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Mr. David Hirshhorn
President
The Blaustein Foundation
Baltimore, Md.

1/28/99

Dear David,

Adam Gamoran and I would like to have the opportunity to meet with you in person and fill you in on the Mandel Foundation in New York's current work in the area of research and evaluation. I will call your secretary to find out when is convenient. One suggestion (from the standpoint of our calendars) is February 24 in the afternoon.

We have been continuing the work on the Indicators Project as well as the Teacher Educator Institute evaluation. Just to keep you posted in the meantime:

- Dr. Bethamie Horowitz is completing her review of identity indicators. She is completing a major new study of Jewish identity and her paper will be of great value in guiding our work.
- Dr. Ellen Goldring is currently reviewing the literature of indicators of high quality institutions. This is the second of the three areas, which we identified as highest priority of development work. Dr. Goldring's review will be completed this spring.
- A consultation with a variety of experts, in North America and in Israel is scheduled for February 17 to make progress about the content areas or types of questions that can legitimately serve as indicators of Jewish learning across a broad spectrum of the population.

Enclosed with this letter are two documents:

- The evaluation report of the second cohort of the Teacher Educator Institute. Renee Wohl, one of our researchers has prepared this report under the direction of Dr. Susan Stodolsky, a professor of Research and Evaluation at the University of Chicago.
- Pathways, the handbook on program evaluation that we have produced with JESNA.

Looking forward to seeing you soon.

Sincerely,

Gail Dorph
Senior Education Officer

March 1, 1999

Mr. David Hirschhorn
President, The Blaustein Foundation
The Blaustein Building
P.O. Box 238
1 North Charles St.
Baltimore, MD 21203

Dear David,

I am looking forward to meeting with you on April 12. In the meantime, I wanted to elaborate on some of the activities Gail Dorph mentioned in her letter of January 28, to keep you fully apprised of our activities in the project.

Evaluation of the Teacher-Educator Institute (TEI)

Evaluating our own work has been a central goal of the research and evaluation project at the Mandel Foundation, not only for purposes of maintaining quality and informing decisions, but also to serve as a model of evaluation from which we can learn and demonstrate the evaluation process itself. From our group of "Professors of Education" (a network started by the Mandel Foundation to increase capacity for research in Jewish education) we have been fortunate to bring in Professor Susan Stodolsky of the University of Chicago to guide the TEI evaluation. Under her supervision, Renee Wohl has completed a report on the second cohort of participants. Unlike the evaluation of cohort I, which relied on interviews after the program was completed, the evaluation of cohort II included interviews both before and after program participation. This design allows us to draw firmer conclusions about changes in the participants as a consequence of the program. Wohl reports that in response to TEI, participants changed their ways of thinking about professional development, and changed the kinds of programs they offer to educators in their communities. Instead of offering "discrete opportunities for the transmission and acquisition of techniques," TEI graduates now understand professional development as "a long term processing journey with teachers." This recognition, and its corresponding change in practice, is essential for enhancing the quality of professional development for Jewish educators.

The evaluation also revealed challenges to the implementation of enhanced professional development. Although the teacher-educators stressed the value of collegiality and collaboration within communities, in practice this collaboration was sometimes difficult to achieve. The redesign of TEI for a third cohort, just underway, is taking this challenge into account.

By the time the third cohort of TEI has graduated, about 85 teacher-educators from over a dozen communities and four national movements will have participated. In light of the effectiveness of the program as revealed by the evaluation, we expect that TEI will have had a major impact on professional development for teachers in Jewish schools, a key to our strategy for building the profession of Jewish education in North America.

The Indicators Project

On February 17, we reviewed the progress of the Indicators Project in a consultation at the Mandel Foundation in New York. Participants included Gail Dorph, Seymour Fox, Adam Gamoran, Ellen Goldring, Annette Hochstein, Alan Hoffmann, Barry Holtz, Bethamie Horowitz, Michael Inbar, Daniel Marom, Nessa Rapoport, and Barbara Schneider. (Michael Inbar and Barbara Schneider are sociology professors and methodologists from the Hebrew University and the University of Chicago, respectively.) The agenda and background materials for the meeting are attached. Key results of the consultation are as follows:

