact with the Jewish educator. This circumstance stands in contrast to classes where a teacher builds a relationship with the adult students (see below), as well as to similar programs conducted in a synagogue setting, where the rabbi may know the family for many years. JFE at JCCs offers a lower prohability that a Jewish educator will use the opportunity to establish or enlarge an ongoing relationship with the families in attendance. These comments simply serve to point to a broader concern for the next stage of development in Center-sponsored Jewish education. That is, JCCs will need to think of ways to build and nurture long-term educational relationships with their members.

The expansion of JCC libraries and the numerous major cultural events highlight the Centers' significant role as purveyors and sponsors of Jewish culture. JCCs appear to be uniquely equipped (in their size, space, ambiance) to take the lead in housing, exhibiting, and merchandising Jewish culture. If American Jews support and consume a distinctive culture, they probably do it more through the JCCs than through any other sort of institution. In our thinking, this is a major responsibility, one that merits greater reflection on the part of the Center movement. For if JCCs are responsible for purveying Jewish culture, they ought to start thinking about what may be called "cultural policies and planning." Just which sorts of culture should they purvey, and why?

The Jewish book fairs that take place annually (in November) throughout North America represent but one example where some reflection and reasoning may be called for. Despite their massive size and huge sale, the Jewish educational side of the book fairs appears to be underutilized. In particular, the fairs define "Jewish books" quite broadly: as long as the author is Jewish the book can be included. JCCs also sponsor film festivals, art exhibits, as well as music and dance concerts. Many of these programs are Israeli-oriented. Does that make them Jewish? Is sculpture with no obvious Jewish themes by an Israeli artist "Jewish?" Should it be exhibited in a JCC with limited exhibit space? What constitutes a "Jewish" film, theater production, dance performance, or work of art? We believe that these and related questions need reflective attention.

The single lecture, or lecture series, are among the most popular vehicles. They usually aim at drawing large audiences and usually involve well-known figures from the Jewish or general community speaking on issues relevant to Jewish concerns. At times this had to do with contemporary political issues (often with an Israel focus). Their virtue is that they serve social as well as educational purposes, bringing together a large number of people who renew their ties to one another. Their shortcomings are also well understood by Center educators. Lectures tend to have limited appeal to parents of school-age children and (generally) to young single adults, two groups that ought to be the *prime* targets of Jewish educational outreach efforts. Secondly, lectures are, by definition, one-shot affairs, providing no opportunity for sustained growth, and building relationships. All of which is not to say that lectures should be abandoned. Rather, it is to say that lectures -- with all the glitz and showmanship that may accompany them -- are no substitute for genuine Jewish education such as what presumably takes place in ongoing classes.

The classes offered in JCCs, generally focus on classic Jewish themes, topics or texts. They are taught by the Center's own Jewish educator, local rabbis, or local teachers. In

general, they aim at beginners or inexperienced learners. Classroom texts are English translations and the topics appeal to a less knowledgeable clientele. This policy is in keeping with the Center's oft-stated mission of being a gateway for a more advanced Judaism, rather than providing that itself. Nonetheless there were exceptions.

In one Center, for example, students could enroll for a weekly, year-long Talmud class taught by a leading academic scholar in the field. This JCC had the advantage of being located in an area with many intellectual resources available, and the Center served a population that could provide the kind of students appropriate for such a course. Nonetheless, this is not a case of merely responding to the clientele's needs. Offering an advanced Talmud class is precisely the kind of program that attracts a more Jewishly committed membership to the Center. Although the class may enroll relatively small numbers of students, its very presence helps shape, sustain, and strengthen the institutional image that this Center cares about Jewish education, and is able to appeal to the cognoscenti as well as the novices.

The Jewish education program coordinator in this particular JCC believes that the key is having the funding to pay top-notch teachers enough to lead such courses. Thus the Center has created individual endowment funds to pay for these classes. Indeed, this JCC aims at raising funds for many small endowments (in the $5000- $10,000 range). The executive believes that focusing only on large endowments is a mistake. By looking for small endowments as well, the Center is able to fund a variety of courses and lecture series devoted to its Jewish educational mission.

TWO "TURN-KEY" ADULT EDUCATION PROGRAMS: As mentioned above, across Jewish Community Centers the two most popular programs for intensive adult Jewish learning are the Melton Mini-School and Derekh Torah. Although the programs have certain similarities, some Centers offer both programs. In such places, Derekh Torah is usually seen as the more basic program; its graduates are steered toward the Melton Mini-School as the next step in Jewish study.

Derekh Torah was created by Rabbi Rachel Cowan around ten years ago at Congregation Ansche Chesed in New York, and then moved to the 92nd Street Y. The program emerged out of Cowan's work with mixed faith couples, some of whom were already married, and others of whom were considering conversion and marriage without conversion. The program sought to introduce non-Jews to the basics of Judaism in a serious and intellectually stimulating fashion. The Jewish partners, in cases where this applied, were also encouraged (or required) to attend. Often these Jews partners were ignorant or estranged from Judaism.

As the program evolved, the fundamental orientation toward non- Jews or interfaith

couples remained in place; but, it grew to include Jews simply seeking knowledge about Judaism, not only those in an interfaith relationship. Typically, people apply to the program and are interviewed by the teacher in advance. In one locale that we visited, several students were newcomers to the community. Derekh Torah seemed to be an access point into a social network for (mostly single) Jews. Central to the program is its social dimension. Classes meet in the homes of the instructors or student homes and are bracketed by informal meeting time.

Derekh Torah is not a conversion class per se, though in some places rabbis use it for that purpose. The curriculum is a set of topics that are covered in the weekly meetings over an academic year. The instructor has considerable latitude in adapting the curriculum to his or her own interests or abilities, as well as to the interests of the class.

The concept of the Melton Mini-School was invented by a lay leader, Florence Melton of Columbus, Ohio. There was a need, in her view, for a program of learning that would address the basic "Jewish literacy" needs of adults in a serious and intensive way. Melton believed that such adults would be hesitant to attend classes in synagogues, even where they were members, because they would not wish to display their ignorance. The JCC was a more neutral area and would be an ideal setting for such programs. Today the program functions in over 20 sites around the country, mostly in Jewish Community Centers.

The Melton Centre of The Hebrew University developed a curriculum for a two-year course of study with weekly meetings, with each built around certain key topics and themes. Anecdotal reports indicate that the program clearly appears to be successful -- both in terms of the quality of learning that takes place and the satisfaction of the students in the course. In fact, in some places, students have asked to continue beyond the two years of the curriculum.

Like Derekh Torah the Melton Mini-School relies on good teachers for its success. According to one Center educator, the teacher must have an "interactive" approach and avoid "rabbinic sermon-making."

The Melton Mini-School requires a two-year commitment on the part of the student; Derekh Torah one year. The Melton Mini-School seems to be less oriented toward the interfaith couple. Both programs have also been flexible enough to be used in ways different from the original design. For example, both Derekh Torah and the Melton Mini-School curriculum have been used for staff classes in JCCs.

The popularity of these two programs in the JCC world says something about the conditions and culture of Jewish education in the Center movement. Both programs provide an introduction to Judaism. To varying extents, the programs can appeal to members of interfaith couples. Both emphasize a social, community-building approach, and both are intent upon utilizing dynamic teachers who are non-judgmental, engaging, enthusiastic, and

open. In other words, good educators with what social workers might call excellent group work skills. Last, both programs come with a ready-made curriculum (the Melton Mini-School being more detailed), relieving the Center educator of that burden. Clearly, the Derekh Torah and Melton Mini-School programs are highly compatible with the needs of JCCs and those of their members.

Senior Adults

Professionals who work closely with senior adults report that they are keen consumers of Jewish educational and cultural services. Understandably, the seniors are the most ethnically committed and least intermarried population group in the Centers. They are chronologically closer to the European experience and Yiddish culture.

As a result, Jewish cultural programming are part and parcel of the social and recreational services offered this group. The professionals who work with them find the experience Jewishly rewarding and challenging. On the other hand, executive directors were not particularly focused upon this group as a target of Jewish educational services. In effect, they were saying that this is one group where expanding Jewish education is not of the highest priority.

Ambiance

The educational programs noted above occur in a certain place (generally the JCC building). Quite obviously, the appearance, physical characteristics, and all that which constitutes the ambiance of the building serve to influence the conduct of the programs and to send messages even to those members who never directly participate in those programs.

Any institution that educates does so in a variety of interrelated ways. Some of those ways are through the overt curriculum of books, lessons and planned activities. But often just as powerful are elements of the so-called "hidden curriculum"-- the personal style and behavior of teachers and staff, and the nonverbal clues of atmosphere, physical plant and an institution's projected image. This latter dimension we will characterize as "ambiance."

Center educators have developed an interesting theory about the importance of ambiance. In their mind, ambiance subtly influences the large mass of people not intensively

involved in the Center's study programs who pass through the JCCs doors. The concept of the Center as a Jewish neighborhood will influence these members. How is that message conveyed?

A specifically Jewish ambiance is effected in a variety of ways by the different Centers. The lobbies in these buildings were recognizably Jewish environments -- we saw in a number of the places Hebrew signs prominently displayed. Typically the signs on office doors ("Administrative center", "Senior Services", or "Physical Education Department") gave the title in both English and Hebrew.

Lobbies allowed for displays around upcoming events in the Center's schedule. In the JCCs we looked at the Jewish calendar was also highlighted through these displays. Pictures or exhibits relating to upcoming Jewish holidays were a regular feature in these JCCs.

In a dramatic fashion, one Center has a set of large, almost life-sized, dolls, a "family" that has been placed in the lobby of the JCC. (In fact, they've even been named-- "the Rosens"-- and everyone refers to them by name!) The dolls are set up in various ways to reflect some kind of Jewish idea or upcoming Jewish holiday: the family is sitting around the Passover Seder, or they're dressed up for Purim, etc. This display has now become a focal point in the lobby, and in a humorous sort of way, they express the underlying Jewish values of the Jewish Community Center.

Another typical aspect of ambiance in the places we studied was having a centrally located kosher cafe. The cafe can also become the locus for other kinds of informal social programming. One Center is in the process of setting up a sound system which would pump Jewish music into the halls. Most have gift shops. A few have established Halls of Fame or other exhibits to honor Jewish sports heroes. Many sprinkle posters of Israel or other Jewish themes throughout the building.

The program catalogues produced by some Centers include Hebrew translations for the various activities and divisions of the Center were also printed. The prominence given to the Jewish educational activities and the separate flyers produced for those activities also sends a message to the potential consumer about the importance of these aspect of the JCCs total program.

TOWARD AN EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHY FOR THE JCC MOVEMENT

Points of Consensus and Unresolved Questions

As mentioned previously in this report, no single coherent philosophy of Jewish education characterizes the entire Center field. Nonetheless, we find elements of such a philosophy. It is a kind of "theory-in-use"[22] that informs the work of the staff and the perspectives of the lay leadership that we observed.

JUDAISM IS FUN: First, Jewish education in the JCC world takes place in an environment which is informal, relaxed and recreational. Members feel good about their JCCs. Centers seem less fraught with the kind of ideological and emotional weightiness present in other Jewish institutions, such as synagogues, day schools, or Federations. Associating Judaism with fun may help attract people to the Jewish Community Centers and potentially toward Judaism as well. Yet, at the same time, such an attitude undercuts the more serious aspects of being Jewish -- those very dimensions that may bring people to Jewish exploration: a sense of belonging to something larger and more profound than oneself, a belief system, a set of answers to the deepest questions of personal meaning in life. If Judaism is only fun, then why should one sacrifice time, energy, emotion and resources for it?[23]

While Centers beckon to people with the notion that Judaism is fun and enjoyable (the not-so-subliminal message found in the JCC publicity literature), Center educators often speak about the need to promulgate the idea that Judaism is "serious." Still, an institution in which one can swim in a beautiful pool, take Yoga and dance classes, sing in a chorus, hear noted Jewish authors or scholars lecture, study in a Melton Mini-School or Derekh Torah class every week and to which you can send your children to summer camp is a powerful and attractive place.

INTRODUCTORY JUDAISM: Second, beyond the idea that Judaism can be fun, JCCs have built their education around a particular focus - - introductory Judaism. Most Centers that we observed paid little attention to the advanced aspects of being Jewish.

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[22]Chris Argyris and Donald A. Schon *Theory in Practice* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1974).
[23]For more on this, see Barry W. Holtz, *Why Be Jewish* (American Jewish Committee, 1993).

Accordingly, JCCs appeal to the most tentative or ambivalent Jews (or seekers and newcomers). Unlike synagogues, JCCs pose no ideological barriers, religious demands, or expectations of liturgical competence that may inhibit newcomers from crossing the threshold. On the other hand, Centers fail to provide the positive side of ideology and expectations.

THE JCC AS GATEWAY: Consistent with their emphasis on introductory Judaism, Center professionals see their Centers as serving as gateways to other Jewish institutions such as synagogues and day schools. The gateway notion sometimes is expressed in the idea that a person might "Jewishly outgrow" a JCC and graduate to a synagogue or day school community.

THE NEW JEWISH NEIGHBORHOOD: Jewish Community Centers are seen as surrogate Jewish neighborhoods. One JCC educator pointed out that especially in suburbia, where a centralized physical neighborhood is hard to define, the JCC can act as a replacement for the "main street" that no longer exists. In that sense the Center becomes a positive alternative to the shopping mall, the suburban pseudo- neighborhood that social scientists have been exploring in recent years. The Center offers a contrast with the pure consumerism of the mall by having its own attractive, air-conditioned indoor space -- with a food concession (kosher in this case!), healthy activities, and opportunities for social and intellectual interaction in a safe environment.

The Center offers a chance to entice people into a setting in which Jewish cultural and educational activities can take place. Some of those activities may be what educational philosophers would call "accidental" learning -- such as seeing the lobby displays and signs on the wall as one heads toward the health club. But there is chance that accidental learning will lead toward something more deliberate as well.

ACCESS TO KEY POPULATION GROUPS: One particular strength of Centers is to capitalize on the attachment of certain population groups to the JCC for specific services. In particular, the JCC may become a gateway into other aspects of Jewish life for pre-school parents. One Center has made this group an explicit target for educational intervention. Several of its staff noted that a couple with two children could potentially remain attached to the Center for 10-12 years. Some Centers have begun to emphasize family and parent education program precisely for this age group.

(QUALIFIED) RESPECT FOR THE SYNAGOGUE: Despite the suspicions voiced by some in the synagogue world, we saw a genuine respect for synagogue Judaism and what

synagogue involvement can mean. Executives and Jewish educators volunteered that they understood that their members' Jewish lives would be incomplete without synagogues. A few volunteered that their success can in part be measured by the speed and extent to which their members join and become involved in congregations.

Accordingly, so as to avoid intruding on the synagogues' domain, Centers established clearly defined articulated boundaries . All the Centers we studied prohibit religious services and other functions (such as weddings, bar mitzvahs, etc.) from being conducted at their sites.[24] In one community the Center refrains from sponsoring an adult education institute so as not to compete with the institute sponsored by local rabbis.

Moreover, JCCs seek out the involvement of local rabbis and synagogue lay leaders both for intrinsic and for political reasons. Centers often invite rabbis to teach adults at the Center. Rabbis view this as an opportunity to teach a wider public than at their own institution and even perhaps to attract membership to the synagogue. (On the other hand, one Center professional we interviewed resisted using rabbis as teachers because "they don't listen" and like to preach rather than interact with the students.)

One Center we observed -- conscious of tension with local rabbis -- executed an "end run:" it recruited leading lay people from local synagogues to serve on the Center Board. Eventually, several of these leaders served as Presidents and in other key Center positions.

One positive sign of relationship is found in one community in which some of the local rabbis use the Center's Derekh Torah adult learning program in lieu of running their own conversion to Judaism courses.

ISRAEL AS A SPECIAL JCC OPPORTUNITY: Finally, the whole issue of Israel and its connection to JCCs goes beyond cultural programming. The JCC movement may yet develop a distinctive role in connecting American Jews to Israel. In some communities, for example, the JCC is the central agency for the community youth trip to Israel and houses the official Israel emissary (shaliah) to the community. The trans-denominational character of the JCC may be particularly helpful in addressing the issue of Israel.

How Much "Interventionism" -- If Any?

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[24]The only exception that we know of is the 92nd Street Y in New York City which runs High Holiday services on its premises. However, this appears to be a long-standing tradition that has been accepted by the local rabbis for many years.

Beyond the points of consensus described briefly above, we uncovered a key point of disagreement among what might be called leading theoreticians of the Center movement. Simplifying greatly, they differed with respect to the extent to which JCCs ought to be pro-active, explicitly change-oriented, and overtly interventionist with respect to the Jewish lives of their members and clients.

Jewish Community Centers, partially because of their history and partially because of the social work training of most of their staff, have taken what we are calling a "non-interventionist" stance vis a vis their participants. This might be expressed in such comment as, "We don't get too involved in people's lives" -- or certainly in their religious lives.

One model -- the least interventionist -- sees the JCC as the Jewish neighborhood. whose purpose is to pump Jewish oxygen into those who come there. The JCC "is a new neighborhood of Jewish life." The total ambiance -- including the physical features of the building, the concentration of familiar Jewish faces, the explicitly educational programs, and more -- combine to exert a powerful pro- Jewish message. Attempts to explicitly push the member or client in one Jewish direction or another may only backfire and serve to raise the ideological threshold that brings so many ambivalent Jews into the Center in the first place.

A second model is somewhat more pro-active. This view maintains that the job of Centers is to put Judaism in front of people, so that they see it is not silly or infantile. Instead they should come to understand that Judaism is serious and has something important to say to contemporary life. Aside from doing that job as best as possible, the educator has no role in pushing any particular perspective -- people need to make their own choices of what to do with what they've learned. In other words the Center cannot advocate particular choices with respect to religious belief, observance or lifestyle.

As one educator stated, "My assignment is to put Judaism out on the table and from there, people should make their own decisions about what it would take to put this into their own lives." Another educator remarked that his approach was to tell his students at the JCC, "I don't know what kind of Jew you should be -- it only has to be serious." He believes that his job is not to be "apologetic" for Judaism, but to argue for its seriousness in the Center and in people's lives. One executive saw four Jewish goals for the Center: seeing ongoing regular study of Jewish texts built into people's lives; developing in people a sense of Jewish curiosity; creating an environment where people can develop their own views on Jewish subjects; and using an interactive method in study and learning.

The third model is more religiously engaging, challenging and interactive. This model in effects authorizes Center staff to become involved in the lives of the people and try to lead them toward certain directions in their life. Like the second model, this model emphasizes Jewish learning, but in this case, the purpose of the JCC is seen explicitly as leading people to

deeper Jewish commitment.

This model views the non-interventionist approach as ultimately inadequate if Centers are going to play any significant role in the "continuity" of the North American community. It is hard to justify or operationalize any Jewish educational system based on a non-interventionist model. After all, Jewish education is all about changing people, not just informing them about Judaism.

How the Center movement tackles these issues over the next few years is an important challenge and one that has not yet been seriously addressed in the Center movement. The question that remains is how much can the Center be an advocate for personal change and development while taking a non-interventionist stance? And is it possible to advocate for a serious Jewish commitment while avoiding the ideological issues, such as those raised by the religious denominations?

Does the "Gateway" Really Function?

We are clear that the Center-as-gateway to other Jewish institutions is a prominent part of the Center's rhetoric, especially among the directors and educators, but we question how true is this principle in reality. We repeatedly asked pre-school directors if they advocate day school education for their little graduates, even if only gently. They typically responded that they would inform parents about local day schools if that is what the parents wanted for their children.

