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Goals Project. Meeting summaries, 1993-1994.

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From: Dan Pekarsky (PEKARSKY)
To: Barry
Date: Tuesday, February 22, 1994 11:44 am
Subject: Goals Project

This is a summary of our recent conversations concerning the Goals Project. In New York we seemed to have gravitated towards the idea that we should launch the Coalition of Vision Driven Educational Institutions by announcing it at the Seminar in Israel this summer. There were, however, a number of concerns voiced at the meeting - and some nagging anxieties that persisted in its aftermath. Prominent among these concerns were the following: 1) Working with an institution in a meaningful way is probably a labor-intensive activity. Are we warranted in assuming that the human resources whom we might want to draft to participate in this project will have the interest and the time to invest in it? 2) Do we know enough about what it is we want to do to catalyze vision-drivenness in educating institutions to publicly announce and launch the Coalition we've been discussing? In New York we seemed to be in agreement that there was a lot we still need to be learning if we are to be effective. Perhaps we need to structure the project in such a way as to give us that time.

Incidentally 1) and 2) are related in that until we are clearer about #2, it may be difficult to recruit outside resource people. For we're not sure how much of their time we'll need, what kind of training they should have, or what exactly they should be doing.

Alongside these concerns stand a number of other beliefs that were shared by myself, Barry, and Gail in our conversations. First, that the idea of encouraging serious engagement with issues of vision and goals remains in our mind compellingly important and worth pursuing. Second, that the communities need to feel that we are moving forward with this project. Third, that whatever we say among ourselves back-stage concerning our need to do a lot of learning, this is decidedly not something we ought to be conveying to them.

Against the background of these concerns, we began gravitating to the view that it may be premature to begin selecting and working with institutions this coming fall. An alternative that we found worth seriously considering is the following:

1) to create the coalition in two stages rather than one. During the first stage, which would cover the 1994-95 academic year, CIJE would sponsor a series of approximately 4 seminars in each lead-community, designed to educate and engage the energies of the leadership of local educating institutions concerning the nature and importance of educational visions and goals. These seminars would guide them to wrestle with a number of significant guiding visions and to begin to understand the role they play in educational design, decision-making and evaluation. In the second stage, the following year, the Coalition would be launched

with the selection of a few institutions that we would work with intensively. Conceivably, in the initial phase of stage 2 (1995-96), we would be working with only one institution in each Lead Community. These institutions would be chosen from among those who had undergone the four-seminar experience during the '94-'95 year. Indeed, the seminar might well include a serious effort to educate the participating institutional representatives concerning the logic behind the requirements for entry into the coalition and guidance in developing an application.

The advantage of this slower launch is that it would give us the time we feel we need to develop appropriate strategies and to scout out available resources to the project. While this approach allows us to make progress, and allows the communities to see that the project is moving ahead in ways they can already buy into, there is a reduced likelihood of promising more than we can deliver.

We agreed in our meeting to let this approach percolate during the course of the week, to see whether it continues to seem sensible, and to discuss it again at our Friday meeting. If it continues to seem sound, we then need to explore its soundness further with other relevant parties - notably, and especially Alan, whose considered judgment will, of course, be decisive.

If we do go this route, our immediate tasks will be the following:

- 1) to sketch out in detail what we should do in Atlanta, beyond my offering a general account of the nature of the Goals Project and the importance of Vision and Goals to the educational enterprise. In our conversations, we noted the importance of a. having some kind of an activity that actively engages them, perhaps one involving studying and reacting to a text connected with the Goals Project, and b. orienting them to the Summer Seminar in Israel.

- 2) Planning the Summer Seminar in Israel (which in many ways might be the forerunner of the four-seminar series to be held in each of the Lead Communities the following year). The role of this seminar would be to educate and engage the lay/professional leadership so that they could talk with some authority concerning the importance of vision/goals and could lend their support and energies to the effort to generate local excitement concerning involvement with this project.

- 3) A serious effort to read relevant articles and meet with appropriate individuals, with an eye towards further clarifying the strategies/approaches that should define our work next year and beyond.

- 4) The development of the library of materials, or the resource bank, we discussed in New York.

- 5) Begin contacting those individuals we believe might prove valuable resources to educating institutions that will become part of the coalition. Our aim would be to assess interest,

availability, time, and good ideas, as well as to engage those who seem most appropriate in participating in the seminars scheduled for next year in the three lead communities.

If I have misrepresented what you took to be our shared understandings in our recent conversations, please don't wait until Friday to correct me, but do so now. If, on the other hand, this does represent your understandings, please feel free to send it on to Alan for his reactions. Or else let me know, and I'll send it on to him.

I look forward to our talking on Friday morning.

SUMMARY OF DEC. 22 MEETING RE: GOALS (Barry, Gail, Danny)

The background for this meeting was my short document that summarized our Dec. 16 conversation concerning the Summer Seminar in Israel. We agreed that we would review where we had gotten last week and push our conversation further.

ANTICIPATING THE MEETING

In anticipating the meeting, I knew I wanted to put the following points on the table:

1. the Educated Jew Project is already engaged in part of what we were discussing last week - namely, in an effort to understand the way in which having a vision can inform the life of an educational institution. It is important that Barry and Gail have a chance to see the relevant material.

