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Professional Growth and Communal Change:

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LEADERSHIP, ADULT LEARNING AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN JEWISH EDUCATION

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It is now crucial for the Jewish educational community to begin discussions that raise the level of conceptualization and articulation about professional growth opportunities for Jewish educators. Existing in-service programs for educational leaders fall short of what is now needed. Programs are usually comprised of short, fragmented sessions, with content divided into small pieces that are isolated from one another (Pitner, 1988). Furthermore, there are few occasions where networks among colleagues can be developed. Educational leaders are often isolated in their institutions, with limited opportunities to engage with other professionals. A recent study of educational leaders in preschools, congregational schools and day schools in three communities conducted by the Council for Initiatives in Jewish Education (CIJE), confirmed this sense of professional isolation for school leaders (Goldring, Gamoran & Robinson, 1995).

This paper raises some key questions that should be considered when planning professional development activities for leaders in Jewish educational institutions. Any person, group or institution offering professional development activities should address two major questions:

1. How do they understand "leadership?"
2. How do they understand "adults as learners?"

Explorations of these types of questions can help guide decisions regarding the content, context, and delivery of professional development opportunities for educational leaders. Without the discussions that follow from seriously considering these issues, it is very difficult to decide: *What* should be taught to educational leaders (content)? *How* should educational leaders be taught (delivery)? What *types* of programs should be provided (context)? The issues presented in this paper are intended to suggest how clarity of perspective should drive decisions about professional growth.

This argument is summarized in Figure 1, below. Professional development opportunities should be shaped by our underlying assumptions about leadership and adult learning. The goal is to frame a discussion that can help guide our thinking about the content, context, and delivery of professional development for leaders.

Figure 1: Framing the Discussion of Professional Development

	Leadership	Adults as Learners
Context		
Content		
Delivery		

Conceptualizations of Leadership

We all have very different assumptions about leadership, and we all have very different "working" definitions of what we mean when we refer to "good" or "effective" leaders. It would be extremely difficult to arrive at a common definition of leadership. However, one's perspective about leadership has a profound influence on the types of professional development programs one would offer. It would be important for anyone offering professional development programs to try to flesh out a "conception" or working definition of leadership.

Whatever one's perspective on leadership, it should be clearly articulated in order to be congruent with one's professional development goals and activities. In Norman Maclean's novel *A River Runs Through It*, the brothers' discussion of their fishing skills illustrates how a general challenge can stimulate different types of leadership. Although both men are engaged in the same task, and have the same goal — to catch fish — they have very different philosophies, styles and skills to bring to the enterprise. Norman approaches his fishing with technical-specialized knowledge: he believes that if he can match the correct bait to what the fish are biting at on a particular day he will be successful. He comes to the river with a wide assortment of flies.

Paul, in contrast, who is ultimately more successful in catching fish than his brother, studies the river. He notices where the fish are biting, and where they are hiding. When Norman asks Paul how he is so successful in catching more fish, Paul responds, "all there is to thinking is seeing something noticeable which makes you see something you weren't noticing which makes you see something that isn't even visible" (210).

Norman and Paul fish with two different perspectives. Norman, as M.E. Driscoll points out, "thinks about catching fish as a linear transaction that requires a perfect match among skills, tools and opportunity, [while] Paul sees the moment as a rare occasion in which nature and knowledge combine, a textured and patterned whole of shifting elements that are constantly in flux."

What does this example say about leadership? In a very broad way, Norman and Paul exemplify two dominant conceptualizations about leadership. One view, like Norman's, suggests that leadership is a technique. This is often referred to as the *rational* view of leadership. According to this view, leaders need to acquire specific knowledge and skills and be able to apply them to individual settings. Thus, situational leadership and contingency theories suggest that leaders must have flexibility of style to change their skills to match different settings. This view of leadership claims to be a "professional model," suggesting that leaders rely on bureaucratic, technical and psychological authority and knowledge. These leaders acquire specific skills such as strategic planning, budgeting, and managing meetings, that help their organizations move desired goals.

Critics of this view of leadership suggest that it implies a false simplicity. It says to the leader, "just choose the 'correct' approach demanded by a situation and apply it." Others suggest that this view of leadership requires leaders to be preoccupied with the immediate

situation, and can often lead to inconsistent and insincere leaders as they try to manipulate and change other people's styles. In short, this method claims that the right methods will produce results. It would be oversimplifying things to say that this view of leadership really talks about management, not leadership, and implies that one is bad and one is good. In reality, leaders need to balance both.

Another view portrays leadership in more of a strategic/systemic perspective, such as that used by Paul. According to this view, leadership is about technique and content, such as understanding the depths of the river for successful fishing. This conceptualization encompasses deep views about the purposes and values of leadership, and the moral bases of leadership. This view of leadership suggests that leaders must build from the center and practice outward from their core commitments rather than inward from a management perspective. It suggests that leaders need a multidimensional vision to analyze and understand their contexts from a variety of perspectives. "The truly effective manager and leader will need multiple tools, the skills to use each of them and the wisdom to match frames to situations" (Bolman and Deal, 1991, 12). This may require professional development in new ways, "a man who is not used to searching in the forest for flowers, berries or plants will not find any because his eyes are not trained to see them and he does not know where you have to be particularly on the lookout for them" (Wittgenstein, 29).