To serve as a gateway, one must engage, at least to some degree in a kind of overt intervention in people's lives. One must advocate for people to join synagogues, or to send their children to day schools. Yet, the unstated Center educational philosophy limits the extent of such intervention. Most Center professionals we interviewed resist the adoption of an explicit change-oriented agenda. Like any good social worker, Center staff members (including the Jewish educators) are committed to accepting the client where he or she is. And they are careful to avoid religion or religiously divisive issues, perhaps because these staff members tend not to be ideologically oriented in general.

Is Jewish Education in the Center "Religious" or "Secular"?

The issues raised above touch upon a more fundamental question about the role of the

Center as a Jewish educational institution: Is Jewish Education in the Center "Religious" or "Secular"? As long as Centers dealt only with social, recreational, and some cultural activities, this question was essentially moot. The Centers represented a secular, or at least a non-denominational, approach to being Jewish. But with the Center's engagement with Jewish education, the question of the religious character of that education is hard to avoid.

Most Jewish education in North America is specifically religious in nature, even when it takes place outside of the synagogue. For examaple, even boys in so-called "community" day schools (i.e. those with no particular religious affiliation) are required to wear kippot during text study. These non-denominational schools still conduct religious services, often daily. Most Jewish summer camps sponsor prayer services as well. Perhaps the only exception to the generalization that all American Jewish education for children is religious is to be found in some youth groups and, at one time, Yiddishist summer camps.

Where does the Jewish Community Center stand in this regard? The answer is not terribly clear. Is the Center an alternative purveyor of Jewish religious education, specializing in areas where all denominations can agree? Or are Centers re-casting the religious tradition in secular or cultural terms in much the same was as many Israelis "observe" many Jewish holidays and customs?

In some ways, Centers are similar to community day schools in their attitudes, with most of the Jewish educators in JCCs viewing themselves as religious educators who happen to be working (and pleased to be working) in a multi- or non-denominational setting. These educators are the ones who might test the Center's Jewish educational success by the extent to which members become active in synagogue (i.e., religious) communities.

By way of contrast, some Center professionals view the JCC as an essential institution, even after it may have ushered some people into the synagogue. According to this view, JCCs fulfill roles that other institutions simply cannot. These might include providing Jewish arts festivals, adult learning centers, and early childhood programs. These days, perhaps owing to the dormant tensions with synagogues, few leading professionals are prepared to articulate an alternative model that sees Center participation as a Jewish end and not a gateway to a bigger and better (religious) Jewish involvement elsewhere. This view would constitute a truly secular ideology for the JCC.

Perhaps this latter position is simply foreign to North American thinking, but certainly one finds versions of a secular Jewish ideology both in Israel (for obvious reasons) and in Latin America. Indeed, in Latin America the Jewish Community Center is a powerful secular institution in the community, more powerful in many ways than the synagogue. The closest approximation to this view to date is Barry Chazan's notion of the JCC as "a new neighborhood of Jewish life."[25] He talks about "pumping Jewish oxygen into that

neighborhood," but he focuses primarily on the forms of Jewish education typical of the Center (i.e. informal versus classroom education) rather than the goals and outcomes of such an education.

Is a secular Jewish education feasible or even desirable in the Diaspora? Should the JCC position itself as the locus for secular Judaism, an explicit alternative to synagogue/religious Judaism? Is a fourth major Jewish denomination emerging around the JCCs, one consonant with the individualism, personalism, and voluntarism of American Jewry? These questions have not been addressed seriously in recent times, and in light of the Center movement's bid to become a major player in the world of Jewish education, they merit renewed attention.[26]

Tension with the Synagogues

The emergence of the Jewish mission of the Center in the past 15 years has, for its positive dimensions, also created a certain level of de-stabilization and conflict about the specific roles of various institutions in the community. In particular, rabbis and synagogues tend to feel some degree of tension with Centers, and are especially wary of the Centers' move into Jewish education.

Even back in 1948, the Janowsky report discussed the tension between these two institutions.[27] In some ways the situation has been exacerbated by the move of JCCs into a Jewish educational role. All the JCC Jewish educators -- and especially those who are rabbis -- reported that relations between the local synagogue rabbis and the JCC educator required a good deal of work. With respect to relations with area synagogues and rabbis, one Center educator reported "a truce" and not much more than that.

In some cases, building trust between the rabbi and the JCC educator through personal contact led to greater connection between the two institutions. We certainly saw some positive examples of JCCs connecting to local community institutions. One community, for instance, now holds a "Jewish education fair" in which the parents of JCC pre-school children get to meet representatives from the various day and synagogue schools in the area. Another Center

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[25]See his article "A Late December Day in the JCC," in *Jewish Education and the Jewish Community Center.*

[26]Of course earlier in this century there were such secular models (such as Yiddishist, cultural education) available in North America.

[27]Janowsky, pp. 317-324.

sponsored a JCC "Walk though Jerusalem" exhibit that had the full support of all the local synagogues and rabbis. The synagogues appeared as co-sponsors of the event and helped promote the exhibit in their bulletins and through rabbinic sermons or announcements. Still another, in its seasonal catalogue, features local synagogues' adult education.

In some cases, we saw possibilities for considerably more connection and interaction among institutions that is just now being realized. For example, the potential of the JCC early childhood program as a "feeder" for local day schools or supplementary schools has only begun to be explored. Connections between the Center and day schools, even when they are in close proximity, could be greatly improved.

Clearly, Center directors and educators understand that they need to manage their relations with local rabbis and synagogues. Some do so in order to minimize the nuisance the rabbis could cause, and others operate out of a genuine respect for the importance of rabbis, synagogues, and religious Judaism more broadly.

One interesting example of a Center's relationship with local synagogues was found in the catalogue of the JCC of the Upper West Side in New York. This JCC sees itself, in the words of its executive, as "a neutral broker for the community." Hence, the catalogue lists virtually *all* the Jewish study options available in the community, irrespective of the denominational affiliation of the institutions. Hence people receiving the JCC catalogue are also obtaining information about the variety of synagogue offerings in the neighborhood.

In addition, the catalogue has a section called "Opportunities to Volunteer" in which programs offered by a variety of institutions-- synagogues and independent, non-Jewish agencies-- are listed for those who wish to volunteer their time. As the executive pointed out, many people wish offer their time, but need a central clearinghouse which lists the soup kitchens, homeless shelters, school literacy programs, services to the elderly, etc. from amongst which individuals can choose. Even though the catalogue lists non-Jewish agencies as well, the fact that the listing appears in a JCC publications helps people feel that their volunteering experience is connected to their identity as Jews. Moreover, the JCC uses these listings as a kind of outreach to individuals in the community and the people that contact them become part of the Center's own data base.

Another example of positive synagogue-JCC relations is to be found in the retreat center housed at the Cleveland JCC. **[paragraph on the cleveland jcc will go here.]**

Conditions Conducive to Success

Directors of Centers with a reputation for success in Jewish education tend to believe that any Center can adopt and, in time, successfully execute a policy of commitment to Jewish

education. At the other extreme, directors who at least privately concede that their Centers fall short in this area argue that other Centers command resources that are not universally available. Is success in Jewish education possible everywhere? Or are certain ingredients essential -- and lacking -- in certain communities?

In point of fact, the truth lies somewhere between these two starkly framed alternatives. Centers vary widely in the underlying conditions that are conducive to the Jewish educational agenda. That which is possible or even likely in one place may be simply unachievable elsewhere. However, all Centers possess some of the resources to allow for a level of Jewish educational commitment commensurate with the available resources. We saw examples of Jewish educational success in Centers located in communities that lack many of the conditions often associated with achievement in the realm of Jewish education.

What are those conditions?

These include:

1) being located in a strong Jewish community;

2) having a long-standing, secure executive;

3) having reasonable financial security;

4) being part of a supportive federation or having the key lay leaders on the JCC board that help its relationship with the local federation; and

5) large size.

To elaborate, Jewish communities differ markedly in size, recency of migration, and rates of affiliation. Communities with large numbers of recently arrived Jews rarely experience high rates of affiliation. Moreover, communities with high rates of affiliation in one type of institution, generally experience high rates in others as well. We were struck with how many of the Centers we visited are located in relatively stronger Jewish communities.

We were also struck by the long tenure of the executive in these places. Most had been in the same job 15 years or more. Somehow, we surmise, their longevity may provide them with the political capital and credibility to undertake a serious commitment to Jewish education. After all, as we noted earlier, investment in Jewish education demands up-front costs and produces little tangible returns, at least financially, and at least in the short run. The executive who has pushed for Jewish education, especially in the late 1970's and early 1980's is one who felt secure enough in his or her position to advocate a policy direction that was, at least then, innovative and that is always difficult to justify in terms of the financial bottom line.

(To be sure, as these executives noted, only a Center committed to higher values is apt to engender the type of involvement and allegiance from major supporters necessary to sustain

and expand the Center's operations. In other words, what may seem costly in the short run, may be fiscally prudent in the long term.)

A parallel argument may be made for the contribution that financial stability makes to launching and sustaining a Jewish educational agenda. In our travels we sensed that none of the Centers we visited were awash with all the funds they could use; but we did sense a feeling of fiscal confidence. News of cutbacks in allocations from federation or United Way campaigns did not seem to provoke the kind of anxiety we might have expected in a financially more tenuous agency. Directors with whom we met conveyed the sense that they were successful fund raisers and budget managers who could raise reasonable sums for needed sustenance or expansion of the Jewish educational program.

A related issue is the relative prominence and influence of lay leadership. JCC Board members and the directors in the sites we visited generally projected great satisfaction with the extent to which they are able to elicit the support of the Federation. In fact, it seemed to us that most were claiming that JCC Board members were, in their locale, more prestigious, influential and sought- after than the counterparts in Federation life. We need not accept these statements fully at face value to conclude that JCCs certainly perceive themselves as favorably situated vis a vis Federations specifically and the local Jewish institutional complex generally.

Finally, larger Centers manage to invest more heavily in Jewish education. Sheer size means that the start-up funds necessary for personnel or program are relatively easy to locate.

All five indicators, in one way or another, point to institutional strength. In short, stronger JCCs (however measured) seem more able and ready to invest in a policy of effective Jewish education.

CONCLUSIONS

Significant Achievements, But Major Challenges Remain

We come away from our study of Jewish educational excellence in Jewish Community Centers with contradictory reactions: we are both impressed and chastened. We are impressed with the sheer extent of investment in Jewish educational programming, and we are impressed with the possibilities for serious education in the JCC context. As we noted early on in this report, we embarked upon this study somewhat skeptical about whether good Jewish education could even take place at a JCC. After seeing so many places with examples of educational excellence, we are convinced that such education is possible.

At the same time we are indeed chastened by the sheer enormity of the task of trying to change the JCC institutional culture and to re-direct the thinking of the staff. We met with some extremely impressive executive directors, all of whom expressed a deep commitment to the Jewish educational mission. All had been in their positions for many years, in some cases as much as two decades or more. Yet none could be fully satisfied with the current state of Jewish education in their respective Centers. By comparing across Centers we learned that areas of excellence were distinctive to just a few Centers. One may excel in strategic thinking or staff development. Another may sponsor an extraordinary adult education program. Another may be justifiably proud of its pre-school. Everywhere we saw signs of progress, both in the recent past and anticipated in the near-future. But nowhere could we point to an entire institution with all its components producing at peak, or near-peak educational capacity.

To elaborate, for all the talent, commitment, and progress we encountered, we were left wondering about how great the impact of these improved efforts were on the Center as a whole. How many people had actually been touched by these programs. In a Center of ten or eleven thousand members, how many people, what percentage of the membership, had actually been affected? One Center executive told us, for example, that he believed around 1500 people a year participated in some form of Jewish educational program. Is that a large number or a small one? It depends a good deal of the particular observer's own point of view. At around 10% of his membership population, it may seem small (especially since it includes people who are both studying every week in a class and those that appear once a year). Of course, some may view these percentage as a tremendous success, given the history of Jewish Community Centers and the attitude about the JCCs mission that many members may hold.

And, numbers alone may not be that significant. As one Center educator told us, "There is a need to build cells, small groups, of meeting 15-25 people, rather than big lectures." He thinks the small intimate groups are the way to engage people with Judaism. "If we get hung on big numbers, we'll get killed." He thinks there are other ways to effect large numbers of people, but he doesn't think energy should be invested in programming for large numbers of people.

To what extent can Centers realistically aspire to significantly influence large numbers of people? From a cost- benefit perspective, is it, in fact wiser, to target small groups rather than design programs to touch large numbers of Jews? These issues -- as well as the questions raised earlier about intervention, the secular or religious nature of the Center, the gateway function, and other such matters -- are among those that need to be addressed as the Center movement graduates to a more sophisticated approach to Jewish education.

From Programs to Education, From Tactics to Strategies

The Center movement clearly has made great strides in the realm of Jewish education. At the level of individual agencies, recent studies have documented steady increases in Jewish educational programming and Jewish educational personnel. Anecdotal evidence points to expanded efforts to hire and train Jewishly committed and knowledgeable staff members. On the national level, several tools have been brought to bear to change the place of Jewish education in the Center movement. Commissions, reports, conferences, consultants, publications, awards, and promotions have sent the message to lay and professional leaders in the JCC world that commitment to Jewish education is now essential to success in the Center movement.

After ten to fifteen years of incremental activity in this area, it is time for individual Centers and the JCC movement on a continental basis to begin to ask some hard questions about mission and purpose, and about the allocation of scarce resources. In our view, Centers have forged ahead and developed what may be called the tactics of Jewish education in the JCC, but have paid scant attention to larger strategic issues. At various points throughout this report, we have posed isolated questions for further consideration. Here we wish to bring them together to constitute an agenda for further reflection and deliberation by key JCC policy makers, both lay and professional.

Our list of the most important strategic questions consist of the following:

1) Who is the constituency for JCC educational efforts? Is it the entire local Jewish community, or just the members or clients of JCC services?

2) Within that constituency, which groups are the most worthy targets of Jewish

educational efforts? Who is most likely to combine the following characteristics: they are accessible to the JCC; they are amenable to Jewish growth; and they are under- developed in terms of their Jewish knowledge and commitment?

3) What ought to be the Jewish identity and knowledge requirements for hiring and retaining staff? Should different standards apply for staff in different departments or at different levels of authority?

4) What are sorts of Judaic demands of the staff are legitimate, which are most effective, and which are most useful?

5) To what extent may (and should) a JCC and its staff "intervene" in the Jewish lives of their constituencies? How aggressive in promoting Jewish involvement can they be? And how aggressive should they be?

6) What type of Judaism is the JCC working to "market." Is it "introduction to Jewish religion -- you pick the denomination" or is it a nascent and emerging form of American secular Judaism?

Undoubtedly other important questions have been raised in this report. We cannot be sure if our observations and inferences were, in all instances, accurate and precise. However, we have greater confidence in the challenges we advanced and the questions we raised. We hope and trust that opinion molders and other leaders within the JCC movement will be moved to take some of these challenges seriously and deliberate carefully on the questions we have raised, both immediately above and throughout the report.

Acknowledgments

This volume represents a joint effort between CIJE and the Jewish Community Association of North America (JCCA). The project was directed by two researchers, Barry W. Holtz from CIJE, and Steven M. Cohen who was engaged for this project by JCCA. Although JCCA is a national organization representing and working closely with centers that were studied for this report, we the two researchers were completely independent both in our mode of operation and in the findings discussed in this report. At the same time we wish to acknowledge the help and advice of the JCCA staff, in particular: Solomon Greenfield, Allen Finkelstein, Leonard Rubin and Rabbi Mark Charendoff.

Researchers:

Dr. Julie Tammivaara

Dr. Ruth Pinkenson Feldman

From the Centers:

At each Center numerous individuals gave us of their time and insights. Without meaning to slight anyone who helped us, we wish to single out in particular the following people who spent a good deal of time with us and helped make this report possible:

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About the Authors

Prof. Steven M. Cohen is a sociologist teaches at the Melton Centre for Jewish Education in the Diaspora, The Hebrew University. He has also taught at Queens College, Brandeis University, the Jewish Theological Seminary, and Yale University. He has written or edited nine books on contemporary Jewry including *Two Worlds of Judaism* (with Charles Liebman), *American Modernity and Jewish Identity*, and *American Assimilation or Jewish Revival?* In addition, he has written over a hundred scholarly articles and reports. The sponsors of his research have included: the American Jewish Committee, the CRB Foundation, the Cummings Foundation, the Detroit Jewish Federation, the Jewish Agency for Israel, the Jewish Community Centers Association, the Joint Authority for Jewish- Zionist Education, the National Science Foundation, the New York Jewish Federation, the Pew Memorial Trust, the United Jewish Appeal, the Wexner Foundation, and the Wilstein Institute.

Prof. Barry W. Holtz is Senior Education Officer and Director of the Best Practices Project of the Council for Initiatives in Jewish Education (CIJE). He is on leave from his position as Associate Professor of Jewish Education at the Jewish Theological Seminary of America. Prior to his coming to CIJE, Dr. Holtz was, for twelve years, co-director of the Seminary's Melton Research Center, where he supervised the writing and publication of numerous volumes of the Melton Graded Curriculum materials for Jewish schools across North America.

As author and editor, Dr. Holtz's books include: *Back to the Sources: Reading the Classic Jewish Texts* (Simon and Schuster, 1984), *Finding Our Way: Jewish Texts and the Lives We Lead Today (Schocken Books, 1990)*, and, most recently, *The Schocken Guide to Jewish Books* (1992). His first book (written with Arthur Green), *Your Word is Fire: The Hasidic Masters on Contemplative Prayer*, has recently been reprinted in a revised edition by Jewish Lights Press.

If there is any one Midrasha style of instruction it is discussion. Several classes are limited in numbers to promote a seminar-like atmosphere. There is a healthy respect between students and teachers. Students know their teachers from other arenas. Six are rabbis; five have congregations of which the students are members. Fourteen are Jewish professionals, educators in communal institutions which may have once trained these students. Three are secular educators with strong teaching skills. Four are knowledgeable Jewish lay persons, involved in the lives of their congregations.

A number of teachers are devotes of cooperative learning and incorporate it into their teaching. No one relies on lecturing as his or her primary method of instruction. The flavor of Midrasha Aleph is child-centered and problem-oriented, in the best of the Progressive education tradition.

The staff is quite stable. This year fewer than 15% had to be replaced. The principal reports that this is about average. The school has a reputation for paying its faculty well. Since the Bureau promulgates a teacher code, with a salary component, it behooves the Bureau's high school to be in compliance. The principal meets with new staff members to orient them individually, in addition to requiring them to attend the annual opening faculty meeting.

D. Affective Experiences

The "practice" in Jewish living as exemplified by the informal tzedakah programs of the school are noteworthy. The carnival for residents of the Ladd School, the overnight programs at Camp Ramah in Nyack or in Vermont to work on ecological concerns are outstanding. Prayer, as I have indicated earlier, is a regular part of the life of the school. Although the principal rues the fact that tallitot and tefillin are not second nature to all the students and the large majority of parents, graduation ceremonies begin with communal prayer. Arts programs may not be represented as well as they should be. There are occasional classes in Jewish art and several times students worked on art projects in the course of hugim. This year a course is being offered in the image of the Jew in American film.

E. Parent or Family Education

In 1991-2 Midrasha Aleph offers two opportunities for parents to study with their children: a semester course for parents of juniors and seniors to study American Jewish literature with their children, and an eight-week course for the parents of ninth and tenth graders to study Jewish heroes with their children. Here I am not a disinterested

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BEST PRACTICE IN JEWISH EDUCATION: JEWISH COMMUNITY CENTERS

by Steven M. Cohen and Barry W. Holtz

Sponsors:

Council for Initiatives in Jewish Education
and
The Jewish Community Centers Association

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INTRODUCTION

Jewish Education in the JCCs

Every year across North America tens of thousands of Jews walk through the doors of Jewish Community Centers. They come to swim in the pool, to work out in the health club, to drop their children off at the day care center, to chat with their friends-- and today in ever increasing numbers they come to do other things as well: They come to view an exhibit of Israeli art, to attend the Jewish book fair, to eat at the kosher cafe, and even, perhaps most surprisingly of all, to study some Torah.

