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"Overview" [of Indicators Project], May 1997.

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OVERVIEW

May 1997

Introduction

The idea of an Indicators Project for CIJE goes back to early discussions of evaluation methods within the advisory group of the CIJE project on Monitoring, Evaluation, and Feedback. At the time, the idea was to gather periodic information on the status of Jewish education to determine whether changes are occurring in accordance with CIJE's theories about the essential steps for change. A major problem for the project, and one reason it did not get off the ground, was the absence of a clear sense of what the main outcomes were, around which one might develop indicators.

The current revival of the idea stems from CIJE's ongoing strategic planning process. As part of the planning, a set of ideal visions have been drafted. If a consensus is reached around these visions, a set of outcomes could be derived upon which indicators could be based. Consequently, CIJE is considering an Indicators Project which would allow one to assess progress towards the vision.

Purpose

The underlying purpose of the Indicators Project is to supply information that would help build the case for quality in Jewish education. The project is intended to provide a baseline on the current status of Jewish education, both "inputs" and "outcomes", and to allow measurement of change over time. Presumably the project will rely on some combination of integrating existing data and gathering new data.

In an ideal world, with unlimited human as well as fiscal resources, the project could operate on several fronts. These might include a comprehensive, longitudinal study of a cohort of young Jews, gathering information on the quality and quantity of their Jewish experiences, including the home as well as formal and informal educational settings, to document the experiences that matter most for Jewish outcomes. In addition, one might gather periodic data on various aspects of Jewish educational programs and institutions and on outcomes that are expected to be related to educational programs, in a wide range of communities and at frequent time intervals. These approaches would test hypotheses about the quality of Jewish experience and its contribution to Jewish knowledge, practice, and identity, and simultaneously assess change in the extent to which Jewish education reflects the necessary quality.

In practice, a more limited approach is necessary. The Indicators Project we develop must provide a gauge of change in the conditions of Jewish education and in associated outcomes. To the extent the indicators data can address questions about which aspects of Jewish education are most important for a set of valued outcomes, that would also be desirable.

THE CIJE LEADING INDICATORS PROJECT

May 1997

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According to this view, the purpose of the Indicators Project is not to assess the impact of CIJE per se, but to examine in a broader sense whether the changes CIJE is seeking over time are in fact occurring. Another view, however, may suggest that the Indicators should pertain closely to CIJE's own work, so that the direct effects of CIJE can be assessed through the gathering of indicators data.

Current Activities

At present we are engaging in a series of consultations to help us design the Indicators Project. The consultations include:

- January: CIJE Seminar for Professors of Education
- April: Educational Researchers (Henry Levin, Aaron Pallas, Barbara Schneider, Lee Shulman, Ross Stolzenberg)
- May: Mandel Institute (Steve Cohen, Seymour Fox, Annette Hochstein, Michael Inbar)
- June: Network for Research on Jewish Education

Based on this input, we intend to prepare a draft proposal for collecting Indicators data by the end of June.

In addition to general issues for discussion listed on the next page, we are currently working through several salient issues:

1. To what extent can the Indicators Project rely on existing data that merely needs to be coordinated and integrated, and to what extent will the Project need to gather new data?
2. Should the level of analysis for the indicators focus on the continent as a whole, or on selected communities, or on selected institutions or programs?
3. Should the indicators be designed to assess the causal connections between "inputs" and "outcomes" (e.g., well-trained teachers and student learning), or should the causal connection be assumed? Should we attempt to test hypotheses about quality Jewish education, or should we assume we know what quality education is, and seek indicators of quality and of outcomes thought to be associated with such quality?
4. How much emphasis should be placed on using indicators to assess the impact of CIJE?

CIJE

Leading Indicators Project

CIJE has a vision of what "success" will look like if the American Jewish Community is revitalized through Jewish Education. The vision includes 10 outcomes in the North American Jewish Community.

How can we measure the extent to which we are reaching this vision?

The goal of this project is to operationalize leading indicators, or outcomes of the process of change, and implement a program of research and evaluation so that progress toward the vision can be measured.

Issues for discussion:

- 1) Is this a worthwhile endeavor?
- 2) What is the feasibility of doing this type of work?
- 3) What are different approaches that can be used?
 - a) How can these outcomes be measured?
 - b) What methodologies should be used?
 - c) What type(s) of research design(s) can be used?
- 4) How can we prioritize these indicators?
Which are most likely to yield important information?

Schedule for working on the Leading Indicators project

JANUARY-FEBRUARY, 1997:

- Review outcomes listed in strategic plan research.
- Discuss concept of Leading Indicators, and varieties of possible implementation, with professors group.

MARCH, 1997:

- Consultation with a small group of social scientists in connection with AERA at the end of the month. Given a set of outcomes, how might they be measured, and how should they be prioritized? Commission one participant to write a memo responding to the Leading Indicators idea.