- We affirmed our decision that the indicators receiving the highest priority for attention are Jewish identity, high-quality Jewish institutions, and Jewish learning (or literacy). For literacy and high-quality institutions, progress is well underway. Dr. Bethamie Horowitz is preparing a background paper on the first, and Dr. Ellen Goldring is scanning the literature on the second. Both scholars are charged with examining current approaches in Jewish and secular arenas, and providing us with recommendations for indicators. For Jewish literacy, however, the consultation brought to light several weaknesses in the plan we were considering, with the resulting decision to rethink the purposes and plans of this aspect of our work. I have been asked to lead this rethinking.
- Several U.S. national data sets contain information on American Jews, which could be made useful for the Indicators Project. For example, the General Social Survey, an annual survey of a representative sample of American adults, contains information about religious heritage, current religion, and the strength of religious identity. This could be used to trace the strength of religious identity among U.S. Jews for a twenty-year period. Although the measure of identity is crude (respondents are simply asked whether their religious identity is strong or not very strong), the ability to monitor responses over time is of great value. We are considering a series of reports, perhaps two each year, reporting on this and similar findings about indicators for the North American Jewish community.

I look forward to discussing these matters further with you when we meet in April.

Sincerely,

Adam Gamoran
Professor

Mandel Foundation, Jewish Education Sector
Summary of Meeting February 17, 1999

Topic: The Jewish Indicators Project

Participants: Gail Dorph, Seymour Fox, Adam Gamoran, Ellen Goldring, Mark Gurvis, Annette Hochstein, Alan Hoffmann, Barry Holtz, Elie Holzer, Bethamie Horowitz, Michael Inbar, Daniel Marom, Nessa Rapoport, Barbara Schneider, and Leah Strigler

Overview

The agenda for the meeting was as follows:

- I. Overview and update on the Indicators Project
 - A. Project Goals
 - B. Project Activities to Date
- II. Review of Jewish Indicators in U.S. Data Sets
-- Piloting an Indicator Report
- III. The Process of Developing Indicators
 - A. Jewish Identity
 - B. High Quality Jewish Institutions
 - C. Jewish Literacy
- IV. From Development to Implementation: Next Steps
 - A. Data Collection: National and Communal
 - B. Pilot Community Involvement
- V. Globalizing the Indicators Project

This agenda was overly ambitious. Nevertheless, during the course of this six-hour meeting we were able to examine items I-III in great depth, and some important decisions were reached:

- We decided to move ahead with planning a series of indicator reports using U.S. national data.
- We decided to continue with the review of literature on indicators of Jewish identity that is currently underway.
- We decided to pursue our plan of scanning the literature on indicators of high-quality institutions, with some re-focus to incorporate other possible approaches to studying institutions.
- We decided that the literacy initiative needs to be reconceptualized.

Update

Adam described the goals of the meeting as threefold:

- to reach a common understanding of what indicators are, and what they are not
- to provide an update on the project and obtain feedback on ongoing activities
- to help us reach decisions in key areas

He then discussed the history of the project, noting its emergence in the context of Lead Communities and its re-emergence as a response to the CIJE Strategic Planning process. Current interest in the project is fueled by its potential contributions to the mission of the Mandel Foundation:

- the Indicators Project can galvanize attention on Jewish education
- it can also help sustain attention on education over the long term
- it can provide hard data for decision-makers

A related point is that instruments developed for the Indicators project can be used, with modification, for evaluation of local programs. Although direct evaluation of such programs is not a goal of the Foundation, building capacity is one of the Foundations' aims, and the Indicators Project can contribute to such capacity.

Activities thus far in the project included the following consultations: the "Professors Group", experts in U.S. educational research, members of the Network for Research in Jewish Education, CAPE, and the CIJE lay board.

Discussion of these issues covered a wide range of topics. An additional contribution of the topic could be to stimulate the research agenda for the Sector. For example, findings about associations in the Indicators data might lead to research questions. An important concern about the idea of indicators is that they are reductionist. We need to be careful not to accept indicators that are meaningless, even if policy-makers think they are important. There may be some areas where research is needed which should *not* be reduced to indicators.

The Foundation's role is to raise the level of the conversation, especially when other organizations are reluctant to pay the price. Indicators can serve as a flashpoint to stimulate debate, but this means we need to think very carefully about what to indicate. We must develop ideas we can defend before we implement indicators.

Mike offered a distinction among types of indicators that proved very useful over the course of our discussion:

- One kind of indicator is of value in and of itself. Child mortality was Mike's example.
- A second kind of indicator is one that is of practical value, a sort of warning light for decision-makers. Intermarriage may fall into this category (although some argue that intermarriage is a symptom rather than the problem itself, and using it as an indicator furthers the reductionist argument).
- A third kind of indicator is one that is theoretically justified. Educators who are professionally prepared is an example for this category. In this case it is primarily a theory of effective practice, rather than empirical evidence, that links the indicator to desired ends.