The Jewish Community Center of today is a complex and multifaceted institution. It weaves together a variety of activities and it attempts to address an agenda suited to the needs and concerns of the times. The JCC in recent years has rethought its commitment to its educational mission and in many ways it has reinvented itself in the light of the contemporary situation of Jews in a changing world. No longer satisfied with actualizing only its social and recreational mission, the JCC views itself as part of a bigger picture, part of the core of *educating* institutions within the Jewish community in North America.

There are 275 JCCs throughout the continent, serving an estimated one million members. As a potential resource for Jewish education, the Center has at its hand a wide range of departments, programs and personnel. In recent years, as we describe below, Centers have moved in decisive fashion to upgrade the quality and quantity of their Jewish educational offerings. There have been significant and dramatic initiatives undertaken to bring new personnel for Jewish education on board and to improve the Jewish knowledge and skills of the people who have been long in the field. At least sixty-five Jewish educators have been added since the early 1980s; over 90% of Center executives have gone through Jewish training and learning programs, both in North America and in Israel.

We have reached an appropriate time to look at Jewish education in the JCCs, to take stock of their accomplishments and reflect upon what needs to be improved. How do Jewish Community Centers engage in Jewish education? What are the signs of an educationally effective JCC, and what are the key ingredients in good Jewish education in the JCCs?

These central questions are raised at a time when the organized Jewish community, more concerned about its creative survival than ever before, has placed renewed emphasis upon Jewish education in its many forms. In point of fact, this investigation

comes several years after the Center movement has inaugurated a significant move toward increased emphasis on Jewish education. The initial steps in this direction began in the 1970s. (This is not to ignore the several distinguished -- but largely unheeded -- voices within the Center movement that had called for heightened commitment to Jewish education decades earlier.) In the early 1970s, some JCC camps began to increase significantly their Jewish content, and throughout the decade, a small number of Centers hired directors who would later emerge as well-known advocates of a Jewish educational agenda in their individual Centers.

Then, in the early 1980s, the Commission On Maximizing Jewish Educational Effectiveness in the JCCs (COMJEE I) sparked a significant across-the-board surge in investment in Jewish education and culture. Surveys of JCCs conducted in the 1980s and 1990s documented a large and growing amount of Jewish educational programming across North America.[1] Moreover, the movement has sponsored a wide variety of in-service staff development programs designed to enhance both Jewish commitment and competence among executive directors, line workers, and everyone in between. Notably, since COMJEE I, well over 2,000 Center professionals have participated in Israel Educational Seminars sponsored by the JCCA. Veteran professional leaders in the Center movement are deeply impressed with what they see as a fundamental transformation in the mission and standard operation of the JCCs

Now, with about two decades of a growing commitment to Jewish education, we find throughout the continent many examples of noteworthy "best practices" in JCC Jewish education. When taken together, they point the way for Centers that may still be in the early stages of transformation. This study reports on our efforts to locate, understand, and interpret the most notable practices in Jewish education now taking place in the Center movement.

As two researchers whose professional and personal lives have been close to the practice and study of Jewish education in conventional settings, we came to this study with a degree of skepticism. We wondered whether serious Jewish education was taking place anywhere in the Center movement. We questioned whether it was even possible for a JCC to engage in serious or effective Jewish education. Several considerations

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[1]See Bernard Reisman, *Social Change and Response-- Assessing Efforts to Maximize Jewish Educational Effectiveness in Jewish Community Centers in North America* (JWB, 1988). Barry Chazan and Steven M. Cohen, *Assessing the Jewish Educational Effectiveness of Jewish Community Centers-- The 1994 Survey* (New York: JCCA, 1995).

underlay our initial skepticism.

As champions of Jewish education in the Center movement readily concede, JCCs face a daunting number of obstacles if they are to be taken seriously as a "player" in the world of Jewish education in North America. At its heart, the JCC is a market-driven, service-oriented agency, best known for its pre-schools, camps, and physical education facilities. For decades, Jews have come to Centers for specific services that are only tangentially related to Jewish education as it has been traditionally understood. Jewish education in the JCC context is not a "money-maker," at least in the short-term. (As we shall see, advocates of Jewish education in the JCCs argue that Jewish education is essential for the institutional well-being of Centers in the long-term.)

Moreover, putting matters most simply, Centers are neither synagogues nor schools, two institutions that have been in the business of Jewish education for centuries. Jews do not come to Centers to pray; they do not celebrate their most momentous life cycle events in the Center context; and (for better and worse) they do not expect to be confronted with a particular religious ideology there. Centers cannot expect to Jewishly engage their clientele in the same fashion as do synagogues and schools; nor, in fact, do they seek to do so.

Our skepticism was further fueled by our initial impressions of the Center professionals. At least until recently, JCC staff have historically been selected for their group work skills, rather than their proficiency in or dedication to Judaism. For the most part, they have not been very well-educated Judaically (although, as we report below, this has been changing). In addition, it could be argued that social workers (who dominate JCC professional staffs) are inclined to accept the validity of their clients' values and beliefs. In contrast, educators -- especially religious educators -- see themselves in the business of challenging, if not changing, fundamental values and beliefs. On a certain level, the social work ethos and the education ethos are in tension, although a tension that may be resolvable or even fruitful.

Yet in the course of conducting this study, our own views began to change. Notwithstanding the obstacles mentioned above and our initial reservations, we did in fact discover numerous examples of good Jewish education taking place within the confines of Jewish Community Centers throughout North America. JCCs, we came to believe, *can* be effective instruments of some forms of Jewish education. Without looking very hard, we found several examples of what may be called "best practices" in Jewish education in JCCs.

The Best Practices Project

In describing its "blueprint for the future," *A Time to Act*, the report of the Commission on Jewish Education in North America, called for the creation of "an inventory of best educational practices in North America."[2] Accordingly, the Best Practices Project of the Council for Initiatives in Jewish Education (CIJE) documents exemplary models of Jewish education. Up to this point, the Project has published volumes in two areas: the supplementary school, and early childhood Jewish education programs. This volume on Jewish Education in Jewish Community Centers, then, is the third in the series.

What do we mean by "best practice"? One recent book about this concept in the world of education states that it is a phrase borrowed

> from the professions of medicine and law, where "good practice" or "best practice" are everyday phrases used to describe solid, reputable, state-of-the-art work in a field. If a doctor, for example, does not follow contemporary standards and a case turns out badly, peers may criticize his decisions and treatments by saying something like, "that was simply not best practice."[3]

We need to be cautious about what we mean by the word "best" in the phrase "best practice." The literature in education points out that seeking perfection will be of little use as we try to improve actual work in the field. In an enterprise as complex and multifaceted as education, these writers argue, we should be looking to discover "good," not ideal practice.[4] "Good" educational practice is what we seek to identify for Jewish education, models of the best available practice in any given domain. In some cases, best available practice will come very close to "best imaginable practice;" at other times the gap between the best we currently have and the best we think we could attain may be far

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[2]Commission on Jewish Education in North America, *A Time to Act* (University Press of America, 1991), p. 69.
[3]Steven Zemelman, Harvey Daniels, and Arthur Hyde, *Best Practice* (Heinemann, 1993), pp. vii-viii.
[4]See, for example, Sara Lawrence Lightfoot, *The Good High School* (Basic Books, 1983).

greater.

We also need to think carefully about the second word in the phrase "best practice." As we conducted our investigation, we came to learn that that which is "best" about JCC Jewish education cannot be reduced to a specific program or procedure. Rather, educationally effective JCCs have developed an ethos, a set of principles that pervade entire organizations. These principles constitute an overall approach to Jewish education that, when it works, informs the decisions and functioning of professional staff and lay leaders. In short, for purposes of this report, "best practice" embraces not only best programs (or procedures), but also best philosophy and best principles.

Main Purposes and Intended Audience

In describing areas of Jewish educational excellence, this study seeks to understand what goes into making an educationally successful Center. Earlier studies[5] have pointed to the director, the board, the Jewish educator, the staff, the institutional environment, and other elements of success in JCC Jewish education. What we have tried to do in this volume is to fill in the portrait, add color and nuance to the description and help the reader imagine the way that successful JCCs operate in their settings.

Our concern here is with the JCC as a Jewish educational institution, and it is only in this realm that we sought to document best practices. With this said, we define the concept of "Jewish education" quite broadly Education includes schoolrooms and classes, to be sure; but education takes place in many different ways -- in the gym, in the art gallery, in early childhood and family programs, as well as by way of the very ambiance of an institution, the decorations on its walls, and the music in its corridors.

The notion that education is broad-based and multi-dimensional, that it goes beyond schooling (formal education), is an idea explored in depth by Lawrence Cremin, the great historian of American education. Cremin's definition of education includes "the multiplicity of individuals and institutions that educate-- parents, peers, siblings, and friends, as well as families, churches, synagogues, libraries, museums, summer camps, benevolent societies, agricultural fairs, settlement houses. . . ."[6]

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[5]See, for example, Barry Chazan and Steven M. Cohen, *Assessing the Jewish Educational Effectiveness of Jewish Community Centers-- The 1994 Survey* (New York: JCCA, 1995). Also Barry Chazan and Mark Charendoff, *Jewish Education and the Jewish Community Center* (Jerusalem: JCCA, 1994).

[6]Lawrence Cremin, *Traditions of American Education* (New York: Basic Books, 1976), p. 136.

Perhaps no institution in Jewish life today reflects the notion of an "ecology"[7] of diverse educational opportunities better than does the JCC. And there are few institutions that have so much potential to educate.

As should be obvious by this point, we hope that our study will promote better practice in this important area of Jewish education. Ideally, JCCs that are currently less advanced in this domain will be inspired to change their practice and advance their commitment to Jewish education.

We believe that this report will be useful to JCC board members, executive directors, department heads, Jewish educational personnel, and all those who work professionally for their JCCs. If this document truly succeeds, it will help provoke renewed and deeper thinking on the part of even the most expert and thoughtful practitioners and policy-makers in the Center movement.

This report is also directed to policy-makers, Jewish educators, and others outside the Center movement who may be unaware of the significant recent developments in JCC Jewish education. The JCC movement has effected enormous changes in the ways that Centers view their role as Jewish educational institutions. As we have come to learn through the course of our research, JCCs ought to be taken more seriously as a locus of Jewish education.

Method

We began our research by consulting with several experts and reading the literature published in recent years about this topic. On that basis, we chose a half dozen JCCs that are reputed to be among the outstanding Jewish educational Centers in the field. We sought diversity with respect to several characteristics: geography, size of community and Center, structure (i.e., a metropolitan system as well as local units), and personnel (i.e., status of Jewish educator). Our six sites were:

The Jewish Community Centers of Chicago
The JCC on the Palisades, Tenafly, New Jersey
The Memphis JCC
The Jewish Community Centers Association of St. Louis
The JCC of the Greater St. Paul Area

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[7]Lawrence Cremin, *Public Education* (New York: Basic Books, 1976).

The YM&YWHA of Suffolk in Commack, New York (Long Island)

We wish to underscore that these six particular Centers are not the only examples of best practice in this arena. We chose them because they constitute a *sample* of the best Centers and because they are diverse along the lines stated above. We specifically excluded some Centers with a deserved reputation for excellence, in part because they are so unusual or so well endowed with institutional resources that other Centers might regard them as "sui generis."

Beyond the six sites chosen for in-depth investigation, we also selected a group of "stand-alone" programs operating within other Jewish Community Centers. These specific programs are among many around the continent that offer examples of excellence in particular domains of JCC activity.

The mode of work in this study was qualitative, but the study is not"ethnographic" in the way that term is conventionally used in social research.[8] True ethnographies demand a lengthy period of "participant observation" in which the researcher becomes a virtual member of the society or institution that is being investigated. Such a study of a JCC would be extremely useful, but our time and resource limitations did not permit it. Our goal was to learn as much as we could from insiders about how these particular JCCs did their educational work.

After selecting the six sites, we requested from each a host of documentation including catalogues, reports, minutes of board meetings, and publicity materials.

The two of us conducted our first site visit (at the JCC of the Palisades) jointly to learn how we might carry on the interviews and to allow for mutual self-reflection. Another researcher, Julie Tammivaara then joined Steven Cohen in the visit to Suffolk; afterwards, Tammivaara visited Memphis, Holtz went to St. Louis, and Cohen visited Chicago and St. Paul. Both Holtz and Cohen interviewed significant figures from the Centers with "stand-alone" programs; in addition Ruth Pinkenson Feldman researched an early childhood department at yet another Center.

In each Center we asked the director to arrange interviews with the Jewish educator, assistant directors, department heads, other staff and board members. In all instances we met with the Jewish educator and the pre-school director. We also met with lay leaders of the agencies, most typically with current or past presidents and other

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[8]See, for example, H. Russell Bernard, *Research Methods in Anthropology* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1994)

senior officers. Last, we viewed programs in progress and as we walked through the Centers, we closely examined the building, looking for visible evidence of Jewish education in action. In designing our visits, we gave the executive director a considerable amount of flexibility in choosing those aspects of his or her Center that were deemed most outstanding.

We spent from one to three days in each Center. We prepared separate reports on each of our visits. People spoke to us in confidence, and, for that reason, throughout this report we provide few specific names.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND:
THE JCCS' GROWING COMMITMENT TO JEWISH EDUCATION

The Jewish Community Center movement has had a long and complex relationship to the question of its role as an educating institution. Originally created as a social and intellectual meeting place for Jews in the mid-19th century, Centers came to play an important role in the integration of the huge waves of immigrants that came to American shores in the late-19th and early -20th centuries.[9] In time, Centers moved out to the suburbs -- often in beautiful new facilities -- following the migration of their upwardly and outwardly mobile constituents.

The question of a specifically Jewish mission for the JCC has been debated throughout the entire history of the Center movement. Even in the earliest days of Centers, well-known personalities such as Louis Marshall, Mordecai Kaplan and Horace Kallen urged the Centers to adopt a more central Jewish focus. However, as Oscar Janowsky, in his ground-breaking survey of JCCs published in 1948, pointed out, "practice fell short of precept in this regard."[10] In describing settlements (precursors of the modern JCC) during the early part of the century, he wrote, "when allowances are made for. . . necessary concessions, and for lip-service to the positive views of [some], the Jewish settlements remained throughout this period lukewarm, if not hostile to Jewish emphasis."[11] He quotes an observer from as early as 1916 who concluded that settlements were still emphasizing the non-sectarian rather than the Jewish aspects of their mission. Janowsky adds, "The experience of the present Survey would lead one to believe that this was an understatement, and as an understatement it describes adequately the present situation in most Jewish settlements."[12] Janowsky states: "In the main, while there has been great emphasis upon the Jewish center as a unifying agency, the cleavage of previous decades has remained: some have envisaged a distinctively Jewish purpose for the Jewish center, while others have leaned toward non-sectarianism."[13]

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[9]The best history of the early years of Jewish Community Centers is a recent doctoral dissertation by David Kaufman entitled *"Shul with a Pool"* (Brandeis University, 1994). It is currently being prepared for publication in book form.
[10]Oscar I. Janowsky, *The JWB Survey* (New York: Dial Press, 1948), p. 237.
[11]*Ibid.*, p. 244.
[12]*Ibid.*
[13]*Ibid.*, p. 244.

In the years following the Janowsky report, many of the same tensions about the issue of the Center's Jewish mission remained. But as Jews became more at home in America -- both more integrated and more assimilated -- the Center began to reevaluate its role and purpose. As noted earlier, this process culminated in the JWB's Commission on Maximizing Jewish Educational Effectiveness of Jewish Community Centers (COMJEE) that began deliberations in 1982 and published its report in 1984. In a clear and direct fashion, the report argued for the centrality of Jewish education to the mission of JCCs and asserted the unique role that Centers can play in lifelong Jewish learning.

A small number of Jewish Community Centers had placed Jewish education on their agenda several years before the COMJEE report. (In fact, informants at most of our six sites claimed that they had done so in the 1970s). Certainly, the Commission's work galvanized the Center movement and represented a dramatic shift in the priorities and mission of Jewish Community Centers across North America. Despite earlier efforts to improve the Jewish educational mission of Centers, "what we are now witnessing is different in depth and intensity than anything that has preceded it. More resources, effort, support and passion have been injected into the Jewish focus of centers than ever before."[14] Recent research has documented the expansion of Jewish educational programs in the Centers, consistent with the COMJEE recommendations.[15]

The potential role of JCCs as places for Jewish education was given further impetus by the new concerns in the Jewish community at large about intermarriage, assimilation and the future of the Jews as a viable and dynamic community in North America. The 1990 National Jewish Population Survey[16] and the report of the Commission on Jewish Education in North America[17] raised serious questions and challenges about Jewish education and Jewish "continuity."

In May of 1995, the JCCA released a follow-up report to the original COMJEE. This second effort, *COMJEE II: The Task Force on Reinforcing the Effectiveness of Jewish Education in JCCs*, delineated specific recommendations to help move the

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[14]Barry Chazan and Richard Juran, "What We Know About Jewish Education in Jewish Community Centers," in *What We Know About Jewish Education*, edited by Stuart L. Kelman (Los Angeles: Torah Aura, 1992), p. 171.
[15]*Assessing The Jewish Educational Effectiveness of Jewish Community Centers.*
[16]Barry Kosmin and others, *Highlights of the National Jewish Population Survey* (New York: CJF, 1991).
[17]*A Time to Act.*

educational mission of JCCs forward. In an introductory section of this report, entitled "Maximizing Jewish Educational Potential," COMJEE II outlined a set of outcomes for a Center that "seeks to reach its potential as an institution of creative Jewish continuity"--including items such as "have an ambiance that is warm, embracing and visibly Jewish," "make budgetary provision for Jewish educational experimentation and innovation," and, engage "Jewish educators as part of its staff."

These eighteen paragraphs of descriptive outcomes helped form a set of criteria for our research in evaluating best practice in JCCs. In essence, the description of the Jewishly effective JCC boils down to three words starting with the letter "P": Personnel, Program, and Philosophy. The rest of this report will examine each in turn.

PERSONNEL

Jewishly Committed and Knowledgeable People, Both Lay and Professional

Jewish educational excellence begins with a committed lay and professional leadership, coupled with a Judaically knowledgeable staff. The key components here (in relative order of importance) are:

- the executive director;
- the board;
- the professional Jewish educator; and
- the staff, particularly those who serve in explicitly educational capacities.

The Executive Director

> The literature on effective schools tends to agree on at least one point -- that an essential ingredient of good schools is strong, consistent, and inspired leadership. The tone and culture of schools is said to be defined by the vision and purposeful action of the principal.[18]

As researchers have found in education, in business, and in government, the role of the top professional is central in making any system work well. In Jewish Community Centers, the executive director is clearly the key player in creating a best practice site for Jewish education.

The executives we studied were imbued with the importance of the Jewish mission of their Center and of Centers in general. In some cases, these directors have been well known for years as advocates -- sometimes in print -- for the Jewish mission of Jewish Community Centers. They have a vision about what they want to accomplish and can articulate that vision to their staff and their members. In some cases the executive has a well worked out theory - - one might even say a philosophy -- for Jewish education in the JCC. In other cases, the executive director works instinctively and relies on the wisdom of other staff members, most importantly the Jewish educator, to provide the theory. But without a firm belief in the Jewish educational mission of JCCs on the part of the

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[18]Lightfoot, p. 323.

executive, it is unlikely that anything significant in Jewish education could happen in a Center, no matter what other factors were in place, even a committed lay leadership and staff.

Most broadly, the executive has primary responsibility for projecting a Jewish educational vision and commitment that permeates the agency. More specifically, we can identify four key responsibilities:

1) Bolster the board's commitment to the Center's Jewish educational mission.