APRIL, 1997:

- Draft statement of PURPOSE and possible alternative MODELS for studying Leading Indicators.

MAY/JUNE, 1997:

- Consultation in Jerusalem with Annette Hochstein, Seymour Fox, Mike Inbar, Steven M. Cohen, on models for Leading Indicators.

JUNE, 1997:

- Consultation with Jewish educational researchers at the annual meeting of the Network for Research on Jewish education, on models for Leading Indicators.
- Discussion with CIJE staff of models for Leading Indicators.

JUNE-AUGUST, 1997:

- Draft proposal for a study of Leading Indicators, identifying a model and illustrating with examples of possible indicators.
- Discussion of proposal with CIJE staff

OCTOBER, 1997:

- Discussion of proposal with CIJE Steering Committee
- -- Draft expanded proposal including PURPOSE, MODEL, and MEASURES to be included in a study of Leading Indicators.

NOVEMBER, 1997:

- Invitational meeting with lay leaders on Leading Indicators (at the GA?).

DECEMBER, 1997:

- Discuss expanded proposal with professors group.
- Discuss expanded proposal with CIJE staff.

JANUARY, 1998:

- Consultation with top methodologists on detailed plans for measuring Leading Indicators.

MARCH, 1998:

- Final proposal for studying Leading Indicators. Discuss with CIJE Steering Committee and Blaustein Foundation.

DRAFT VISION FOR OUTCOMES IN THE NORTH AMERICAN JEWISH COMMUNITY

1. Centrality of Learning/Knowledge Jewish learning broadly defined (e.g., including arts, history, meditation as well as traditional types of learning) is central to the life of North American Jews. There is a recognized minimum level of knowledge and skills that most Jews achieve and a substantial group that achieves much higher levels.
2. Jewish Identity Being Jewish is at the heart of the self-image of most Jews.
3. Moral Passion Moral passion and a commitment to repairing the world is recognized as being at the heart of what it means to be Jewish.
4. Jewish Values Jews and the organized Jewish Community are actively involved in bringing Jewish values to bear on their own lives and on the problems of the wider society.
5. Pluralism Many different ways exist of being and living as a committed Jew but there is a recognized core common “language” and an atmosphere of mutual respect.
6. Involvement/Commitment Most Jews are deeply involved in one or more organizations that engage in learning, community work, cultural activities, prayer and/or other Jewish activities and that are central to their identities. These communities serve almost as extended families.
7. Intensity/Energy There is a feeling of energy in these organizations and an intensity of involvement. These organizations engage the heart and mind.
8. Relationship with Israel There is an strong, active, positive, mutual relationship with Israel.
9. Leadership There is a large, talented group of lay and professional leaders driving continuous improvement and innovation in all aspects of Jewish Life.
10. Continuous Renewal There is an ongoing process of continuous innovation and change and a built-in culture of creativity that drives this process.

DEVELOPING METHODOLOGIES FOR MEASURING SUCCESS

We are proposing to hold a series of day-long consultations on evaluating progress in the revitalization of Jewish life in North America. At these consultations we hope to take the first steps in envisioning a program of research and evaluation about the impact of Jewish education, Jewish schooling, Jewish continuity efforts, and other efforts to bolster American Jewish life.

We recognize that this is an ambitious project and that it is unlikely, if not impossible, to find the perfect solution to this problem. However, we believe that it is only by experimenting with some less-than-perfect answers to this challenge that the Jewish community will, over time, find measurement techniques that can help to guide decision-making and funding. We believe it is important to go ahead and get something "off the ground" reasonably quickly. We are not looking for the perfect or elegant answer, but rather for a workable, meaningful attempt at addressing this important problem.

THE PROBLEM DEFINITION

We repeatedly hear from professionals and especially from lay leaders about frustration with their inability to measure in any meaningful way whether the changes being made today in the Jewish Community are making a difference. Funders are reluctant to sink millions of dollars into programs when they do not see any meaningful way of measuring the impact, either short-term or long-term. Most evaluation projects fall into one of two categories. They either evaluate programs by measuring activity and attitude (i.e., they count the number of participants and how much they liked the program) or they look at a group of people and assess a limited set of behaviors (e.g., "Do you light Shabbat candles?"). There are few, if any, significant attempts to measure whether there has been any systematic progress toward the goals most lay leaders, funders and professionals care most about, nor are we sure that it can be done.

In our view, a major underlying reason that evaluation is not addressing this critical issue is that it is difficult to do so. The difficulties lie in three areas:

- 1) The goals of these programs are difficult to define and progress against them is even more difficult to measure. Behavioral measures like whether a person lights Shabbat candles or conducts a Passover Seder, are probably inadequate for measuring the complex and diverse processes by which individual Jews respond to these programs.
- 2) Impact happens over a long time frame. It is hard to measure progress without using a longitudinal approach which can be expensive, complex and takes a long time before results can be assessed.