Although there was some concern about reductionism, there seemed to be a general consensus about the need for a variety of indicators. In contemporary Jewish education, we know virtually nothing about the most elementary facts -- e.g., what proportion of youth continue their Jewish education after bar/bat mitzvah -- even though indicators like this are relatively simple. This is information we need.

Two other issues dominated the remainder of this portion of the discussion. First, what is the proper role for the Foundation vis-a-vis indicators? The CIJE's motivation for the project was to measure change, but the Foundation's purposes may be better served by indicators not only of what exists, but what is desired or possible. Indeed, the Foundation is in position to take a stand about indicators which may be unpopular or seen as unattainable. One notion was that the Foundation should set aside funds for high-risk, minority ideas. (Of course, consideration of these funds would need to occur in the context of the Foundations total priorities.) The Foundation's long-term goal may be to get people in the field to hold *themselves* accountable. What are conceptions of meaningful continuity? How do they apply to education? Are they attainable? Considering these questions helps provide a background for the Indicators project.

A second issue concerned the Indicators methodology. Because Jewish education is voluntary, the U.S. national goals is not a good model. What are the valid units of measure given the voluntary, sporadic, decentralized, non-systematic system of Jewish education? Central agencies (national and local) have little impact on most educational institutions. The CIJE Study of Educators focused on separate communities, one at a time. Is this the right approach for indicators?

Indicators Reports

We considered the sample Indicators Report prepared last summer by Adam, Ellen, and Bill Robinson (who is no longer on staff). Some of the conversation concerned issues in the sample report. Examples included: How are intermarriage and involvement related? With all the debate about intermarriage rates in the NJPS, why has no one looked before at the GSS (the data set for the sample report)? Are there gender differences in the strength of Jewish identity? At what point in the life cycle does a change in religion occur? These questions seemed to show some interest in the specific findings that might be presented in Indicators reports of this type. More generally, we discussed several issues related to the principle of preparing such reports.

Audience

Who is the audience for this type of report? The consensus response seemed to be the Foundation itself, first and foremost. As Seymour commented, "We need to know what we're up against." Even if this type of report were only prepared for Mort Mandel, it would be justifiable (but Alan added, "I want to read it too!"). Nessa posed pertinent questions: Do people read this sort of document? Does it make a difference for policy? Are there tools that can help people

interpret what they are reading? In response, Mark explained that Jewish community planning is generally done in the absence of data. There is no guarantee, but it is possible that data-rich reports of this nature could begin to change the culture of a field that has been devoid of data. It could be an enormously important tool, so we should not get too worried (at the beginning) about how few others may use it. Any one report does not help planning, but an accumulation of reports over time may be very helpful.

Content Focus

How should we determine what content, or what indicators specifically, should be the focus of reports? One important answer is to ask those implementing change, such as Gail and Barry, what they need to know to do their work. For example, do they need to know about the allocation of resources to "in-reach" vs. "out-reach"?

A data set like the GSS has the advantage of yearly tracking. This is very important; it is not available in any other source that we have uncovered. The disadvantage of the GSS is that it is very narrow. Also, the results of the GSS analyses are already well known, so far. Of course, were the trends to change, it could be very important.

Indicators are always political. Therefore it is very important that those who collect and/or report indicators data have legitimacy before the audience they seek to engage. What looks like small changes in trends can mean a lot, so one needs to interpret the findings.

There are some optimistic signs in Jewish life, e.g. a rise in adult learning, an increase in spirituality. Can these be the focus of indicator studies?

Moving Ahead

We decided to spend 1999 on prototype reports, and developing a list of future topics. At least two reports should be ready before any one is sent out. Since research questions may be nested within indicators findings, the process of developing indicators reports may also generate research questions. It was also suggested that we form an advisory board for the Indicators Reports (or the project as a whole).

Indicator Reports can be a valuable tool, consistent with the broader movement towards bringing scientific knowledge to the general population. The documents may be used in seminars and in public forums. Generally there is a movement to translate complicated work to people in a way that can be understood, and Indicator Reports may contribute to that endeavor.

It would be a good idea to attach a response card to the first Indicators Report, to see whether people read the report, how well it meets their needs, and whether they would like to remain on the mailing list.

Developing Indicators

We discussed our activities in developing indicators for the three areas we had previously identified as highest priority: Jewish identity, high-quality Jewish institutions, and Jewish literacy.

Jewish Identity

Bethamie described her new work and latest findings on Jewish identity. She has developed a more complex and nuanced scheme than has been used in the past. Her approach examines identity as a dynamic process rather than as fixed and static. Also, the approach is innovative in that it combines behavior with subjective assessment of identity. It may not fit with past conceptions of Jewish identity, so it is important to understand and describe differences in the ways Jewish identity can and has been measured.