2) Advocate for the creation of the Jewish educator position, and extend personal and concrete support to that educator once he or she is in the job.

3) Hire Jewishly knowledgeable professionals for such key tasks as directors of early childhood education, the summer camp, youth programming, and cultural arts.

4) Assure that the staff grows in terms of Jewish knowledge and commitment.

The particular ways in which the executive manages and achieves these goals differ from place to place and from person to person. But no matter how the executive expresses his or her leadership, and no matter what kind of personality and background the executive brings to the position, certain dimensions of the job seem to be constant across all sites.

Flowing from this personal and professional commitment, the educationally "successful" executive director advocates for the creation of a Jewish educator position at the Center. The educator position is probably the single most important "proximate cause" in bringing about advances in Jewish education in a JCC. Part of what the director must do is create that position. He or she must believe in the importance of the job, understand the function of the position, and advocate for it within his or her staff and board. Directors spoke of how they rearranged budgets or raised additional funds in order to pay for the position-- for example, by raising endowments specifically for that purpose.

The next step is to find the right kind of person for the job. Having a clear understanding of the nature of the Jewish educator's role and the possibilities for the Center at that point in time is crucial in making correct decisions in hiring. In all the places we visited, we were impressed with the apparent suitability of the particular educator with the particular environment. The director made sure there was a good fit between the educator and the needs and culture of the particular Center at that point in its development as a Jewish educational institution. As we will point out later, there are a variety of legitimate models for the Jewish educator role in Centers. Accordingly, the

executive needs to have the rigbt concept to match his or her Center and the person hired for the position.

Once the slot has been filled, the director helps integrate the Jewish educator into the life of the Center in supportive and significant ways. This may include introducing the educator to influential lay people or working to assure that the staff is receptive to the advice and assistance of the educator. The educator must be supervised appropriately and positioned well, both in the Center and in the community. To some extent, executives decide how mucb authority and influence -- both formal and interpersonal -- the educator will exercise.

In Centers that we studied, executives provide helpful, supportive supervision. In some Centers, the executives share access to the board with the educator. As a result, the executive helps position the educator to interact well with board members, such as by creating study opportunities at board meetings or at board members' homes. Generally, such executives help the educator develop his or her own relationship with board members. Rather than viewing this access to the board as a threat to their own leadership, these executives encourage such encounters.

The executives assure opportunities for staff to study Judaica with the educator during work time. Some even conduct their own classes in text study, setting a powerful example and role model. As one Center executive put it, "If it doesn't take place during work time, it can't work and it can't send the message you want to send."

In addition, the use of time is critical to the life of the educator. In some cases (though not all), Center executives in these sites conceptualize the time demands on the educator in a manner different from that of other staff. For example, some educators are encouraged to pursue their own personal study and preparation as an integral part of their work day, even though they are not being "productive" as an administrator, programmer, or classroom teacher during those hours. Almost all the educators identify a need for time for their own continuing Jewish study. The Center environment is an activist one and, unlike a university or school, it is not particularly attuned to the need for preparation time. Nevertheless, executives and educators feel that such time for reflection and learning is especially important if the job is to serve as teacher or resident scholar at the JCC.

Next, many of the Center directors at the sites we visited make Jewish commitment a specific, stated requirement in hiring new staff and in promoting veterans. One senior professional reported that she informs prospective hirees -- at the first interview -- that Jewish commitment is an absolute, bottom-line requirement. Apparently, the candor and

simplicity of the message is quite effective, as she reports that several job applicants proceed to withdraw their names from consideration for appointment.

Aside from establishing criteria for hiring new personnel, executives in many of the sites that we studied make the Jewish contribution of staff members already in place an important part of their regular evaluation and a clearly stated criterion for promotion. One director reported that over the years, consistent with his long-term strategy for raising the Jewish educational commitment and capability of his professionals, some experienced staff members had left his Center because they felt that they could not conform to the demand for increased personal Jewish involvement and ongoing study of Judaic material.

Executives work to enhance the Jewish knowledge and commitment among the staff. They assure opportunities for staff study by way of study groups or sessions with the Jewish educator. Some encourage their staff to enroll in existing curricular programs such as the Melton Mini-School or Derekh Torah. In other places, this Jewish study revolves around specific situations that Center staff might encounter in their work and the Jewish responses to such situations. For example, some Centers schedule regular sessions on topics such as death and suffering ("why bad things happen to good people"), abortion or alcohol and drug abuse, so that staff members will come to appreciate a Jewish perspective on these matters. In many places, the director personally attends these study sessions, further indicating their importance in the culture of the JCC.

Perhaps the most dramatic example of the executive's commitment to enhancing the Jewish knowledge and commitment of the staff has been the staff educational seminar in Israel. These seminars can have a profound, personal impact on both Jewish and non-Jewish staff members. During the course of our interviews, several staff members reported how they (or their colleagues) underwent a significant turn toward a Jewish educational commitment after a JCC-sponsored seminar to Israel. As one executive remarked in a recent study of the 1989-1990 JCCA Executive Fellows Program (in Israel):

> Personally, it touched me because it gave me the opportunity to really discuss and become in touch with my Judaism, which I really hadn't been for a long time. In terms of what a JCC director does, I had been in touch more with the mechanics of it than I was with the emotions of it. So the three months that I had a chance just to feel myself as a Jew, when I got back, made a profound change in my professional life. ... It influenced

almost every program at the agency, as well as board meetings.[19]

Executives whom we interviewed spoke of their on-going efforts to subsidize and organize Israel Educational Seminars, a budgetary item that can readily be dropped in hard times.

Some Centers have instituted a self-evaluation in which the executive (often using the Jewish educator as a content resource person) embarks on a critical and ongoing examination of the Jewish content, and potential for Jewish content, in all programs, activities, and departments of the Centers. This analysis prompts a search for changes to improve the Jewish program in these domains. For example, the residential camping program at one Center went through such an evaluation and its internal report (quoted below) urged the hiring of

> a person on staff with a strong Jewish background (rabbinical student or person getting a masters in Jewish studies), who could be a source of Jewish programming and Jewish knowledge and who could also serve in some other capacity at camp. Besides a functioning staff member, few, if any Jewish resources are available at Camp. . . Resource books, tapes and videos would be valuable for staff. . .

When we visited this Center, these recommendations report were already well on the way toward implementation (beginning with the hiring of the Judaica resource person).

In addition to assuring the enhancement of the staff's Jewish knowledge and commitment, the executives in these sites work to assure a board committed to the Center's Jewish education agenda. One technique for doing so emphasizes building and attending to long-term relationships with individuals. In addition, some executives encourage Jewish study by the board members, either at the formal meetings or by creating other contexts. We learned about Jewish study evenings designed primarily for the board members, or classes exclusively for board members conducted by the Jewish educator, or, of course, the Israel Educational Seminars for the board. In one place the board seminar served as the launch for the entire Jewish educational rethinking of the Center.

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[19]Steven M. Cohen, "The 1989-90 JCCA Executive Fellows Program." 1993. N.Y.: JCCA.

The executive who is deeply committed in his or her own Jewish life serves as a powerful role model for board members. However, the director need not be Jewishly knowledgeable at an advanced level. Those who are not advanced demonstrated their personal commitment to Jewish learning by hiring a Jewishly learned educator and by visibly participating in staff programs. Of course, in the small number of cases where the executive was knowledgeable, the impact on board members could be even more powerful. In such situations the executives functions as a kind of "surrogate rabbi" for members of the board. One director said that he sees his own role as challenging lay leaders so that they come to adopt more Jewishness in their lives.

Finally, beyond functions internal to the JCC, Center executives have an external role to play as well. The director manages relations with local synagogues, Jewish schools, Federation, and other relevant institutions. These relationships have become thicker -- and in some cases more complex -- as Centers have taken on more responsibility for Jewish education.

The Board

A Jewishly committed executive cannot go very far in instituting Jewish educational excellence without the acquiescence, if not the full support, of the board. As a result, executives committed to Jewish education work to bring the board along, to sustain and enlarge board support for the Center's Jewish educational mission. In this regard, the board plays several crucial roles:

1) It hires (and fires) the executive.

2) It influences numerous decisions large and small, affecting the whole tenor of the agency with respect to Jewish education.

3) It exerts ultimate authority over the budget, affecting such decisions as whether to employ a professional Jewish educator, how much to invest in Jewish educational programming, and how much to charge the clients for those services.

4) Individual board members can become the enthusiastic sponsors of specific Jewish programs, facilitating them through their credibility, insights, and financial support.

Prior to undertaking our research, we had suspected that board members in educationally effective Centers would contain a core group with extraordinary personal

commitment to Jewish life. After all, if some JCCs are more committed to Jewish education than others, and if the boards are indeed a critical ingredient in fostering that commitment, then it stands to reason that such boards should consist of members who are unusually committed to Jewish practice and learning in their own lives.

Instead -- and, perhaps paradoxically -- we found that board members' Jewish background in the best practice sites were not terribly different from that of lay leaders of Federations, social service agencies, and defense agencies. Typically, they are Conservative and Reform synagogue members, who send their children to religious schools and support the Federation campaign. But they are not distinguished by high levels of personal Jewish involvement in the home or synagogue, or by a great degree of prior Jewish learning. The very typicality of these board members' Jewish involvement and learning testifies to the strength of their Centers' commitment to Jewish education, and to the leadership of the executive who has nurtured boards that support their Centers' Jewish mission.

Indeed, with respect to the Jewish education agenda, some board members were simply non-obstructionist; insofar as support for Jewish education did not compete with needed resources, they would offer no objection. (Indeed, as one executive confided, with some board members, the most he could hope for is that they simply "stay out of the way.") At the other extreme, we met leaders who were insistent upon the Jewish education mission as essential to Center and to their own ongoing participation. When pushed, not a few of these said they would resign from the board in the unlikely eventuality that their Center abandoned its commitment to Jewish education.

The latter were the sort of board members who were open to personal learning and participation in Jewish education. They were either genuinely interested, or saw such participation as vital to their successful "career" as a Jewish leader in the Center and community. We sensed that the impact committed key board members bring to the Jewish educational endeavor may extend far beyond their small numbers. Effective support for the Jewish educational mission can be maintained by the perpetuation of an inner leadership group (albeit an influential and respected minority) that is willing to defend that mission in hard times, and broaden it in good times.

In that regard, one significant activity that we saw in more than one place was leadership development projects to socialize new board members to the Jewish mission. One site, for instance, conducts a special 3-4 session program (for 40 people) to move new leadership toward support for the Jewish mission of the Center.

For the most part, board members stay out of day-to-day management of Jewish

educational programming. Rather, they allow for the professional autonomy of the educator or Jewishly committed director. Boards viewed the executive as the key to implementing their vision. Some boards came to the Jewish mission and then went out to hire the right executive to realize their dream; in other cases, the director was already in place and he or she (often inspired by the original COMJEE report, the 1989-90 Executive Fellows in Israel program, or some personal experience) moved the board along this path.

We tried to determine how the board came to adopt a strong commitment to Jewish education. Beyond the influence of the executive director (the single most important factor), we identified the following factors:

1) the original COMJEE process, entailing the report and its dissemination during the 1980's by way of personal visits of the national JCCA staff and lay leaders, and through the Biennial Conference of the JCCA.

2) Israel Educational Seminars for boards where specific teachers and programs (through the JCCA Israel Office, Melton Centre of the Hebrew University, Melitz, etc.) seemed to have left strong, positive memories.

3) the impact of the national emphasis by Federations and other Jewish communal agencies on ensuring Jewish continuity and the interest of JCC leadership to be seen as taking part in this continental enterprise.

4) two national leadership development programs (the Wexner Heritage Program and CLAL) entailing study of Judaica with highly proficient teachers.

A combination of the factors above was often given additional support and energy by the arrival of a visiting Jewish educator or scholar (such as from Israel) who helped demonstrate the potential of a "in-house" educator for advancing the Jewish agenda of the Center. The success of the visiting educator was the factor in some cases that helped secure the funding for hiring an educator for the Center staff.

The Jewish Educator

In the Center's day-to-day operation, the Jewish education specialist is the central figure in improving a Center's educational program. To varying extents, the Jewish educator assumes a variety of including the following:

1) Programmer -- the specialist plans, administers, and executes a variety of

educational activities, be it in a specific department or throughout the Center.

2) Resource -- he or she serves to provide Jewish educational advice and materials, generally to other department heads, and particularly to the pre-school and camp.

3) Advocate -- the educator explicitly lobbies for change among staff and lay leaders, trying to raise the Jewish profile of the agency.

4) Teacher -- the educator conducts classes personally, generally with a heavy emphasis on staff and board development (rather than for the members at large).

5) Scholar -- the educator devotes time to study and, sometimes, to writing.

Of the possible functions and activities listed above, which role seems to work the best? JCCs have individually adopted diverse definitions of the Jewish educator job. In any one place, the responsibilities draw upon some, but not all, of the roles outlined above. Most often, the educator serves as programmer, resource and advocate. In one instance, the educator does everything but programming. In one very atypical instance, the educator serves only as a "scholar-in-residence" and occasional resource person. In still other instances, individuals occupying top and near-top professional leadership positions manage to devote considerable time to study and writing, particularly of professional literature. Currently, JCCs have numerous ways of structuring this position and may make their decisions based upon their needs, their current personnel, and the candidates available to fill the position.

The COMJEE II report picks up on the plurality of job definitions by differentiating two main types of educators--"Advanced Jewish Educators and Jewish Programming Specialists."[20] As noted, we saw both "types"-- but even within the types we find significant differences in job definition, as well as previous training and experience.

Critical to the success of the Jewish educator is the proper fit between the expectations and style of the educator with his or her Center and its level of development. Not every Jewish educator or every rabbi would do well in the world of the Jewish Community Center. In our view despite differences among them, the successful JCC educators whom we met shared an ability to fit into the particular culture of the JCC in which they worked, negotiate its complexities and use to advantage the many educational opportunities that a Center can offer.

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[20] COMJEE II, p. 18-19.

Each Center has its own specific ethos, its own symbols, values and way of operating. The educators in the best practice sites were able to feel at home in their Center; they were able to share in its culture and become an insider. Perhaps the most important characteristic of the successful educator is a non-judgmental openness to the people whom he or she meets, many of whom are less Jewishly committed or knowledgeable than the educator. Although it is true that educators and rabbis in more conventional educational settings such as schools or synagogues are generally more learned and involved than their constituents, the formal settings tend to have established norms or expectations that are acknowledged (though not always attained!) by both the educator and the lay participant. At the Center, however, the educator must be willing to be comfortable with a wide range of behaviors, beliefs and knowledge--in which expectations of "success" or conformity to "what we do here" is very fluid and often undefined. An educator unable to meet the "client where he or she is" will not succeed in a JCC.

Thus a Center educator must be willing to accept the various Jewish choices that Center members may make. For example, we heard an Orthodox educator in one Center enthusiastically talk about a member who had participated in his classes and then joined a local Reform synagogue. Not all educators are able to take such a stance. Those who can, however, will have a far greater chance at success working in a JCC. As one educator put it, "I don't care what Jewish path they [his students] take, but I do want them to be on a path!"

The successful educators were people who understood that other *staff* of the JCC were as much their "clients" as were the members. Compared to synagogues, Centers have a large number of professionals who come in contact with the lay members. Whether it be the physical education trainers, the counselors at the day camp, the youth advisers leading teen programs or the cultural program directors, Jewish educators in Centers need to view the various staff members as a prime audience for their Jewish educational work.

The good practice, then, entails the educator maintaining standards that are appropriate for their agencies, in particular, that are consistent with the expectations of the board and the director. Conversely, the Centers (read: the directors) are responsible for helping the educator understand the organizational culture and the limits it imposes.

Building relationships, inside and outside the Center: The Jewish educator serves important roles both inside and outside the Center's walls. Within the Center itself, as

noted, the educator may serve as direct teacher of staff and lay people. Indeed, the educator may be a kind of quasi rabbi for lay leadership and professional staff of the JCC. The job embraces a very important "outside" dimension as well; like the executive director, the educator must develop relationships with local rabbis, Federation professionals, and others in the community.

In both domains -- within the Center and in relation to outside agencies and people -- one recurrent theme we discerned was the need for the educator to develop a sense of trust in those with whom he or she interacted, a "best practice" important for all Center workers but especially crucial for the Jewish educator. The ambivalent feelings contemporary Jews harbor toward Judaism, coupled with the changing place of Jewish education in the JCC, combine to raise at least the potential for resistance, suspicion, and even antagonism on the part of some staff members toward the Jewish educator and what he or she represents. Some staff members might wonder, as one worker told us, "Who is this guy and what does he want from me?" One of the educators, for example, remarked that he needed a good deal of time to show the key professionals and lay leaders that he was worthy of their trust, and that he was not out to make them "religious." Complicating the situation is that, of course, the educator *does* have an educational mission, and though the suspicions of the staff may be overblown, educators do aspire to influence and change the people with whom they interact.

The issue of trust is related to the educators' needs to build relations around the Center by personal connections and relationships with the entire staff. Educators in the best practice sites try to meet with the various staff members in a variety of ways -- in some cases through being a teacher, and in others by developing informal friendships. In one Center, the Jewish educator goes out to lunch on a monthly basis with a number of staff members, including those seemingly remote from his work, such as the maintenance director of the Center. In these ways he gets to know many people around the JCC -- both staff and members -- and is able to develop real relationships that help him do his job more effectively.

Trust plays an important role in the educators' relationships with the "outside" community as well. Clearly the most complicated of these relationships is with the local rabbis. These relationships become more complicated still when the Jewish educator at the Center is a rabbi, as was true in three of the sites that we studied. Local rabbis worry about the Center becoming a competing Jewish institution, "a pool with a shul," as the old saying (quoted to us by more than one Center professional) has it. To avoid conflicts with rabbis, Center educators refrain from performing ritual functions, and channel their

JCC "students" toward various synagogues for life cycle events and conversions to Judaism. One educator (a rabbi) who has become particularly close with members of his Center's board told us that he is scrupulous in not performing weddings, funerals, and other rites of passage, even for board members who find he is the one rabbi to whom they feel close.

Despite their self-imposed constraints, it is also clear that rabbis working in Jewish Community Centers come to play a kind of rabbinic role. One such educator reported that he very rarely is asked for rulings on questions of Jewish law and ritual. However, he is asked to serve as an authoritative teacher and a repository of information and ideas about Judaism, often demonstrating Judaism's relevance to contemporary situations. In that he quite closely resembles his rabbinic peers in other JCCs.

Staff Development: Deepening Knowledge, Comfort, and Commitment

Like other Jewish institutions, JCCs must cope with difficulties in recruiting and retaining highly qualified staff members. The key issue for JCCs today is not merely budgetary constraints. Rather, in light of the increasing emphasis on Jewish education as critical to Centers' mission, it is in finding and developing staff who will meet the new and expanded set of criteria that flow from a commitment to Jewish education. Some Centers (those with only a moderate commitment to a Jewish education agenda) need concern themselves only with such qualifications as group skills, or pedagogic abilities. A minimal level of Jewish commitment and knowledge generally suffices for most line positions in such places. In fact, some Centers regularly turn to non-Jews to serve as pre-school teachers, youth workers, camp counselors, and related personnel; and, by definition, non-Jews lack both Jewish commitment and Jewish knowledge (which is not to say that they are incapable of acquiring at least one and perhaps both, in time). Under these circumstances, Centers committed to a Jewish education agenda have no choice but to institute vigorous, comprehensive, and effective programs of staff development with the twin goals of enhancing Jewish commitment and deepening Jewish knowledge.

