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Senior Policy Advisors Working Paper. "Developing a Research
Capability in North America: Some Issues for Consideration",
March 1991.

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PRELIMINARY WORKING PAPER FOR DISCUSSION BY CIJE
SENIOR POLICY ADVISORS: NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION

DEVELOPING A RESEARCH CAPABILITY IN NORTH AMERICA

SOME ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

1. The Commission on Jewish education pointed to the lack of reliable data on Jewish education.

"There is a paucity of data about the basic issues, and almost no evaluation has been made to assess the quality and impact of programs.

Because of this, decisions are taken without the benefit of clear evidence of need, and major resource are invested without sufficient monitoring. We do not know what works in Jewish education. We do not even know much about what students know at different stages of their education. There are not enough standardized achievement tests. There is not sufficiently accurate information on the number of teachers in the system, their qualifications and their salaries.

We also need more extensive investigation into the history and philosophy of Jewish education in order to enrich the creative process that will help design the Jewish education of tomorrow."

As a result of its findings the commission adopted, as one of its five recommendations to develop a research capability:

"A research capability...will be developed at universities, by professional research organizations, as well as by individual scholars. They will create the theoretical and practical knowledge base that is indispensable for change and improvement. A comprehensive, long-range research agenda will be outlined...."

2. The staff of the Council on Innovations in Jewish Education (CIJE) suggested that as a first step an outstanding researcher be asked to map and assess the existing research capability (people, institutions, forums, resources) and to recommend approaches to the development of an agenda.

The researcher would work with an active steering or editorial committee and the work submitted to the CIJE Senior Policy Advisors and Board for approval.

a. The Researchers:

1. There is a small but growing number of people actively involved in research on Jewish education in North America.
2. There is a group of academics in general education who are Jewish and have expressed great interest in Jewish education (e.g., Gammoran and Pekarsky at the University of Wisconsin; Feiman-Nemser at Michigan State University).
3. There are researchers in general education who are Jewish, who might be recruited to the task (e.g., Henry Levin at Stanford University).
4. There are subject matter experts - primarily professors of Judaica who could be invited to contribute their expertise (e.g., Prof. I. Twersky at Harvard University).

What can should be done to expand the pool of individuals who devote themselves to research.

b. The Agenda:

1. There is a need to map existing research and to address its validity. In the continuum from basic to policy research there are enormous gaps in knowledge - far beyond what that in general education or in other areas. These gaps should be defined and documented. (See Appendix A - from the Background Papers to the Fifth Commission meeting).
2. Some early attempts have been made to define the agenda. These often consist of extensive lists of possible research topics. There is a need for a reasoned agenda. Researchers and others should think through the needs and prioritizing them.
 - What is already available?
 - What will make a difference?
 - What is most urgent?
3. The researcher will need to consider the situation from several perspectives. From

statistical data (profile of the teaching force) to the question of indicators.

- How are we improving knowledge and skills?
- What is the true relationship of tuition to day-school enrollment?
- How much does it cost to run an educational institutions?
- What are alternative modes of financing?
- How effective has this innovative or ongoing program been?

4. In the area of curriculum there are examples of attempts to prepare subject matter for curriculum.

In general, the curriculum for formal and informal settings is underdeveloped and - except for the Haredim - lacks a contemporary historical and philosophic foundation. In most settings work is done without an overall syllabus or set curricula. Programs often depend on the ingenuity of the individual educator.

5. The market - have has not been addressed. Needs, desires, expectations.
 - What do parents want for themselves?
For their children?
 - What do students want?
 - What do rabbis and lay people want?
 - What is the fit between what exists and what is wanted?
 - Do the North American Jews have the "education" they want?
6. What are the policy implications of the above?

c. The Assignment:

1. The researcher should work together with a steering or editorial committee and undertake an assessment of the state of research in Jewish education. The product should consist of a paper that offers an overview and assessment of the current state of research, guidelines for an agenda, and suggestions on the development of existing and new settings for research. This should take about six months to complete.

2. The paper will be presented to the Senior Policy Advisors and to the CIJE Board for discussion and recommendations.
3. The CIJE will involve the appropriate foundations in this process with a view to securing funding for the development of research opportunities. CIJE will decide if the research endeavor will be the domain of one foundation or whether several foundations will be approached for specific grants consistent with each foundation's interests.



I. Background

There is very little research on Jewish education being carried out in North America. As a result, there is a paucity of data; too little is known concerning the basic issues and almost no evaluations have been undertaken to assess the quality and impact of programs.

Because of this, decisions are made without the benefit of clear evidence of need; major resources are invested with insufficient evaluation or monitoring. We seldom know what works in Jewish education, what is better and what is less good, what the impact of programs is. The market has not been explored; we do not know what people want. There are not enough standardized achievement tests in Jewish education; we do not know much about what students know. We do not have accurate information on how many teachers there are, how qualified they are, what their salaries are.

Various theories and models for the training of educators need to be considered as we decide what kinds of training are appropriate for various types of educators. The debates in general education on the education of educators need to be considered in terms of their significance for Jewish education. A careful analysis of the potential of the existing training institutions would help us determine both what is desirable and what is feasible.

More extensive investigation into the history and philosophy of Jewish education would inform our thinking for future developments.

We are also in need of important data and knowledge in areas such as the curriculum and teaching methods for Jewish schools. For example, the teaching of Hebrew needs to be grounded in research. The various goals for the teaching of Hebrew should determine the kind of Hebrew to be taught: the Hebrew of the Bible, of the prayer book, spoken Hebrew, Hebrew useful on a first visit to Israel, and so on. These decisions in turn would determine the vocabulary to be mastered, the relative importance of literature, of grammar, etc.

The potential of informal education has not been researched. Summer camping appears to make a difference. Is this really so? If it is, how can its impact be increased by relating it to the education that takes place in the JCCs and in schools?

Adult education is also an area that needs to be researched. How could we best reach out to the many Jewish adults who might be interested in Jewish study but are not involved in existing adult education courses? What are the varied needs of different audiences of adults and what kinds of programs would meet diverse needs and learning styles?

The role of Israel as an educational resource has not been studied adequately. It plays too small a role in the curriculum of Jewish schools. There is a shortage of educational materials and literature about teaching methods for this topic.

We need research in order to allow decision-makers to make informed decisions. We need it, too, to enrich our knowledge about Jewish education and to promote the creative processes that will design the Jewish education of tomorrow.

II. Recommendations

The Commission recommends the establishment of a research capability in North America to develop the knowledge base for Jewish education, to gather the necessary data and to undertake monitoring and evaluation. Research and development should be supported at existing institutions and organizations, and at specialized research facilities that may need to be established.