An important question for Bethamie is, "Why is that identity?" What conception of Judaism or Jewish identity guided her approach? Have people moved from the conception of Judaism to the conception of identity? In addressing these questions, Bethamie was advised to examine the conceptions of Jewish identity in the Educated Jew papers. It was also suggested that Sam Wineburg would be a good person to talk with about identity issues.

The group looks forward to Bethamie's review paper on the measurement of identity, and particularly her recommendations for measuring identity in the indicators project.

High-Quality Jewish Institutions

Ellen described her planned review paper, which is expected to examine the following: What are indicators of institutional quality? One writer has categorized these as outcomes, processes, and capacity. How can information on indicators be collected and measured? What is unique to institutional indicators for Jewish institutions? The paper would conclude with recommendations.

A number of questions were raised. Are the institutions limited to educational institutions? At this point any institution that contains an educational enterprise -- including JCCs and synagogues, for example -- would be included. Where would "the people factor" fit in, for example, "the teacher who inspired me?" Would "inspiring," "stimulating," and "challenging" capture the meaning of high quality? These adjectives do capture the meaning we are seeking. Is there anything distinctive about the way Jews transmit culture through institutions? This might come out in the review.

Based on the Agnon experience, conditions of "readiness" for change were essential. This may be a feature of high quality, or the potential for high quality.

Another interesting comment concerned the difference between a well-run institution versus one that is vital and compelling. We can think of examples of well-run places which are Jewishly

“about nothing.” We need to find a way to talk about places that are well run, but also compelling. The importance of this concern, and the complexity of the problem, led to the notion that perhaps institutional quality should be a focus of research studies, not indicator studies. Although the institution may be the right place to cut in, we may need portraits a la Sara Lightfoot. It was suggested that Ellen’s paper could include a brief review of institutional indicators, a discussion of what can and cannot be learned from that approach, and an overview of the pros and cons of other methods of studying institutions, such as portraits and other approaches.

Mark pointed out that we do need to keep track of the characteristics of educators. However, this could be done on a communal basis, as in the CIJE Study of Educators, rather than at the institutional level, if we decided against institutional indicators.

Jewish Literacy

Adam described the current proposal for a literacy study. It was immediately apparent and widely agreed that we did not know enough and were not prepared to proceed with such a study. Several issues were discussed, which made it clear that there are multiple potential purposes for a literacy study, and we need greater clarity before we proceed.

Is it worth examining what is learned (or not learned), if no one wants to teach it? This would leave us open to the criticism that Schiff’s study of knowledge received, i.e. of course no one knows Rashi, that’s not in the curriculum. Another view, however, was that it is important to ask questions such as, “What do American Jews know about X?” In doing so, we would hold up a picture of the current situation. This could be a useful policy tool if it were carefully developed. It would ultimately answer the question, do things get better over time? It would be worthwhile to ask this question if we can see some steps that may improve the situation.

Another potential purpose would be to inform communities working on adult education, what their adults know. However, we are not particularly in the “adult education business.”

Developing a literacy assessment is complex (even dangerous) because there are such different conceptions of what constitutes Jewish literacy. We would need to be clear on what we mean, and possibly allow different conceptions in different contexts or for different individuals.

Developing a test is always costly. It is not enough to articulate goals. One must also identify educational objectives and, given those objectives, understand the strategy used to accomplish the aims.

Examples of literacy indicators we had proposed in the past include Adam’s old idea of a study of 7th grade Hebrew performance, and Elana Shohamy’s assessment of day school Hebrew. Shohamy’s assessment included anchor items for comparing day schools. Could we identify

anchor items that would permit comparisons across the adult Jewish population, even if much of the assessment differed for different individuals or groups?

Our conclusions about the literacy project were as follows:

1. We will not go ahead with the project Steve Cohen had proposed. Adam will write to Steve to let him know.
2. We need to articulate the multiple potential purposes of a literacy study, and recommend possible directions for action (or inaction) within the Indicators project (or elsewhere in the Sector). Adam will write a memo outlining the goals of the project and discussing the problems we have encountered.



Memorandum

To: ELLEN GOLDRING
ADAM GAMORAN

From: GAIL DORPH

Date: 03/18/99

Re: FOR REVIEW AND COMMENTS

These are the questions on Jewish ed and identity in NJPS. There will be another go around based on feedback from groups. Please comment on whether you think our agenda is well represented.

Gail

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