In the Centers that we studied, we saw staff involved in a variety of study opportunities to enhance their Jewish knowledge, and, more broadly, their comfort level and confidence in their Judaic competence. These programs included staff classes on a monthly basis and staff classes every week. The program of study often was based around one of the two major adult study curricula currently in use in JCC adult education, the Florence Melton Adult Mini-School or Derekh Torah. Both programs provide a structured curriculum in "basic Jewish literacy" and are not specifically "job-related." In other words, the goal is to improve the Jewish knowledge of the staff irrespective of its immediate relationship to the staff member's work. Staff members from a wide range of departments attend, including both Jews and non-Jews.

Ideally, participation in some of these programs comes to be seen as a matter of professional recognition. One Center we visited is about to launch a Derekh Torah course for its staff. This new class will require staff members to apply and be accepted, and it involves a considerable amount of commitment in coming to the sessions and preparing for classes. Nonetheless, when announced, there was already a considerable amount of interest. It seems likely that the enthusiasm expressed emanates from a combination of a number of factors that may be instructive: the respect the staff holds for the Center's Jewish educator (who will teach the class); the fact that the executive

director supports the course and views Jewish learning as a desideratum in his staff; and the fact that the course is considered part of one's work and takes place during working hours.

Another Center has made Jewish study mandatory for its pre-school teachers, all of whom are studying Jewish texts for two hours a week. One key ingredient here: the teachers are paid for their time spent learning. The executive director made it a priority to raise the additional funds necessary (many thousands of dollars) to keep the entire system's teachers on salary while in the classroom.

Directors and educators at the more educationally effective Centers viewed Judaic staff development and enrichment as a long process taking place over several years. At one point, we felt as if we were talking to field generals in a military campaign as they spoke about how they, in effect, captured or converted one department after another to the cause of Jewish education They might replace a Jewishly weak with a Jewishly committed department head, either by way of change in personnel or the result of nurturing a growing commitment to Jewish life through classes, personal relationships, and Israel Educational Seminars. Directors and their senior Jewish educators were capable of making penetrating assessments of the extent to which each key staff member was committed to the Jewish education agenda. (Upon speaking with the staff members, we were also impressed with the seeming accuracy of these assessments.) A best practice emerges here: the ability on the part of senior professionals to accurately assess the level of Jewish knowledge and commitment of their professional subordinates.

While the techniques may differ from one Center to another, the Jewish enrichment of the staff occupies (or should occupy) a central place in the process of turning Centers into Jewishly effective educational institutions.

THE PROGRAM

Virtually any JCC program has potential as a Jewish educational venue, given the right blend of support, knowledge, creativity, skill, and time. No JCC that we saw taps the Jewish educational possibilities in all areas, and certainly some programs have more obvious potential for Jewish education than others. For example, the physical education program does lend itself to some features of Jewish education (e.g., through posters of Jewish athletes; scenes of Israel; a Jewish sports heroes hall of fame; Hebrew signage). But no one would argue that it is as centrally related to the Jewish education mission as, say, early childhood education or classes for adults.

Focusing on the prime areas for Jewish education, we identified five distinct areas where one could say that Jewish education was an explicit part of the program. They are roughly definable in terms of the age of their principal target populations: early childhood education, summer camps, teen programs, adult education (with several varieties), and senior adult programming Our intention is not to describe specific programs in great detail. Rather we seek to provide a synthetic overview of some of the principles that seem to guide the most educationally effective programs within each type.

Some of these principles of best practice cut across the board and are worthy of mention at the outset:

1) The program is directed by an educationally oriented department head who is personally committed to the Jewish education agenda.

2) The Center's Jewish education specialist and the department head maintain a good working relationship, such that the specialist can exert significant influence over the program content and the training of the staff.

3) The staff is recruited, trained, supervised, and developed in line with the goal of securing enhanced Jewish commitment and greater Jewish knowledge.

4) The department head has developed, adopted, and transmitted to the staff a detailed "curriculum" containing the Jewish educational objectives of the program. The program opens up possibilities for Jewish growth, leading clients to opportunities for more intensive Jewish living or learning, be it at home, in the JCC, or in other settings (synagogue, school, Israel, etc.).

5) The program succeeds in "general" terms. That is, clients are attracted to the nursery school because it is a good school (even *without* the Jewish program) compared to other options in community. The camp is known to be as good as any of its competitors. The program capitalizes upon and addresses the clients' need for

community and recreation; in other words, it uses all of the educational tools peculiar to informal education, even within more traditional Jewish educational programs at the Center.

6) The program's director establishes and makes frequent use of open channels of communication with the learners and their families so as to learn of any difficulties and immediately take corrective action.

Throughout our discussions of the five major areas of Jewish educational programming, we will see many of these points emerge. Our primary goal in these discussions below is to try to understand just how and why certain programs stand out above the others in the Center movement.

Early Childhood Education

Recent research has amply demonstrated what Jewish educators have known instinctively: parents of young Jewish children constitute an ideal target group for educational intervention[21]. The ability to draw families into a Jewish program through Early Childhood Jewish Education is one of the most obvious and important "gateway" possibilities that JCCs can offer.[22] More pointedly, some senior professionals have made a strategic decision to make the pre-school their number one priority for Jewish educational intervention. In their view, Centers' resources are limited, as is their ability to reach, influence, and Jewishly educate their constituency. The pre-schools offer the possibility of influencing both children at an early age, and perhaps even more importantly, their parents. Parents of pre-school youngsters are especially amenable to advice from educational experts, are often immersed in a period of transition as Jews themselves, and, with two or more children, are likely to spend upwards of ten to twelve years in direct contact with the Center's early childhood program.

At its best, the good JCC pre-school is directed by a skilled and learned Jewish

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[21]Susan Wall, *Parents of Preschoolers: Their Jewish Identities and Implications for Jewish Education* (unpublished doctoral dissertation, Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1994.)

[22]See the important studies by: a) Ruth Ravid and Marvell Ginsburg, "The Effect of Jewish Early Childhood Education on Jewish Home Practice," *Jewish Education*, Vol. 53, #3, Fall, 1985. b) Ruth Pinkenson Feldman, *The Impact of Jewish Day Care Experiences on Parental Jewish Identity* (American Jewish Committee, 1988).

educator who works closely with a highly motivated, stable teaching staff. The director herself (most are women) is deeply committed to the Jewish mission of the program and has a strong Jewish background that enables her to deepen the Judaic dimension of the program. The responsibilities are *structured* in such a way as to free up the director's time for close, educational supervision of the teachers, rather than the more typical situation in which early childhood directors' are almost entirely engaged by administrative and management issues. Such situations are rare, but we did see a program-- indeed a model that could be emulated-- in which someone had worked to make sure that the early childhood director had the time to function as an educator. We saw that she was assisted by two fully competent administrative assistants who tended to the chores that often overwhelm talented and educationally motivated directors in other Centers.

Generally, even in the best places, teachers tend to arrive with weak Judaica backgrounds,[23] but we did see at least one example in which the director manages to devote a considerable amount of time working individually with the teachers to help them prepare lessons which are rich in Judaic content. We saw an early childhood director who obviously enjoyed an excellent rapport with her teachers. She and the staff know each other for many years. She maintained a personal one-on-one relationship with her teachers and she invested heavily in in-service training for early childhood education generally and the Jewish dimension specifically. She was seen as a mentor and the Jewish educator of her teachers. The mutual respect, support, and confidence were palpable.

Nonetheless, we also noted what may be a significant misunderstanding by the leadership as to the level of Judaica required for teachers in early childhood settings: Several directors noted in their interviews that subject matter knowledge on the nursery school level is not all that difficult for teachers to acquire. It appears that these school directors believe that because of the *age* of the children, the *knowledge* of the teachers could be minimal-- one step ahead of the students might suffice. In fact, early childhood experts point out that given the extremely fluid and dynamic interactions of education for this young age group, a *greater* knowledge might be required on the part of teachers! Early childhood teachers don't deliver lectures; they "teach on their feet," in Philip

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[23]For example, in a study of educators in three North American communities, only 10% of pre-school teachers were certified in Jewish education and only 4% had majored in Jewish studies in college. See the *Policy Brief on the Background and Training of Teachers in Jewish Schools* (CIJE, 1994) for more on Judaica knowledge of pre-school teachers.

Jackson's term.[24] Knowing how to pull out the right Jewish story and the appropriate Jewish value if two children are suddenly caught up in a fight, for example, requires a richness of background that few teachers in these settings may have.

For these reasons, and consistent with the observations made earlier in this report, the better pre-school directors take pains to Jewishly educate and motivate their staffs. For the most part, these efforts are tailored to the individual teacher. After all, some are non-Jewish, some are only marginally Jewish, and a few come from very strong Jewish backgrounds; moreover, newcomers to the profession need more intensive work than veterans of 10 or 20 years.

As for the execution of the pre-school program itself, several elements distinguish the schools that are educationally effective from a Jewish point of view. The Jewish side to the curriculum emphasizes the annual major Jewish holidays, Shabbat, and some Hebrew language. At their best, teachers blend general and Jewish studies in creative and organic ways. The classrooms are decorated with Hebrew letters, holiday displays, pictures of Israel, and ritual objects, generally at the youngsters' eye-level. In other words, all the critical tools of educational excellence are brought to bear with equal force on the Jewish (as well as the "secular") side of the learning. Nonetheless, some of the early childhood directors and Center executives with whom we spoke expressed a need for more sophisticated and creative curriculum tools that could be used with this age group.

Pre-schools use a variety of techniques to Judaically engage their students' parents. They offer regular workshops, and provide a stream of attractive materials that are sent home with the children (usually focusing upon the upcoming Jewish holidays). We were told of occasions where parents would turn to pre-school directors or teachers (and other JCC staff) as Jewish resources for home activities and for personal direction in the Jewish community. One early childhood director explicitly defined "her students" to be *the entire Jewish family* of her pre-school children. This concept was part of the informal "contract" between parents and school and it was understood and shared by other key members of the JCC staff.

With respect to the future Jewish education of the youngsters, the better early childhood education directors felt comfortable in advocating continuing Jewish education as a goal for their "graduates." So we saw, for instance, a Jewish education fair that sought to present the various future day school and synagogue school options for the pre-

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[24]Philip Jackson, *Life in Classrooms* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, Winston, 1968).

school parents. Taking a strong role in advocating for chilren to continue in Jewish education beyond the pre-school is an important "best practice" element in the better early childhood programs we observed.

It is obvious from our observations that JCC pre-schools are a central component of most Centers and represent a huge opportunity for Jewish educational intervention. Center executives and Jewish educators are well aware of the potential that these programs have in making an impact of contemporary Jewish families, both through the children and the parents. In all of the sites that we visited the professional leadership expressed a desire to now take the pre-school to the next level-- through increased staff development, a focus on appropriate curriculum materials, and expanded offerings in family education. The next few years will no doubt show a marked emphasis on this domain in the arena of JCC Jewish education. The general feeling in the best practice sites is that the possibilities are great and the potential of these programs needs only to be tapped.

We came away from our research convinced that the national JCC Association can play an important role in addressing the needs of early childhood Jewish education. However, the role of the JCCA in this process must be carefully thought out and delineated. The JCCA, with the assistance of the best and the brightest JCC Jewish educators, ought to serve as a catalyst that stimulates local JCCs to improve the content and quality of their early childhood programs. This may come through a combination of curriculum development projects, programs for pre-school directors, or in-service education for early childhood teachers in JCCs. The JCCA role might include conferences, seminars, model curriculum publications, guidelines, consultants, and the like. It is clear, however, from the range of settings which we observed that any effort on the national level must be suited to specific local conditions and must take into account the active involvement of teachers, early childhood directors, Jewish educators, and other local interested parties and stakeholders. Striking the balance between local input and national expertise will help insure the level of quality needed to improve the field and assist in mobilizing the necessary local support for proposed innovations.

Summer Camps -- Day and Overnight

For a half century and more, summer camps sponsored by synagogue movements, Zionist youth movements, and Yiddishist associations have offered Jewish educational

experiences to tens of thousands of youngsters. Although no definitive studies have successfully measured the impact of these camps, anecdotal and impressionistic accounts of these camps' "alumni" suggest that they have indeed played a significant role in shaping the Jewish identity of many of their former campers and counselors.

In contrast with these ideologically sponsored camps, the JCC camps have historically adopted a less pronounced Jewish profile, in part because they have catered to a Jewishly and denominationally diverse clientele. Today, almost all Centers of reasonable size sponsor day camps during the summer; in addition, JCCs sponsor 22 residential (or "overnight") camps. The increasing emphasis on the Jewish educational agenda has affected the camps, in fact, some claim that the camps were the early incubators of the JCCs' turn toward a greater emphasis on Jewish education.

As with the pre-school (and with the JCC itself), Jewish educational excellence in camps begins with a director who is committed to the Jewish educational mission. Either he or she is personally capable of imparting that mission, or the director makes sure to hire a Jewish educator to recruit and train an appropriate staff and to design and implement the Jewish curriculum. (Indeed, camps noted for Jewish educational excellence do have a curriculum -- a defined set of Jewish educational goals and specific procedures for how to achieve those goals.)

The JCC camps that have managed to make progress in boosting the Jewish educational content to their camp experience conduct pre-Shabbat programs, teach Hebrew songs, and provide what may be called Israeli or Hebrew "decoration" to the program (e.g., Hebrew bunk names or sports teams). One camp devotes different weeks to different Jewish ethical themes (e.g., kindness to animals) that have universal appeal and that can be transmitted easily by staff with less Judaic knowledge, be they Jewish or not.

As noted earlier, one Center we visited had engaged in a thorough and highly critical evaluation of its camp's Jewish content and personnel and had begun to take steps in line with the report's recommendations, such as hiring a professional Jewish educator to supervise the Judaic program.

JCC summer camps face (and work to overcome) several challenging obstacles, of which staffing may be the most daunting. If year-round Center programs (such as the pre-school) encounter difficulties in recruiting, training, supervising, and retaining staff with a modicum of Jewish commitment and knowledge, the camps, especially the day camps, are in an even more tenuous position. Their staff consists by and large of college students and local teenagers. The turnover rates are high and the Judaic background of

many staff members is weak. Accordingly, the camp's Jewish educator is faced with a daunting task. The better camps simply set aside more time and resources for the Jewish educational preparation and supervision of their counselors, both before the camp season gets underway and during the camp season itself.

As with pre-schools, JCC camps must often turn to non-Jews for staff. One of the cardinal principles in informal education, particularly with teenagers, is that one wants the staff to serve as admirable and accessible role models. Non-Jews as counselors simply cannot fulfill that function, and non-committed Jewish counselors may be even worse. It follows that better camps from a Jewish educational perspective are those that manage to hire (and retain from one year to the next) Jewish staff who are comfortable with the camp's Jewish educational mission. They also are able to bring over Israeli staff, a step that offers numerous educational possibilities.

Clearly much remains to be done in this area. Camps need to think through and institute a Jewish educational curriculum. They need to plan and budget for Jewish educational training of the staff. Perhaps most of all, they need to clarify the Jewish mission and goals in regard to summer camp, imagining the successful outcomes of a Jewish camp experience and the unique contribution that JCC camps can make to North American Jewish life.

These and other steps will require a personnel pattern resembling that of the Center as a whole: a director (in this case, of the camp) who is committed to introducing Jewish educational content; a professional Jewish educator who is given the backing and support necessary to institute change; and a staff that is ready to accept training and supervision designed to enhance their Jewish commitment, Jewish knowledge, and the skills needed to transmit both to their campers.

One clear example of "best practice" that we saw in this domain was the willingness of some Centers to engage in a process of self-reflection and evaluation in regard to the Jewish educational dimension of their camp programs. Viewing the camps in the light of the Center's Jewish educational potential and making recommendations to improve the staffing and the programming of the camps is the first and most crucial step toward realizing the full potential of JCC camping.

Teen Programs

Through the 1960's (or thereabouts), urban JCCs served as major centers of Jewish teenagers' social lives. Many of today's JCC lay leaders got their start in Jewish life

"hanging out" at the JCCs of their youth. Today, the Center's aspiration to serve as the surrogate for the largely defunct Jewish urban neighborhood is especially challenged in the case of the suburban Jewish teenagers. Ideally, the informal and multidimensional nature of Centers create the potential for them to compete with the youth "mall culture" that is so prevalent in American suburbs. Thus at a JCC a teenager can play basketball, swim in a pool, take part in a play and engage in meaningful volunteer activities for his or her community.

The geographical dispersal of teenagers in suburbia has undoubtedly taken its toll on teen participation in all sectors of Jewish life, making it unlikely that many 14-16 year-olds will casually gravitate to the JCCs as their urbanized parents did. A recent article on informal Jewish education of teenagers concludes:

> It is important for successful youth programs to espouse an ideology that expresses a certain amount of idealism. Such idealism calls upon the young person to give up some of his or her own needs to serve some nobler cause. For this idealism to be placed in the service of Jewish identity, it should relate to the Jewish people or religion.[25]

Truth be told, no Jewish agency or type of agency is doing a particularly good job in attracting and organizing Jewish teenagers. The synagogue youth movements, Zionist youth movements, and supplementary high schools all report difficulties, often with stagnant or declining levels of participation.

In this context, we can readily understand why few executives and other Center professionals pointed to their teen programs (aside from summer programs) as models of Jewish educational excellence. We did, however, see instances where Centers managed to recruit large numbers of teens for a variety of community service projects, such as assisting the elderly or improving the environment. Thus, if there is one area in which Centers excel with this age group, it may be in the realm of providing volunteer opportunities that appeal to teenagers' keen sense of idealism.

JCCs have been successful in recruiting thousands of youngsters every year to the JCC Youth Maccabi Games. Not only are over 4,000 youngsters involved, so are over 8,000 parents and family members (more or less). At minimum, the games provide an arena (literally) for these 12,000 or so people to gather under Jewish auspices. In

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[25]H.A. Alexander and Ian Russ, "What We Know About... Youth Programming" in Kelman.

addition, they surround these people with a Jewish and Hebrew environment, and sponsors are looking for ways to augment the Jewish educational dimension. Significantly, the Center movement is exploring ways of bringing the games to Israel, consistent with a larger effort to emerge as a significant organizer of Israel travel by North American Jews, especially for teenagers.

Adult Education and Jewish Culture

In the six Centers that we examined closely, the most developed area of Jewish programming was in the area of adult education. The programs took a variety of forms:

1) Holiday workshops (usually connected with the pre-school, as noted earlier), and other forms of Jewish family education.

2) Libraries: books, videos, magazines.

3) Cultural events (Israel fair, book fair, film festival, musical presentations, theater, exhibits).

4) Lectures.

5) Courses, a special subset of which consists of two structured programs for teaching basic Judaism.

Taken together, these programs lend a significantly different atmosphere to the JCC than in 1948, when Janowsky reached his downbeat conclusions regarding the absence of Jewish educational content in JCC programming, as reported above. Taken as a whole, these programs even represent considerable progress over the pre-COMJEE I period.

To be sure, each form of adult education programming represents a distinctive attempt to engage Jewish adults in a particular fashion. Some of them merit special comment.

Jewish family education as an identified field first began to emerge during the 1980s, although JCCs' early childhood programs have been operating in this area for decades. One beginning point for the field was with conventional Jewish educators who felt frustrated at attempts to educate children who returned to homes that did not or could not support the lessons being taught in the classroom. Moreover, parents seemed interested in learning what their children learned and in spending time with their children in a context that combined recreation with education. Today, both JCCs and synagogues

sponsor various forms of Jewish family education.

As currently constituted, Jewish family education revolves around the children in school, be it the toddlers in the JCC pre-schools or the grade school children in the day schools and supplementary schools. As a result, a large fraction of those attending JCC holiday workshops are the Center's own pre-school youngsters and their parents (community-wide events, such as Purim carnivals have wider appeal). To JCC professionals, these parents represent an ideal target audience. They are relatively young and open to intervention. They are generally not otherwise affiliated with Jewish institutions. And they are keenly aware of their responsibilities as parents. One Center that we visited actually sends staff members into the homes of new parents to engage in Jewish educational activities with the family where the families live. Centers also offer childbirth classes and parenting classes as a way of bringing new parents into the life of the JCC.