For this latter view of leadership, the place of program content is central. This adds a new dimension to issues facing leaders in Jewish educational institutions. Jewish educational leaders need to confront questions of vision, but these questions about content are more profound than the notion of the "vision thing" that seems to be so pervasive in the leadership literature today. Leaders in Jewish educational settings need to ask: What kind of Jewish community and Jewish person are we hoping to cultivate through our educating institutions? Where do goals and visions come from? Furthermore, Jewish content comes to bear in a number of other areas, including the moral basis of leadership and the function of role models. This leadership perspective raises the question: What Jewish content knowledge do leaders need to have to be able to nurture schools, communities and other institutions?

In the real world, approaches to leadership do not fall neatly into the two broad perspectives mentioned above. The point is, however, that professional development programs should be rooted in some overarching conception. *The content, context and delivery of professional development programs will be significantly affected by the conceptualization of leadership being used in planning those programs.* For example, leaders need different types of professional development experiences at different stages of their professional careers. Perhaps early on in their career they need more tools as stressed by the first conception of leadership. Therefore, the professional development activities would be skills-based and could take place in more traditional classroom settings. In contrast, mid-career leaders may need more problem-based learning opportunities to experience complex situations. A supervised internship to receive feedback about their performance and guided reflection on their actions may then be more appropriate.

Conceptualization of Adults as Learners

Designers of professional development programs should have a clear perspective on the way in which they believe adults learn. These conceptions have implications for content, context and delivery of professional development programs. Once again, I am suggesting that different theories have distinctive implications for professional development offerings.

Cognitive learning theory is a recent development applied to adult learning. Prestige and LeGrand (1990) note that "proponents of cognitive learning theories argue that learning advances through collaborative social interaction and the social construction of knowledge... not the rather individualized, isolated and decontextualized processes emphasized in most education settings" (Prestine & Legrand,1990, 1). This idea is similar to Shulman's idea of the "wisdom of practice" as a major source of a teaching knowledge base. Another example of adult learning is the constructivist approach illustrated in the following story:

> "Three umpires were discussing their view of their work. Some're balls and some're strikes" the first umpire said, "and I calls 'em as I sees 'em". "Some're balls and some're strikes," the second umpire said, "and I calls 'em as they are." "Well, some're balls, all right," the third umpire said, "and, sure some're strikes. But until I calls 'em, they ain't nothin'" (Kegan & Layeh, 1984, 199).

This view suggests that much of our learning depends on our own experiences and perceptions. "A constructivist approach attends to developments in an individual's very construction of reality, how he or she makes meaning — in this case makes meaning of leadership or the exercise of authority" (Kegan and Layeh, 1984, 202). As adult learners, we are constantly creating meaning systems that organize our thinking, feelings and actions in response to the changes in our lives.

A constructivist approach to professional development suggests new roles for the "teachers" in professional development settings. In this context, the role of the teacher is closer to that of the facilitator who guides and helps adult learners generate new connections with new knowledge. Professional development experiences may give new meaning to current practices as new connections with new knowledge are integrated into an adult learner's repertoire. Constructivist theory asserts that as changing conditions occur, people respond out of their own constructed meaning systems. Thus, development is not just a function of age, but as a "qualitative change in a person's meaning system" (p.202).

A constructivist approach to adult learning, for example, would support a problem-based approach to professional development as delivery, in an ongoing seminar context. These problems connect *thinking* about leadership with *doing* leadership in a learning context that anticipates potential problems that learners may face as professionals.

Reflective practice is another tool of the constructivist approach that can be used in professional development activities. As a form of experiential learning, reflective practice is "viewed as a means by which practitioners

can develop a greater level of self awareness about the nature and impact of their performance" (Osterman & Kottkamp, 1993, 19). Thus reflective practice focuses on the process and content of learning by integrating theory and practice explicitly. Experiential knowledge or knowledge of the craft is often used to develop and refine theory.

Professional Development

Differing views about leadership and adult learning theory will lead to very different professional development activities. It is imperative to know what assumptions and conceptual bases one is working from. It is also clear that these conceptions must take into account the needs of the individual participants and their institutions and communities. They must also acknowledge that these needs will constantly change. In thinking about professional development it is important to consider individual development as well as organizational development. Individual changes and organizational changes should be addressed simultaneously and support one another.

There are many issues facing professional development for leaders in Jewish educational institutions. If we can help professionals learn separately and together, discard outmoded conceptual maps, create independent arenas for thinking, and deliberate about what ought to be, all enveloped in Jewish content and thought, we will have been successful.

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