- 3) Even if longitudinal techniques are used, it is difficult to establish causality. Jewish life may be strengthened, but it may be unclear why.

OUR GOAL

Our goal at CIJE is to begin a process of developing a set of measurement techniques that could be used to assess progress in the revitalization of the Jewish community. Our initial concept is that the same techniques could be adapted for three different purposes: 1) To assess progress overall across major communities; 2) To evaluate and compare at the communal level; 3) To evaluate specific programs, especially education programs. We believe that the use of similar techniques at these three different levels would facilitate the gathering and processing of data and would help ease the burden of training evaluators. Also, if one set of techniques could be generally accepted it might improve overall quality and prevent the constant "reinvention of the wheel" for every evaluation project.

Our goal is to define both long-term and "leading indicators" so that progress could be measured in the "right" way long-term, yet there would be some feedback to the system in the early stages.

Another important objective is cost-effectiveness. We do not want to design a Rolls Royce, rather we would hope to find methodologies that would be cost-effective enough to be supported by local communities and by individual projects.

TENTATIVE PROJECT PLAN

JANUARY - FEBRUARY, 1997:

- Review outcomes to be measured as listed in strategic plan. Get input from other leading thinkers and practitioners. (AG, EG, BR)
- Discuss concept of Leading Indicators, and varieties of possible implementation, with professors group. (AG, EG, GZD, BWH)

MARCH, 1997:

- Consultation with a small group of social scientists in connection with AERA at the end of the month. Given a set of outcomes, how might they be measured, and how should they be prioritized? (AG, EG, BR) Commission one participant to summarize the thinking to-date on the Leading Indicators idea.

APRIL, 1997:

- Draft statement of PURPOSE and possible alternative MODELS for studying Leading Indicators. (AG, EG, BR)

MAY/JUNE, 1997:

- Consultation in Jerusalem with Annette Hochstein, Seymour Fox, Mike Inbar, Steven M. Cohen, on models for Leading Indicators. (AG, EG)

JUNE, 1997:

- Consultation with Jewish educational researchers at the annual meeting of Network for Research on Jewish education, on models for Leading Indicators (AG, EG, BR)
- Discussion with CIJE staff of models for Leading Indicators (All)

JUNE-AUGUST, 1997:

- Draft proposal for a study of Leading Indicators identifying a model and illustrating with examples of possible indicators. (AG/EG/BR)
- Discussion of proposal with CIJE staff. (All)
- Integration of ideas in Evaluation Institute curriculum.

OCTOBER, 1997:

- Discussion of proposal with CIJE Steering Committee (All)

NOVEMBER, 1997:

- Invitational meeting with lay leaders on Leading Indicators (at the GA?).

DECEMBER, 1997:

- Draft expanded proposal including PURPOSE, MODEL, and MEASURES to be included in a study of Leading Indicators.

JANUARY, 1998:

- Discuss expanded proposal with professors group.
- Discuss expanded proposal with CIJE staff.

MARCH, 1998:

- Consultation with top methodologists on detailed plans for measuring Leading Indicators.

MAY, 1998:

- Final proposal for studying Leading Indicators. Discuss with CIJE Steering Committee and Blaustein Foundation.

Draft of the schedule for working on the Leading Indicators Project

JANUARY-FEBRUARY, 1997:

- 1) Review outcomes listed in strategic plan research
- 2) Discuss concept of Leading Indicators, and varieties of possible implementation, with professors group.
- 3) Commission one professor to write a memo responding to the Leading Indicators idea.

MARCH, 1997:

- 1) Produce rough outline of leading indicators.
- 2) Consultation with a small group of broad-thinking social scientists, possibly in connection with AERA at the end of the month. Given a set of outcomes, how might they be measured, and how should they be prioritized?

APRIL, 1997:

- 1) Revised outline for a proposal to specify and measure Leading Indicators.

MAY/JUNE, 1997:

- 1) Further consultations on the Leading Indicators outline.

JUNE, 1997:

- 1) Consultation with Jewish educational researchers at the annual meeting of the Network for Research on Jewish education, on the Leading Indicators outline.
- 2) Discussion with CIJE staff of the Leading Indicators outline.

JUNE-AUGUST, 1997:

- 1) Draft memo on measuring Leading Indicators.

NOVEMBER, 1997:

- 1) Invitational meeting with lay leaders on Leading Indicators.

DECEMBER, 1997:

- 1) Consultation with top methodologists on detailed plans for measuring leading indicators.
- 2) Consultation with CIJE staff.