In another sphere, the expansion of JCC libraries (of books, periodicals, video tapes, and more), and, more significantly, the numerous cultural events offered by JCCs highlight the Centers' significant role as purveyors and sponsors of Jewish culture. JCCs appear to be uniquely equipped (in their size, space, ambiance) to take the lead in housing, exhibiting, and merchandising Jewish culture. If American Jews support and consume a distinctive culture, they probably do it more through the JCCs than through any other sort of institution.

The single lecture, or lecture series, are among the most popular vehicles. They aim at drawing large audiences and usually involve well-known figures from the Jewish or general community speaking on issues relevant to Jewish concerns. Their virtue is that they serve social as well as educational purposes, bringing together a large number of people who renew their ties to one another. Their shortcomings are also well understood by Center educators. Lectures are, by definition, one-shot affairs, providing little opportunity for sustained growth and building relationships. The educators with whom we spoke, then, saw lectures -- with all the glitz and showmanship that may accompany them -- as no substitute for more the intensive and sustained Jewish education that takes place in ongoing classes.

The classes offered in JCCs generally focus on classic Jewish themes, topics or texts. They are taught by the Center's own Jewish educator, rabbis, or local teachers. In general, they aim at beginners or inexperienced learners. Classroom texts are English translations and the topics appeal to a less knowledgeable clientele. One Center's typical offerings, for example, included a course entitled "Does the World Need Jews?" which met once a month and dealt with issues such as the idea of being a chosen people. In

addition this same Center offered another course based around Abba Eban's television series "Civilization and the Jews," a course called "How to Celebrate as a Jew" (which met in advance of the major Jewish holidays), a monthly course in the classic rabbinic text Pirkei Avot, and a monthly discussion group on "The Future of the American Jewish Community."[26]

Nonetheless there were exceptions, places where more intensive or advanced Jewish educational offerings could be found. In one Center, for example, students could enroll for a weekly, year-long Talmud class taught by a leading academic scholar in the field. This JCC had the advantage of being located in an area with many available intellectual resources, and the Center served a population that could provide the kind of students appropriate for such a course. Nonetheless, this is not a case of merely responding to the clientele's needs. Offering an advanced Talmud class is precisely the kind of program that attracts a more Jewishly committed membership to the Center. Although the class may enroll relatively small numbers of students, its very presence helps shape, sustain, and strengthen the institutional image that this Center cares about Jewish education, and is able to appeal to the cognoscenti as well as the novices. Other advanced offerings included a weekly course in Jewish philosophy, a course in Mishnah and a course on "Great Figures of the Bible" (based on the Elie Wiesel video series).

The Jewish education program coordinator in this particular JCC believes that the key is having the funding to pay top-notch teachers enough to lead such courses. Thus the Center has created individual endowment funds to pay for these classes. Indeed, this JCC aims at raising funds for many endowments in the $5000- $10,000 range.

Two "turn-key" adult education programs: As mentioned above, across Jewish Community Centers the two most popular programs for intensive (and largely introductory) adult Jewish learning are the Melton Mini-School and Derekh Torah, both of which have had a distinctive, nearly exclusive association with Jewish Community Centers. In a very real sense, the Melton Mini-School and Derekh Torah programs have been born, nurtured, and developed primarily within the precincts of JCCs in North America. Although the programs have certain similarities, some Centers offer both programs. In such places, Derekh Torah is usually seen as the more basic program; its

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[26]In addition this Center runs an unusual visiting scholar and artist program which brings five different people into the community over the course of the year to speak and teach both at the JCC and at local synagogues and Federation.

graduates are steered toward the Melton Mini-School as the next step in Jewish study.

Derekh Torah was created by Rabbi Rachel Cowan around ten years ago at Congregation Ansche Chesed in New York and then moved to the 92nd Street Y. The program emerged out of Cowan's work with mixed faith couples, some of whom were already married, and others of whom were considering either conversion or marriage to a Jew without conversion. The program sought to introduce non-Jews to the basics of Judaism in a serious and intellectually stimulating fashion. The Jewish partners, in cases where this applied, were also encouraged (or required) to attend. Often these Jewish partners were ignorant or estranged from Judaism.

As the program evolved, the fundamental orientation toward non-Jews or interfaith couples remained in place; but it grew to include Jews simply seeking knowledge about Judaism, not only those in an interfaith relationship. Typically, people apply to the program and are interviewed by the teacher in advance. In one locale that we visited, several students were newcomers to the community. Derekh Torah seemed to be an access point into a social network for (mostly single) Jews. Central to the program is its social dimension. Classes meet in the homes of the instructors or student homes and are bracketed by informal meeting time.

Derekh Torah is not a conversion class per se, though in some places rabbis use it for that purpose. The curriculum is a set of topics that are covered in the weekly meetings over an academic year. The instructor has considerable latitude in adapting the curriculum to his or her own interests or abilities, as well as to the interests of the class. Derekh Torah is a 30-week program in which classes of around 15 students study and discuss Jewish history, theology and Jewish living. Classes meet once a week for two hours and include topics such as ethics, the Sabbath and holidays, prayer, dietary laws, life cycle events, Israel, and various other issues.

The concept of the Melton Mini-School was invented by a lay leader, Florence Melton of Columbus, Ohio. There was a need, in her view, for a program of learning that would address the basic "Jewish literacy" needs of adults in a serious and intensive way. Melton believed that such adults would be hesitant to attend classes in synagogues, even where they were members, because they would not wish to display their ignorance. The JCC, a more neutral area, would be an ideal setting for such programs.

Florence Melton turned to The Melton Centre for Jewish Education of The Hebrew University to develop a curriculum. The program calls for a two-year course of study with weekly meetings, with each built around certain key topics and themes. Anecdotal reports indicate that the program clearly appears to be successful -- both in terms of the

quality of learning that takes place and the satisfaction of the students in the course. In fact, in some places, students have asked to continue beyond the two years of the curriculum. Today the program functions in over 20 sites around the country, mostly in Jewish Community Centers.

The curriculum consists of five courses. One focuses on "functional Jewish terminology;" another "essential Jewish ideas as they unfold in ... sacred texts;" a third probes "Dilemmas of Jewish Living" such as assimilation and antisemitism in the past and present; a fourth takes the student through the Jewish life cycle; and a fifth looks at "issues in Jewish ethics" in a variety of contexts. Taken in their entirety, these courses certainly provide what may be regarded as a valuable introduction to Jewish life and literacy.

Like Derekh Torah, the Melton Mini-School relies on good teachers for its success. The Melton Mini-School requires a two-year commitment on the part of the student; Derekh Torah one year. The Melton Mini-School seems to be less oriented toward the interfaith couple. Both programs have also been flexible enough to be used in ways different from the original design. For example, both Derekh Torah and the Melton Mini-School curriculum have been used for staff classes in JCCs.

The popularity of these two programs in the JCC world says something about the conditions and culture of Jewish education in the Center movement. Both programs provide an introduction to Judaism. To varying extents, the programs can appeal to members of interfaith couples Both emphasize a social, community-building approach, and both are intent upon utilizing dynamic teachers who are non-judgmental, engaging, enthusiastic, and open. Last, both programs come with a ready-made curriculum (the Melton Mini-School being more detailed), relieving the Center educator of that burden. Clearly, the Derekh Torah and Melton Mini-School programs are highly compatible with the needs of JCCs and those of their members.

Senior Adults

Professionals who work closely with senior adults report that they are keen consumers of Jewish educational and cultural services. Understandably, the seniors are the most ethnically committed and least intermarried population group in the Centers. They are chronologically closer to the European experience and Yiddish culture.

As a result, Jewish cultural programming is deeply imbedded in the social and

recreational services offered this group. The professionals who work with them find the experience Jewishly rewarding and challenging. On the other hand, executive directors were not particularly focused upon this group as a target of Jewish educational services. In effect, they were saying that this is one group where expanding Jewish education is not of the highest priority. In part, senior adults were seen as tending to their own Jewish educational needs as an organic outgrowth of their firm ethnic involvement. And, in part, we suspect that directors and JCC educators assigned lower strategic priority to senior citizens than to the parents of young children, whom, it could be argued are both more "at risk" from a Jewish communal point of view, and more potentially pivotal in influence the next generation.

In the last few years, JCCs have increasingly turned to organizing groups of visitors to Israel, a program which has heavily drawn upon senior adults. This age group possesses the time, money, and inclination to travel to Israel, particularly in well-organized groups.

Ambiance

The educational programs noted above occur in a certain place-- the JCC building. Quite obviously, the appearance, physical characteristics, sights, sounds, and smells of the building all serve to influence the conduct of the programs. They send messages even to those members who never directly participate in those programs. These non-verbal messages carry with them Jewish educational import and constitute an important component of what may be called the Center's "hidden curriculum." This dimension has been characterized as "ambiance."[27]

A specifically Jewish ambiance is effected in a variety of ways by the different Centers. The lobbies in these buildings were recognizably Jewish environments -- we saw in a number of the places Hebrew signs prominently displayed. Typically the signs on office doors ("Administrative center," "Senior Services," or "Physical Education Department") gave the title in both English and Hebrew.

Lobbies allowed for displays around upcoming events in the Center's schedule. In the JCCs we looked at, the Jewish calendar was also highlighted through these displays. Pictures or exhibits relating to upcoming Jewish holidays were a regular feature in these

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[27]For more on this topic see Jane Perman, *Enhancing the Jewish Ambiance of Your JCC* (JCCA, 1992).

JCCs.

In a dramatic fashion, one Center has a set of large, almost life-sized dolls, a "family" that has been placed in the lobby of the JCC. (In fact, they've even been named-- "the Rosens"-- and everyone refers to them by name!) The dolls are set up in various ways to reflect some kind of Jewish idea or upcoming Jewish holiday: The family is sitting around the Passover Seder, or they're dressed up for Purim. This display has now become a focal point in the lobby, and, in a humorous way, expresses the underlying Jewish values of the Jewish Community Center.

Another typical aspect of ambiance in the places we studied was having a centrally located kosher cafe. The cafe can also become the locus for other kinds of informal social programming. One Center is in the process of setting up a sound system to pump Jewish music into the halls. Most have gift shops that market Jewish games, novelties, books, tapes, and ritual objects. A few have established Halls of Fame or other exhibits to honor Jewish sports heroes. Many sprinkle posters of Israel or other Jewish themes throughout the building.

The program catalogues produced by some Centers include Hebrew translations for the various activities and divisions of the Center. The prominence given to the Jewish educational activities and the separate flyers produced for those activities also sends a message to the potential consumer about the importance of these aspects of the JCC's total program.

TOWARD AN EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHY FOR THE JCC MOVEMENT

Points of Consensus and Unresolved Questions

As mentioned previously in this report, no uniform philosophy of Jewish education characterizes the entire Center field. Nonetheless, a kind of "theory-in-use"[28] informs the work of the staff and the perspectives of the lay leadership that we observed. Indeed, the JCC theory of Judaism and Jewish education has undergone significant deepening and increasing sophistication over the last ten to fifteen years. Notable are the two COMJEE reports; the numerous continental task forces and local board retreats; the seminars for staff and lay leaders; and the several intensive training programs, particularly for up-and-coming executives. The sheer volume of discussion, both written and oral, has produced and disseminated a philosophy of Jewish education in the JCC movement. It consists of several key elements, the most prominent of which we describe below.

Judaism Can Be Enjoyable

First, Jewish education in the JCC world takes place in an environment that is informal, relaxed and recreational. Members feel good about their JCCs. Centers seem less fraught with the kind of ideological and emotional weightiness present in other Jewish institutions, such as synagogues, day schools, or Federations. The Center is an institution in which one can swim in a beautiful pool, take yoga and dance classes, sing in a chorus, hear noted Jewish authors or scholars lecture, study in a Melton Mini-School or Derekh Torah class every week, and to which you can send your children to summer camp. As such, it is a powerful and attractive place.

Yet, at the same time, Centers, at their educationally effective best, realize that if Judaism is only fun, then members may start to ask: Why should one sacrifice time, energy, emotion and resources for it?[29] While Centers beckon to people with the notion

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[28]Chris Argyris and Donald A. Schon, *Theory in Practice* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1974).

[29]For more on this, see Barry W. Holtz, *Why Be Jewish?* (American Jewish Committee, 1993).

that Judaism is enjoyable (the not-so-subliminal message found in the JCC publicity literature), Center educators often speak about the need to promulgate the idea that Judaism is also "serious," that it offers more than the pediatric variety encountered by so many Jews who ceased their formal Jewish education in their early teens.

Introductory Judaism for the Many, Advanced Judaism for the Few

Beyond the idea that Judaism can be enjoyable, JCCs have built their education around a particular focus -- introductory Judaism. JCCs recognize that they can readily appeal to the most tentative or ambivalent Jews (or seekers and newcomers). Unlike synagogues, JCCs pose few ideological barriers, religious demands, or expectations of liturgical competence that may inhibit newcomers from crossing the threshold. Leaders in the Center movement point out that JCC Jewish education strives to be highly participatory and welcoming. Such education may help create introductory opportunities for those who take advantage of it, and it may also serve as a "feeder" for Jewish education offered by synagogues. Rather than serving an essentially "unaffiliated" population, the National Jewish Population Survey of 1990 showed that 72% of members of JCCs are also members of synagogues. The possibility for a connection between the world of the JCC and the world of the synagogue should not be underestimated.

At the same time, educationally effective Centers strive to balance their heavy emphasis on aspects of introductory Judaism with offerings that appeal to the learned and committed. Though clearly a much smaller constituency than the potential targets for more elementary forms of Jewish learning, the participants in more demanding and more sophisticated educational programs serve to enrich the Center's ambiance, program, and staff. By their commitment and knowledge such participants legitimate ongoing study for staff and other members alike. In essence they give the message: if you begin your Jewish studies now, here is a model of what you could attain.

The JCC as Gateway

Consistent with their emphasis on introductory Judaism, Center professionals see their Centers as serving as gateways to Judaism generally, and to other Jewish institutions such as synagogues and day schools more specifically. This is not to say that Centers see themselves as subordinate to those other institutions. Rather, they view themselves as especially suited to bring formerly uninvolved or unaffiliated Jews into the network of

Jewish institutional and communal life. In this regard, Centers are able to capitalize on the attachment of certain population groups to the JCC for specific services-- in particular, pre-school parents. No professional with whom we spoke saw the Center as the only institution with which Jews should be involved. But many referred to the ability of the Center to serve as the (chronologically) first institution for young adult Jews. If the Center's Jewish educational efforts succeed, then these newly affiliated Jews will go on to other areas of involvement in the home and community.

The New Jewish Neighborhood

Jewish Community Centers are seen as surrogate Jewish neighborhoods. One JCC educator pointed out that especially in suburbia, where a centralized physical neighborhood is hard to define, the JCC can act as a replacement for the "main street" that no longer exists. In that sense the Center becomes a positive alternative to the shopping mall, the suburban pseudo-neighborhood that social scientists have been exploring in recent years. The Center offers a contrast with the pure consumerism of the mall by having its own attractive, air-conditioned indoor space -- with a food concession (kosher in this case!), healthy activities, and opportunities for social and intellectual interaction in a safe environment.

The Center entices people into a setting in which Jewish cultural and educational activities can take place. Some of those activities may be what educational philosophers would call "accidental" learning -- such as seeing the lobby displays and signs on the wall as one heads toward the health club. But accidental learning may well lead toward something more deliberate as well.

Complementarity of the Center and the Synagogue

The clear emergence of the Jewish mission of the Center in the past 15 years has, for all its positive dimensions, also engendered tensions, if not sometimes conflict, with rabbis and synagogues who can often feel especially wary of the Centers' move into Jewish education. Even in 1948, the Janowsky report discussed the tension between these two institutions. All the JCC Jewish educators -- and especially those who are rabbis -- reported that relations between the local synagogue rabbis and the JCC educator required a good deal of work. With respect to relations with area synagogues and rabbis, one

Center educator reported "a truce" and not much more than that.

To be sure, the tensions between JCCs and synagogues are not entirely derived from ideological, cultural, or stylistic differences. Both institutions compete for limited resources in the same communities. The seek leaders, participants, money, and recognition. Synagogues compete with each other and experience some of the same tensions among themselves that they experience with Centers. By strongly supporting the educational mission of JCCs, Federations can and do help minimize potential inter-agency conflicts.

Despite the suspicions voiced by some in the synagogue world, we saw a genuine respect for synagogue Judaism and what synagogue involvement can mean. Executives and Jewish educators in the best-practice sites were themselves personally connected to synagogues and traditional Jewish rituals. They often volunteered their view that their members' Jewish lives would be incomplete without synagogues. A few claimed that one measure of their success is the speed and extent to which their members join and become involved in congregations.[30]

Indeed, as an overarching theme, Center professionals speak of the synagogue and Center operating in a complementary fashion on several levels. They maintain that both institutions serve to enhance Jewish involvement, but do so in different ways and at different points in people's lives. Synagogues and day schools educate youngsters during the elementary school period and during the school year. Centers emphasize the years before and after elementary school and, through their camps, serve school youngsters during the summer.

Executives speak about certain areas (e.g., celebrating life cycle transitions) that are best left to synagogues. So as to avoid intruding on the synagogues' domain, Centers establish clearly defined articulated boundaries . All the Centers we studied prohibit religious services and other functions (such as weddings, bar mitzvahs, etc.) from being conducted at their sites.[31] In one community, the Center refrains from sponsoring an adult education institute (an area seen as the legitimate potential domain of both Centers and

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[30]A recent issue (Fall, 1995) of *JCC Circle*, the magazine published by the Jewish Community Centers Association, includes a feature describing a number of positive examples of Synagogue-Center relationships.

[31]The only exception that we know of is the 92nd Street Y in New York City which runs High Holiday services on its premises. However, this appears to be a longstanding tradition that has been accepted by the local rabbis for many years.

synagogues) so as not to compete with the institute sponsored by local rabbis.

We certainly saw some positive examples of JCCs connecting to local community institutions. One community, for instance, now holds a "Jewish education fair" in which the parents of JCC pre-school children get to meet representatives from the various day and synagogue schools in the area. Another Center sponsored a JCC "Walk though Jerusalem" exhibit that had the full support of all the local synagogues and rabbis. The synagogues appeared as co-sponsors of the event and helped promote the exhibit in their bulletins and through rabbinic sermons or announcements. Still another, in its seasonal catalogue, features local synagogues' adult education.

In some cases, the JCC early childhood program sees itself as a "feeder" for local day schools or supplementary schools. Many have run programs on choosing a synagogue. One Center system has experimented with what is, in effect, a Center-congregation joint membership program for young adults

One interesting example of a Center's relationship with local synagogues was found in the catalogue of an urban JCC. This Center sees itself, in the words of its executive, as "a neutral broker for the community." Its catalogue lists virtually *all* the Jewish study options available in the community, irrespective of the denominational affiliation of the institutions. Hence people receiving the JCC catalogue are also obtaining information about the variety of synagogue offerings in the neighborhood.

In addition, the catalogue has a section called "Opportunities to Volunteer" in which programs offered by a variety of institutions -- synagogues and independent, non-Jewish agencies -- are listed for those who wish to volunteer their time for such agencies as soup kitchens, homeless shelters, school literacy programs, services to the elderly, etc. Even though the catalogue lists non-Jewish agencies as well, the fact that the listing appears in a JCC publication helps people feel that their volunteering experience is connected to their identity as Jews. Moreover, the JCC staff uses these listings as a kind of outreach to individuals in the community, and the people that contact them become part of the Center's own data base.

In one way or another, educationally successful Centers manage to defuse or deflect potential conflict with local rabbis. Centers often invite rabbis to teach at the Center. Where genuine involvement proves too difficult, Centers resort to other politically astute techniques to neutralize potential rabbinic opposition. One Center director consciously recruited leading lay people from local synagogues to serve on the Center board. Eventually, several of these leaders served as Presidents and in other key Center positions. Clearly, Center directors and educators understand that they need to

manage their relations with local rabbis and synagogues. Some do so in order to minimize the nuisance the rabbis could cause, and others operate out of a genuine respect for the importance of rabbis, synagogues, and religious Judaism more broadly. Of course, all this is not a one-way street. How rabbis, at their end, relate to JCCs is outside the purview of this paper, but it is obvious that the relationship between synagogues and JCCs needs to go in both directions.

Israel as a Special JCC Opportunity

JCCs have found a natural fit with Israel in a variety of ways. The fully elaborated Israel-oriented JCC would have the following programming pieces (reflecting an underlying commitment to the Israel dimension). The best practice sites all included various aspects of the list below:

1) Board and staff seminars to Israel

2) Organized travel to Israel (for teens, families, singles, senior adults, etc.)

3) Classes in Hebrew and Israel-oriented subjects.

4) Lectures on Israeli events and culture.

5) Gatherings during momentous points in Israeli history (e.g., outbreak of the intifada, assassination of Prime Minister Rabin).

6) Cultural programming (concerts of Israeli music and dance; exhibitions of Israeli art and books; visits by Israeli artists and performers; items from Israel in the gift shop; Israeli food in the Center's cafe).

7) Hebrew signage.

8) Use of *shlichim* (official Israel emissary), Israel themes, Hebrew terms, etc. in the camps and youth programs.

The JCC movement may yet develop a distinctive role in connecting American Jews to Israel. In some communities, for example, the JCC is the central agency for the community youth trip to Israel and houses the *shaliah* to the community. (The JCCA's national office has now hired a full-time *shlicha* to focus on enhancing the number of teens participating in Israel Experience programs for JCCs.) The trans-denominational character of the JCC may be particularly helpful in addressing the issue of Israel. The fact that the JCCA has an Israel office which is attuned to issues of Jewish education also increases the likelihood that seminars in Israel will go beyond tourism experiences to include serious Jewish study and reflection on educational issues.

Intervention and Confrontation

Beyond the points of consensus described briefly above, we uncovered a key point of disagreement among what might be called leading theoreticians of the Center movement, all of whom staunchly advocate the Jewish educational agenda. To simplify the argument greatly, they differed with respect to the extent to which JCCs ought to be proactive, explicitly change-oriented, and overtly interventionist or confrontational with respect to the Jewish lives of their members and clients.

Jewish Community Centers, partially because of their history and partially because of the social work training of most of their staff, have classically taken what we are calling a "non-confrontational" stance vis-a-vis their participants. What we are seeing in the best practice sites, however, is a philosophic evolution beyond the sort of simplistic prohibition on confrontation that may have been true in the past. In the last fifteen to twenty years, the Center movement has developed several -- albeit diverse-- approaches that sanction some form of educational intervention, while at the same time remaining faithful to the social work teaching that emphasizes respect for individual autonomy.

The least confrontational approach sees the JCC as the Jewish neighborhood, whose purpose, in a phrase popularized by Barry Chazan, is to "pump Jewish oxygen" into those who come there. The JCC "is a new neighborhood of Jewish life."[32] The total ambiance -- including the physical features of the building, the concentration of familiar Jewish faces, the explicitly educational programs, and more -- combine to exert a powerful pro-Jewish message. This approach rejects attempts to push explicitly the member or client in one Jewish direction or another. In the view of this approach, heavy-handedness may only backfire, intimidating or alienating those who may be interested in exploring their Jewishness within the "safe" and unthreatening confines of a JCC.

A second model is somewhat more pro-active. This view maintains that the job of Centers is to put Judaism in front of people, so that they come to understand that Judaism is serious and has something important to say to contemporary life. The educator has no role in pushing any particular perspective -- people need to make their own choices of what to do with what they've learned. The Center may affirmatively push Jewish involvement, but it stops short of advocating particular choices with respect to

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[32] Barry Chazan, "A Late December Day in the JCC," in *Jewish Education and the Jewish Community Center.*

religious belief, observance or lifestyle.

As one educator stated, "My assignment is to put Judaism out on the table, and from there people should make their own decisions about what it would take to put this into their own lives." Another educator remarked that his approach was to tell his students at the JCC, "I don't know what kind of Jew you should be -- it only has to be serious." He believes that his job is not to be "apologetic" for Judaism, but to argue for its seriousness in the Center and in people's lives. One executive saw four Jewish goals for the Center: seeing ongoing regular study of Jewish texts built into people's lives; developing in people a sense of Jewish curiosity; creating an environment where people can develop their own views on Jewish subjects; and using an interactive method in study and learning.

A third position advocates that Center educators must actively challenge the beliefs, values, life choices and religious practices of the people with whom they interact students. In a recent paper, expressing this more assertive approach, Yehiel Poupko of Chicago wrote:

> The JCC's Jewish educational work ... must be accountable to the received Jewish past as expressed in the Torah and its classic commentaries. Without accountability to the text, without grounding in the Torah, there is no Judaism, no effective Jewish civilization, and there is no transmission of Jewishness from generation to generation. ... The ... question must move JCC work ... to presenting "what a Jew ought to be." . . While [autonomy of the individual, tolerance, pluralism, etc.] are critical to the culture of the JCC, they do not constitute Jewish education. The challenge before the JCC is to use these assets to make Jewish education more possible and even more effective.[33]

Barry Chazan terms the distinctions described above as those between followers of John Dewey and others whom he calls, "essentialists." Dewey's approach emphasized the efficacy of providing a rich learning environment that allowed the student to explore and learn according to his or her own interests, pace, and style of learning. In Chazan's view, the essentialists believe it is critical to pre-define the Jewish ideology they are teaching and to work explicitly to transmit that approach to Jewish life. Obviously, individual

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[33]Yehiel Poupko, "Towards an Ideology of Jewish Education in Jewish Community Centers," pp. 23-28 in Chazan and Charendoff.

programs, professionals, and staff members differentially situate themselves somewhere along this spectrum of interventionism. As Centers begin more and more to enter the realm of Jewish education, the challenge of "confrontation" will loom as a large question. It goes to the heart of the JCC's educational mission and it will help define the specific kinds of activities that Center do or do not engage in. Working out a stance in regard to this issue will necessarily form an important element in an evolving approach to Jewish education throughout the JCC movement.

Religious Education in JCCs?

The issues raised above touch upon a more fundamental question about the role of the Center as a Jewish educational institution: Can Jewish education in JCCs be "religious" education? As long as Centers dealt only with social, recreational, and some cultural activities, this question was essentially moot. The Centers represented a secular, or at least a non-denominational, approach to being Jewish. But with the Center's engagement with Jewish education, the question of the religious character of that education is hard to avoid. When they function as Jewish educational institutions, are Centers providing a way of being Jewish that differs from that offered by the synagogue, or are they providing a way of learning about Judaism and a path to Jewish involvement that resembles synagogues' religious Judaism? Or, to state the question in its broadest terms, what is the goal of Jewish education in the world of Jewish Community Centers?

Most Jewish education in North America is specifically religious in nature, even when it takes place outside of the synagogue. For example, even in so-called "community" day schools (i.e. those with no particular religious affiliation), boys are required to wear kippot during text study. These non-denominational schools still conduct religious services, often daily. Most Jewish summer camps sponsor prayer services as well.

Where does the Jewish Community Center stand in this regard? Is the Center an alternative purveyor of Jewish religious education, specializing in areas where all denominations can agree? Or are Centers recasting the religious tradition in secular or cultural terms, in much the same was as many Israelis observe many Jewish holidays and customs as a function of their belonging to a Jewish society?

In some ways, Centers are similar to community day schools in their attitudes, with most of the Jewish educators in JCCs viewing themselves as religious educators who happen to be working (and are pleased to be working) in a multi- or non-denominational

setting. For them, the Center offers an opportunity to reach otherwise unreached or even unreachable Jews and to involve them in some form of genuine (read: religious) Judaism.

By way of contrast, some Center professionals view the JCC as an autonomous, essential institution that provides opportunities for Jewish involvement that complement the synagogue. According to this view, JCCs fulfill roles that other institutions such as synagogues simply cannot. These might include providing Jewish arts festivals, adult learning centers, and early childhood programs--programs that are either unavailable through synagogues or else are conducted in a too thoroughly religious environment to suit the taste of many JCC members.

This view could lend itself toward growing into a truly secular ideology for the JCC. Perhaps this position is simply foreign to North American thinking, but certainly one finds versions of a secular Jewish ideology both in Israel (for obvious reasons) and in Latin America. Indeed, in Latin America the Jewish Community Center is a powerful secular institution in the community, more powerful in many ways than the synagogue. We need to point out that secular Judaism is a live and serious alternative in Latin America, far more so than it is in the United States. Many American Jews may be secularized; but their Latin American counterparts are secularists. As such, they lend a positive Jewish ideological character to their JCCs.

Is an overtly secular Jewish education feasible or even desirable in the Diaspora? Should the JCC position itself as the locus for secular Judaism, an explicit alternative to synagogue/religious Judaism? Is another major Jewish denomination emerging around the JCCs, one consonant with the individualism, personalism, and voluntarism of American Jewry? In light of the Center movement's bid to become a major player in the world of Jewish education, these questions merit renewed attention.

Conditions Conducive to Success

Directors of Centers with a reputation for success in Jewish education tend to believe that any Center can adopt a policy of commitment to Jewish education. Others are not so sure. Some directors argue that resources for success in Jewish education are not universally available. Is success in Jewish education possible everywhere? Or are certain ingredients essential -- or lacking -- in certain communities?

In point of fact, the truth lies somewhere between these two starkly framed alternatives. Centers vary widely in the underlying conditions that are conducive to the Jewish educational agenda. That which is possible or even likely in one place may be

simply unachievable elsewhere. However, all Centers possess some of the necessary resources. We saw examples of Jewish educational success in Centers located in a variety of communities.

What are the conditions that seem to have the greatest impact on Jewish educational success?

They include:

1) being located in a strong Jewish community;

2) having a secure executive;

3) having reasonable financial security;

4) having a supportive local Jewish Federation; and

5) large size (as measured by budget and staff).

To elaborate upon the first condition, Jewish communities differ markedly in size, recency of migration, and rates of affiliation. Communities with large numbers of recently arrived Jews rarely experience high rates of affiliation. We were struck with how many of the Centers we visited are located in relatively strong Jewish communities.

We were also struck by the long tenure of the executive in these places. Most had been in the same job ten to fifteen years or more. Somehow, we surmise, their longevity may provide them with the political capital and credibility to undertake a serious commitment to Jewish education. The executive who has pushed for Jewish education, especially in the late 1970s and early 1980s, is one who felt secure enough in his or her position to advocate a policy direction that was, at least then, innovative and that is always difficult to justify in terms of the financial bottom line.

(To be sure, as these executives noted, only a Center committed to higher values, such as those embodied in a Jewish educational commitment, is apt to engender the type of involvement and allegiance from major supporters necessary to sustain and expand the Center's operations. In other words, what may seem costly in the short run may be fiscally prudent in the long term.)

A parallel argument may be made for the contribution that financial stability makes to launching and sustaining a Jewish educational agenda. In our travels we saw that none of the Centers we visited were awash with all the funds they could use; but we did sense a feeling of fiscal confidence. Directors with whom we met conveyed the idea that they were successful fund-raisers and budget managers who could raise reasonable sums for needed sustenance or expansion of the Jewish educational program.

A related issue is the relative prominence and influence of lay leadership. JCC

board members and the directors in the sites we visited generally projected great satisfaction with the extent to which they are able to elicit the support of the local Federation. JCCs certainly perceive themselves as favorably situated vis-a-vis Federations specifically and the local Jewish institutional complex generally.

This differed from the situation found in some communities, where Federations view their local JCCs as competing with them for resources (e.g., participants in Israel travel groups). Obviously, Centers, succeed more readily in the Jewish educational sphere if their respective Federations--for whatever reason--see Jewish education as a legitimate and necessary function of their JCCs, rather than seeing Centers as yet another competitor.

Finally, larger Centers manage to invest more heavily in Jewish education. Sheer size means that the start-up funds necessary for personnel or program are relatively easy to locate. Smaller Centers certainly are capable of maintaining educationally effective operations (indeed, we witnessed some in action). However, Jewish educational effectiveness demands certain basic building blocks (e.g., a full-time Jewish educator, in-service training for staff, board seminars in Israel, etc.), each of which is easier to come by with a larger budget and staff, where resources can be more easily shifted.

All five indicators, in one way or another, point to institutional strength. In short, stronger JCCs (however measured) seem more able and ready to invest in a policy of effective Jewish education.

CONCLUSIONS

Significant Achievements, But Major Challenges Remain

We come away from our study of Jewish educational excellence in Jewish Community Centers with somewhat contradictory reactions: we are both impressed and chastened. We are impressed with the sheer extent of investment in Jewish educational programming, and we are impressed with the possibilities for serious education in the JCC context. As we noted early on in this report, we embarked upon this study somewhat skeptical about whether good Jewish education could even take place at a JCC. After seeing these examples of educational excellence, we are convinced that such education is possible, and, indeed, is taking place right now-- and not just in the six Centers we chose to visit.

At the same time, we are indeed chastened by the sheer enormity of the task of trying to change the JCC institutional culture and to re-direct the thinking of the staff. We met with some extremely impressive executive directors, all of whom expressed a deep commitment to the Jewish educational mission. All bad been in their positions for many years, in some cases as many as two decades or more. Yet, in part reflecting their commitment to excellence, and in part reflecting the dynamic processes of change in Centers now underway, none was fully satisfied with the current state of Jewish education in their respective Centers. One may excel in strategic thinking or staff development. Another may sponsor an extraordinary adult education program. Another may be justifiably proud of its pre-school or its camp. Everywhere we saw signs of progress, both in the recent past and anticipated in the near-future. But nowhere could we point to an entire institution with all its components producing at peak or near-peak educational capacity.

The recent entry of Centers into the Jewish educational field means two things: Much has been accomplished in a short time, but much remains to be done. Taken in their entirety, as the directors themselves readily admit, Centers are still a long way off from the time when a commitment to high quality Jewish education is a routine and long-standing element in the Center ethos. In fact, one could argue that the dissatisfaction of directors with the current state of Jewish education in their Centers -- a phenomenon that typifies good Jewish educators in all contexts -- is itself an element of "best practice."

With respect to Jewish education, Centers are still in a stage of transition and good directors recognize that circumstance.

For all the talent, commitment, and progress, some of our interviewees wondered out loud about the extent and depth of their educational impact. In a Center of ten or eleven thousand members, how many people, what percentage of the membership, is actually being affected? One Center executive told us, for example, that he believed around 1500 people a year participated in some form of Jewish educational program. Is that a large number or a small one? It depends a good deal on the particular observer's own point of view. At around 10% of his membership population, it may seem small (especially since it includes people who are both studying every week in a class and those who appear once a year). Of course, one cannot ignore the likelihood that Centers exert a more subtle, pervasive effect, as Chazan's "Jewish oxygen" position would argue. If so, then the Jewish educational impact of educationally effective JCCs extends well beyond the fraction who, in any one year, participate directly in their Jewish educational programs. But even if 10% is an accurate estimate for a Center with one of the most advanced adult education programs on the continent, and even if only half that number characterizes many other Centers, we cannot ignore the fact that adult Jewish education is a "hard sell" everywhere. Federation-sponsored, community-wide programs enroll very small percentages of their putative constituency (all Jewish adults in a given locale), as do synagogues for their constituencies (i.e., membership).

However, numbers alone may not be that significant. As one Center educator told us, "There is a need to build cells, small groups, of 15-25 people, rather than big lectures." He thinks the small intimate groups are the way to engage people with Judaism. "If we get hung up on big numbers, we'll get killed." He thinks there are other ways to affect large numbers of people, but he doesn't think energy should be invested in programming for large numbers of people.

To what extent can Centers realistically aspire to significantly influence large numbers of people? From a cost-benefit perspective (the most Jewish educational impact for the smallest investment of time and money), is it in fact wiser to target small groups rather than design programs to touch large numbers of Jews?

From Programs to Strategy

These, of course, are not the only questions being raised by senior professional and lay leadership at Centers with a history of commitment to Jewish education. In fact, one

element of good practice we witnessed was a pattern of strategic thinking. That is, senior staff had given serious thought not merely to the most effective ways of planning particular programs, but to the larger questions of Jewish educational impact. Most broadly, they were asking how the Center could exert the greatest impact, on which population groups, and in what fashion.

Senior staff spoke of the efforts they had invested in formulating and debating mandates and policies, both with other staff and with key board members. Some have developed a "culture of writing." That is, some Centers (or, perhaps more accurately: some professionals) are given to setting their thoughts down in writing and submitting them to critical scrutiny of other staff members in their agency, their lay people, and, more broadly, the Center movement and Jewish communal professionals through a variety of professional outlets. The writing of a mission statement, a set of guidelines for a pre-school, a curriculum, or a staff orientation manual become occasions to generate thoughtful debate and discussion in the agency. Indeed, we were excited and impressed to see these discussions underway.

The questions that have been addressed by some of the most sophisticated thinkers in the area of Jewish education in the JCC world, taken together, constitute an agenda for further reflection and deliberation by a broader group of key JCC policy makers, both lay and professional. In addition, they constitute an appropriate conclusion to this investigation:

1) Who is the constituency for JCC educational efforts? Is it the entire local Jewish community, or just the members or clients of JCC services?

2) Within that constituency, which groups are the most worthy targets of Jewish educational efforts? Who is most likely to combine the following characteristics: they are accessible to the JCC; they are amenable to Jewish growth; and they are under-developed in terms of their Jewish knowledge and commitment?

3) What ought to be the Jewish identity and knowledge requirements for hiring and retaining staff? Should different standards apply for staff in different departments or at different levels of authority?

4) What are sorts of Judaic demands of the staff are legitimate, which are most effective, and which are most useful?

5) To what extent may (and should) a JCC and its staff "intervene" in the Jewish lives of their constituencies? How aggressive in promoting Jewish involvement can they be? And how aggressive should they be?

6) What type of Judaism is the JCC working to "market." Is it "introduction to

Jewish religion -- you pick the denomination" or is it a nascent and emerging form of American secular Judaism?

7) To what extent can the JCCA produce models that can be widely adopted? The success of Derekh Torah, Melton Mini-Schools, Israel Educational Seminars for professionals and board members, and the various senior staff development programs[34] run by JCCA suggests several other possibilities. Examples include model curricula for pre-schools and camps, as well as in-service staff development. In short, how can the JCCA in conjunction with foundations and others with the ability to reach beyond a single Center further the cause of Jewish education in the JCC movement?

8) Finally, what are the characteristics of the surrounding Jewish community that support the Jewish educational mission of the JCC, and how may JCCs operate to modify or adjust to their environments?

Undoubtedly other important questions have been raised in this report. We hope and trust that opinion molders and leaders within the JCC movement will be moved to take some of these challenges seriously and deliberate carefully on the questions we have raised, both immediately above and throughout the report. The demands of the present hour require the best resources of the Jewish community-- to engage young people in exploring what a meaningful Jewish life might mean, to transmit Jewish knowledge, skills and attitudes, to help families, teenagers and senior adults find social engagement and spiritual meaning, and to create communities of friendship and concern. The Jewish Community Center has long played a central role in the lives of North American Jews. As Jews grapple with deep concerns about our situation today, JCCs are a precious resource that can be engaged in the service of a Jewish future. In the best practice sites observed for this report, we saw the exciting beginnings of that very effort.

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[34]These include the Wexner Continuing Jewish Education Program for JCC Executives and the Mandel Executive Education Program.

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Acknowledgments

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Researchers:

Dr. Julie Tammivaara

Dr. Ruth Pinkenson Feldman

From the Centers:

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Joel Block

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Barbara Lerner

Rabbi Phil Miller

Aliza Orent

Rabbi Yehiel Poupko

Helaine Strauss

Barrie Weiser

Jerry Witkovsky

Rabbi David Woznica

About the Authors

Steven M. Cohen is a sociologist who teaches at the Melton Centre for Jewish Education in the Diaspora, The Hebrew University. He has also taught at Queens College, Brandeis University, the Jewish Theological Seminary, and Yale University. He has written or edited nine books on contemporary Jewry, including *Two Worlds of Judaism* (with Charles Liebman), *American Modernity and Jewish Identity*, and *American Assimilation or Jewish Revival?* In addition, he has written over a hundred scholarly articles and reports. The sponsors of his research have included: the American Jewish Committee, the CRB Foundation, the Cummings Foundation, the Detroit Jewish Federation, the Jewish Agency for Israel, the Jewish Community Centers Association, the Joint Authority for Jewish- Zionist Education, the National Science Foundation, UJA Federation of New York, the Pew Memorial Trust, the United Jewish Appeal, the Wexner Foundation, and the Wilstein Institute.

Barry W. Holtz is Associate Professor of Jewish Education at the Jewish Theological Seminary of America. He is a consultant to the Council for Initiatives in Jewish Education and director of CIJE's Best Practices Project. As author and editor, Dr. Holtz's books include: *Back to the Sources: Reading the Classic Jewish Texts* (Simon and Schuster, 1984), *Finding Our Way: Jewish Texts and the Lives We Lead Today* (Schocken Books, 1990), and, most recently, *The Schocken Guide to Jewish Books* (1992). His first book (written with Arthur Green), *Your Word is Fire: The Hasidic Masters on Contemplative Prayer*, has recently been reprinted in a revised edition by Jewish Lights Press.

MINUTES:	CIJE STEERING COMMITTEE
DATE OF MEETING:	November 1, 1995
DATE MINUTES ISSUED:	December 18, 1995
PRESENT:	Morton Mandel (chair), John Colman, Gail Dorph, Adam Gamoran, Ellen Goldring, Stephen Hoffman, Alan Hoffmann, Barry Holtz, Josie Mowlem, Nessa Rapoport, Charles Ratner, Esther Leah Ritz, Richard Shatten, Jonathan Woocher, Virginia Levi (Sec'y.)
COPY TO:	Seymour Fox, Annette Hochstein, Lester Pollack, Daniel Pekarsky, William Robinson, Henry Zucker

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I. MASTER SCHEDULE CONTROL

The master schedule control was reviewed and the following changes were noted:

The meeting scheduled for January 22, 1996 will be in New York, not Cleveland. The meeting originally scheduled for March 8, 1996 has been rescheduled to March 6, 1996 and will be held in Cleveland.

II. MINUTES AND ASSIGNMENTS

The minutes and assignments of August 25 were reviewed. The development of a communications/publications program was given a due date of March 6, at which time it will be presented to the Steering Committee.

III. CIJE UPDATE

Alan Hoffmann introduced this discussion, noting that the review of the workplan scheduled for later in the day would be a real overview. He wanted to highlight the following points:

A. He indicated that CIJE has been working with the Wexner Heritage program to design a curriculum for their annual retreat intended to encourage alumni of the program to be more integrally involved with Jewish communal life. The workshop for Wexner Alumni is scheduled for December 1 3. The topic will be "What works in Jewish Education?" and CIJE staff will be among the major presenters. As of November 1, there were 350 people enrolled.

In discussion it was noted that this sort of cooperative effort among foundations is an important breakthrough and should be continued wherever possible. It was

also noted that the Wexner commitment to direct connections with local community outcomes is relatively new and that the curriculum of the two-year Wexner program is being revised to reflect this goal. It was also suggested that the design of the program, "What works in Jewish Education" might be a valuable written document in CIJE's lexicon.

Another meeting scheduled for November is an opportunity for staff of CIJE and Torah Umesorah to discuss the training of teachers of educators. Deborah Ball, a CIJE consultant from Michigan State University will participate in this meeting.

B. Evaluation Institute Consultation

As was discussed at the June and August Steering Committee meetings, CIJE has proposed the establishment of an evaluation institute to help train local researchers to help serve as evaluators for communities and to develop lay commitment to evaluation. It was reported that CIJE and JESNA have together planned a workshop for potential consumers of such an institute. The workshop will include academics, community representatives and core staff of CIJE and JESNA. The goal is for communities with the need for a local evaluator to have someone available to be on retainer for this purpose. Such an individual would be trained in the Institute being discussed. This is seen as a first step toward the possible establishment of a National Jewish Education Evaluation Center with a permanent director.

C. Lead Communities Consultation

Periodic consultations have been held with representatives of the Lead Communities, coming together to discuss issues of common interest. In early October, such a meeting was held with the focus on the findings of the Leadership Survey. Participants considered comparisons between educational leaders in general and in Jewish education and concluded that there are neither the same standards nor opportunities for the training of educational leaders. They considered models for pre-service and in-service training of Jewish educational leaders and expressed an interest in a permanent National Center for Educational Leadership.

It is clear that people from the Lead Communities are much more comfortable discussing their own community findings in the presence of others than was the case early in this process. They have also learned to critically read such findings and discuss them constructively over time.

In their discussion of educational leadership, Lead Community representatives

identified a number of positions or functions that are currently lacking in their communities but would be of value to the Jewish educational enterprise. There is now evidence of acceptance of the concept of involving educational leaders in policy-making at both the communal and institutional levels.

The group also discussed the dissemination of the report on educational leaders. Because the group surveyed is relatively small, it was concluded that the results should be discussed first with local educational leaders, providing them with opportunities to brainstorm possible solutions. Dissemination beyond this group remains in the planning stages.

In the discussion that followed, it was noted that the data from the survey was not surprising, although some of the specific findings were of particular interest. This survey will be helpful to local communities in considering their trend lines and developing a planful process for both developing new positions and engaging educational leaders.

The concept of a National Center for Education Leadership, headed by a full-time director, was discussed further. It was suggested that such a center would serve as a catalyst to stimulate activity on the local level. This national center would develop both pre-service and in-service programs which might be offered on a local or regional basis. The center would also provide opportunities to bring lay and professional leadership together. It was noted that, at the moment, CIJE serves this role.

It was reported that the University of Wisconsin is on the verge of launching a joint program between the School of Education and an interdisciplinary program to prepare people in Judaic content, pedagogy, and administration. The Meyerhoff family has committed one million dollars which the University is currently attempting to match.

D. The Goals Project: Baltimore Seminar and JCC Camping Consultation

1. Baltimore Seminar

On October 22 the Baltimore central agency held a one-day lay/staff retreat to work on goals with Dan Pekarsky, Gail Dorph, and Barry Holtz. Intended as a model for local agencies, the retreat took as a case study the issue of how a central agency might respond to the charge of helping individual institutions establish visions and goals.

Assignment Participants represented a range of affiliations. Gail Dorph will distribute

a list of participants and their affiliations to the Steering Committee.

2. JCC Camping Consultation

We have learned that JCC Camps have a tremendous potential to transmit Jewish learning yet encounter significant issues of the quality of their Jewish teaching. Several camp directors have expressed an interest in improving the Jewishness of their camps. Following the annual meeting of the JCC Association, scheduled for early November, CIJE staff will spend two days meeting with teams which include a JCC director, camp director, and Jewish education director from each of several JCCs. The focus will be on goals for Jewish education at these camps.

It was suggested that MEF could be helpful in identifying the current state of Jewishness at these camps and could begin to evaluate the impact of certain activities to be mapped out. It was suggested that the head of the JCCA research center be invited to participate in this meeting.

E. Report on JCC Best Practices Study

Barry Holtz reminded the Steering Committee that he and Professor Steven M. Cohen have been at work on a joint project of CIJE and the JCC Association to study Best Practices in Jewish Education at JCCs. They identified six JCCs which have been studied, resulting in a composite report based on such themes as the role of the board, the role and models of the Jewish educator. A draft report has been circulated to center staff and JCCA staff who were involved in this project. The project is nearing conclusion and it is hoped that a draft of the final publication will be available to the Steering Committee prior to its January
Assignment meeting. Allan Finkelstein and Steve Cohen will be invited to meet with the CIJE Steering Committee in January to discuss the report and its mandate for JCCs.
Assignment Also at the January meeting, a plan will be presented for dissemination of the report.

IV. WORKPLAN 1995 TOWARD 1996

Alan Hoffmann noted that the purpose of this presentation is to review where we are as compared with where we said we would be for 1995 and how this impacts on plans for 1996. He noted that the staff has effectively decreased with Barry Holtz' return to teaching at the Jewish Theological Seminary while continuing part-time with CIJE. We are presently looking for an additional full-time staff person to work in the area of Building the Profession.

The Steering Committee then reviewed a chart showing 1995 planned activities in the first column, those 1995 activities which will continue in 1996 in the second column, and additional activities planned for 1996 in the third column. A copy of this chart is attached as Exhibit A. It was suggested that the activities in the second two columns go beyond what CIJE can accomplish with its personnel and budget, and that these items will need to be prioritized as the 1996 workplan evolves. The next step in this review will be for the staff to come back to the Steering Committee with recommended priorities.

V. RECONCEPTUALIZING THE CIJE BOARD

It was noted that CIJE inherited its board from the Commission and that many current board members are over-committed and have primary loyalties to other Jewish entities. In fact, the serious work which is undertaken by lay leaders of CIJE occurs mostly in the Steering Committee, which meets six full days each year. The Steering Committee functions as the "true" board of CIJE, serving as the group which actually makes policy for the organization.

It was suggested that CIJE consider a new structure to include:

A. An expanded Steering Committee which would be renamed the CIJE Board.

B. An expanded Executive Committee to include people neither willing nor able to spend six days a year on the work of CIJE, but whom we would like to keep closely informed.

C. An expansion of the present board to approximately 100 lay leaders, to be known as the "Council" of CIJE. This group would meet twice each year for an evening and the following day to discuss a particular theme. This would be the highest level seminar on Jewish education in North America.

D. A CIJE biennial for 400 invited lay leaders and top professionals.

In the discussion that followed, the question of whether this would effectively mobilize community leadership was discussed. It was suggested that such mobilization might be better accomplished when we create the sort of national centers that were discussed earlier in the meeting and develop boards for these centers, providing people with significant roles. Another way to involve greater numbers it to have committees or task forces with discrete assignments, similar to the approach taken by the JCCA Board. Reference was made to the Urban Land Institute, an elite group for people in the field of real estate. CIJE might emulate this approach, bringing together the highest level people to discuss the most critical topics in the field.

Our goals for leadership of CIJE are 1) the need for a mechanism to direct CIJE, and 2) to develop a much larger lay group with ownership of CIJE and its issues. This second goal is to involve and engage lay leadership, which is at the heart of CIJE's mission.

We were cautioned to keep in mind the amount of staff time and energy required to plan and implement the cycle of activities being proposed for the groups described in items C and D above. It was suggested that the Executive Committee and Board could be combined into a single entity, with the understanding that some members of this somewhat expanded "Board" would be unable to attend all six meetings each year. This body could become a model for local communities to emulate in involving their lay leadership. There seemed to be agreement to the concept of a Council meeting twice each year around a specific topic.

It was suggested that the topic for the first such meeting might be "What works in Jewish Education." There were questions about our capacity to run a biennial.

The following chart was the outcome of this discussion:

Lay Group	Participants	Frequency
Board/Executive Committee	18	6 times per year
Council	50 - 100	2 times per year
Biennial	400	Every other year

It was agreed that this proposal requires further elaboration. However, we will move to add four additional lay members to the Steering Committee as soon as possible

VI. EXPANDING THE CIJE NETWORK: SUMMER INSTITUTE FOR PROFESSORS OF EDUCATION

One of the accomplishments of the Teacher Educator Institute has been the engagement of Sharon Feiman-Nemser and Deborah Ball in our work. This came about because these outstanding academics in the field of education have become interested through working with Gail Dorph in applying their expertise to the field of Jewish education.

This experience has led us to the idea of bringing other outstanding and committed Jews in the field of general education into our work. CIJE proposes to bring 10 to 15 such academics together this summer for three weeks to study Judaica, issues of Jewish education, and ways in which they could impact our field. The goal is to forge this group into a cadre to provide their expertise through consultation to CIJE. CIJE would cover the expenses of these people in exchange for five days of consulting with us during the 1996-1997 year. The summer seminar would take place in Israel, where CIJE will work together with the Mandel Institute.

VII. CIJE AT THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

CIJE has been working closely with JESNA and CJF in planning for the 1995 GA. CIJE will participate in the Institute on Jewish Identity and other Jewish education programming, including a forum on synagogue/federation relations.

It was suggested that CIJE develop a schedule of events related to CIJE areas of interest for distribution to our board members.

VIII. REVIEW OF BOARD SEMINAR AND MEETING

The Steering Committee reviewed the plans for the evening seminar and the agenda for the board meeting scheduled for November 2.

EXHIBIT A

CIJE WORKPLAN: 1995 TOWARDS 1996

1995	1996 ROLLOVER	PLANNED OR IN DEVELOPMENT STAGES FOR 1996
d) Articulating and Disseminating (where necessary developing) in-service concepts, curricula and standards		-National Conference with National Board of License, on issue of standards, certification and accreditation. -Best practices volume of Professional Development
e) Comprehensive Planning for Building the Profession		-Continental plan for Senior Personnel.
i)Establish committee	-Establish advisory committee with a plan, hire planner	
B. MOBILIZING THE COMMUNITY		
a.) CIJE Board - Vice Chairs - New Board Members	 -Continues -Continues	-Reconceptualize Board Structure
b.) Impacting Jewish educational agendas on ever-increasing number of communities. - Engage with new communities (Hartford, Cleveland, San Francisco, Chicago, Columbus) - Work with CJF on new committee - GA 1995	 -Continues -Continues -Earlier and deeper involovement in 1996 GA	
c.) Telling the Story - Dissemination of Policy Brief - Sarna-type publication - G. Dorph's article on TEI for GA - Redesign and Repackage 2x Best practices	 -Continues at less intensity -Continues -Establish Advisory Group for media and communications -Redesign and Repackage 2 BP's	 -Dissemination Plan and Distribution -Dissemination Plan and Distribution of JCC Best Practices. -Integrated Report on Educational Leaders-published and distributed

CIJE WORKPLAN: 1995 TOWARDS 1996

1995	1996 ROLLOVER	PLANNED OR IN DEVELOPMENT STAGES FOR 1996
A. BUILDING THE PROFESSION		
a. In-Service Training		
i)Teacher Educator Institute x 2	-Teach Educator Institute x 4-5 -Recuit Cohort II	
ii)Advisory Team on Early Childhood Education	-Meets-develops strategy-write plan	
iii)Harvard Principle Center	-Hrd. Principal's centre Spring+Fall	
iv)Consultation on Teacher Educator Institute for Torah u'mesorah	- ?	
v)Consultation on Professional Development for Day Schools	- Consultation in first 1/4	-Principals for Community Day High Schools (Steinhardt, Jim Joseph, Avi Chai) -Torah u'mesorah Teacher Educator Institute -TTT a la Prof. Twersky
b. Guidance to Communities in developing Comprehensive In-Service Training		
i) 3 Consultations in NYC for Milwaukee, Atlanta, Baltimore leading to local pilot initiative	-3 Consultations in NYC for Baltimore, Milwaukee, Atlanta, Plus Cleveland, San Francisco, Hartford (?), W. Palm Beach (?)	
ii)Machon l'Morim in Baltimore	-Will continue	
iii)Cleveland College Masters Program consultation	-?	
c. Exploring ways to mobilize existing training institutions, central agencies, professional movements and denominations		
i)Planning process with	-Continue through 1996	-1997 or beyond

CIJE WORKPLAN: 1995 TOWARDS 1996

1995	1996 ROLLOVERS	PLANNED OR IN DEVELOPMENT STAGES FOR 1996
		-Policy Brief on Educational Leaders -Case study for goals project: Ramah -Integrated CIJE publication plan -Data base for distribution and tracking.
-CIJE Luncheon Seminars - December 1995	-3 in 1996	
d) Strategy for engaging potential champions -Deferred		
e) Wexner Heritage Retreat -December 1995		-See discussion on reconceptualizing of CIJE Board
C. MONITORING,EVALUATION AND FEEDBACK		-How to work with other private I??
a) Building Research Capacity -Integrated Report on Teachers -Reports on Educational leaders in 3 communities (individual and combined) -Research papers on teacher power, teacher in-service and levers for change	-Policy brief on Leaders	-Distribution, dissemination -Distribution, dissemination
b) Building Evaluation capacity for North America -Develop CIJE Manual	-Publish and distribute	-Dissemination plan
-Proposal for evaluation institute -Consultation on evaluation institute		-Create Evaluation Institute -Hire staff and develop institute
c) Evaluating CIJE Initiatives -Evaluating TEI	-Continue and increase	
d) Planning for the Future -Informal education -consultation	-Continued design of informal education instruments and survey in 1996-97 school year	
-Plan for seminar on what have we learned	-July 1996 in Israel	

CIJE WORKPLAN: 1995 TOWARDS 1996

1995	1996 ROLLOVER	PLANNED OR IN DEVELOPMENT STAGES
D. CONTENT AND PROGRAM		
a) Best Practices		
i) Complete JCCA-Best Practice	-Publish volume	-Dissemination plan
ii) Best Practices in professional development - begin	-Write and publish	
b)Goals Project		
i)Engage with prototype institutions	-Continues	
ii)Plan for extending capacity	-July 1996 Seminar	
iii) Engage with communities	-?	
iv) Wexner Heritage	-?	
E. FINANCE AND ADMINISTRATION		
a) Hire new executive director	-?	-"Curriculum" for new director, overlap with previous director
b) fully-functioning payroll and benefits in New York	-Continues	
c) Successor to VFL		
d) Full set of inter-office procedures for fiscal management	-Continues	
e) Fundraising plan and implementation	-Continues	

COUNCIL FOR INITIATIVES IN JEWISH EDUCATION

ASSIGNMENTS

/3880 ASN (REV. 7/94) PRINTED IN U.S.A.

Function:	CIJE STEERING COMMITTEE
Subject/Objective:	ASSIGNMENTS
Originator:	Virginia F. Levi
Date:	11-1-95

NO.	DESCRIPTION	PRIORITY	ASSIGNED TO (INITIALS)	DATE ASSIGNED STARTED	DUE DATE
1.	Invite Allan Finkelstein and Steve Cohen to January Steering Committee Meeting.		BWH	11/1/95	12/15/95
2.	Complete draft paper on Best Practices in JCCs.		BWH	6/8/95	1/22/96
3.	Draft plan for dissemination of Best Practices in JCC's report.		BWH/NR	11/1/95	1/22/96
4.	Distribute list of participants and affiliations of Goals Project Baltimore seminar to Steering Committee		GZD	11/1/95	1/22/96
5.	Develop a Communications/Publications program: internal; with our Board and advisors; with the broader community.		NR	9/21/93	3/6/96
6.	Redraft Total Vision for review by Steering Committee.		BWH	4/20/94	TBD
7.	Prepare recommendations for dissemination of the study of educational leaders for review by the Steering Committee, after the policy brief is drafted.		AG/NR	6/8/95	TBD
8.	Prepare recommendations for appointment of committee co-chairs.		ADH	4/26/95	TBD
9.	Prepare plan for increasing board size.		ADH	4/26/95	TBD