2. Scheffler et al. have produced a document that summarizes different conceptions of the relationship between theory and educational practice. I think it would be extraordinarily helpful for us to have a similar piece that articulates different conceptions of the relationship between visions and educational practice. Among other things, having such a document would help dispel the idea that the relationship between them is in any sense obvious.

3. My summary of the last meeting did not, I felt, do justice to the item concerning the relationship between Vision, Educational Practice, and Social Reality. This needs to be fleshed out.

THE MEETING

I begin with a few specific points that launched the meeting, and then turn, in #4, to the most fundamental issue we discussed.

1. If Text Study is to be a part of the seminar, Barry suggested that we turn to Mike Rosenak's manuscript on the educational significance of certain classical Jewish texts. Rosenak's introduction to his work would be valuable, and study could focus on some of the texts he suggests. Using such texts would be doubly useful: in addition to having a serious opportunity to study classical texts, educational issues would be illuminated. We stressed the critical importance of having a very gifted teacher for this text study -- perhaps Jonny Cohen??

2. We discussed the importance of offering participants vivid examples of institutions that are actually guided by a vision.

3. We also discussed the possibility of including opportunities to scan different kinds of mission statements, reflecting different institutional visions. This might give rise to an interesting exercise: what differences would we expect in the way institutions guided by these different visions would approach e.g. the study of

Bible or modern Israel?

There was some concern that this route might be too practical, steering participants away from reflection on some of the larger issues we had imagined focusing on. We will return to this.

4. Gail reported that concerns have been expressed, in both Atlanta and Baltimore, concerning the practical implications of the proposed summer-seminar: is it going to have any practical pay-off back home? Will participants be able to go anywhere with what they do and learn? Gail had some concern that these questions reflected a lack of substantial enthusiasm for the seminar.

As we reflected on these concerns and on how we might respond to them, we found ourselves asking some basic questions concerning the wisdom and/or direction of the seminar. Perhaps, for example, it is premature to have such a seminar; perhaps there needs to be more groundwork and buy-in at the local level prior to such a seminar. Our reflections led us to entertain the following reconceptualization of the proposed seminar:

Although we continue to think that the emphasis on substance as articulated in the last summary is desirable, perhaps the seminar can address the concerns of the potential participants and be more fruitful if we emphasize that it will include a substantial PLANNING component -- that it be understood as a seminar designed to encourage reflection but also to facilitate the planning process in relation to goals. Thus understood, the seminar would put on the table the following question: how do we meaningfully raise the issue of goals, in the community at large and at an institutional level, within a community. The reasoning for having the seminar, as thus understood in Israel, is that we would have available to us the resources of the Mandel Institute, which have been substantially focussed on one serious dimension of the goals-issue.

According to this reconceptualization, although issues of substance remain prominent, issues of process (how do we introduce goals-conversations in our communities?) would also be significant.

One possibility would be to communicate the following: in the same way that this year the educator survey served as an organizing theme in each community, next year the theme of goals will be a primary focus in each of the lead communities. The seminar would be a springboard to this process.

There was a sense at our meeting that this reconceptualization of the seminar might encourage greater buy-in from potential participants, some of whom may at this point be uncertain about the possibility of bridging the projected seminar to their work.

We felt that if a seminar is to take place, it is crucial that it be well designed so that the participants come away convinced that it will further their efforts. The credibility of CIJE and of the Goals Project is at stake.

AGENDA FOR THE GOALS PROJECT - PART VI

Based on the foregoing, I would recommend the following agenda for our February 10 meeting:

1. Summarizing/refining/rethinking the basics: a) Underlying assumptions and key distinctions that inform and define the goals project; b) the levels at which the goals project is to work; c) considerations pertinent to a decision concerning which strategy or strategies to adopt.
2. Summary, discussion and assessment of the major proposals represented in this report, as well as additional proposals that seem promising.
3. Action: a) Decide on one or more proposals to pursue, and b) Develop a plan of action, including a division of labor.

IN PREPARATION FOR DEC. 22 CONVERSATION WITH BARRY AND GAIL

1. The Educated Jew project is already engaged in the translation process -- whether adequately or not is a different question.
2. Scheffler et. al have produced a piece on the relationship between theory and practice -- different conceptions thereof. We need, I think, a comparable piece dealing with vision and practice.
3. Park School in Baltimore -- an example of what??
4. Need to develop a piece on vision, educational implications, and social reality -- alluded to but not developed in the document.

Barry: Item 8 b. re: study of Jewish texts. See Rosenak's manuscript on educational significance of classical Jewish sources. See especially the introductory discussion.

Good text teacher might be Jonny Cohen; maybe Howie; maybe Danny Marom

Item 10 re: realities of life,. Need real life examples of institutions that have a vision.

Include mission-statements from different institutions: what would we expect to be different in the way they teach Bible or modern Israel? [Is this too practical?]

Botwinnick: Will this have practical implications -- other than irritating people back home? Will they have anywhere to go with it? Both Baltimore and Atlanta are skeptical; Milwaukee is interested. Do we have anything really worthwhile to deliver? Would we be better off starting in local communities talking about goals -- and saving the Israel-component for later?

Should goal be to make the participants our partners in the local venture -- in getting the conversation going?

WHY ISRAEL? WHY GOALS?

WAY TO THINK OF IT: A PLANNING SEMINAR -- HOW DO WE RAISE THE ISSUE OF GOALS, COMMUNITY-WIDE AND INSTITUTIONAL, WITHIN A COMMUNITY. Why Israel?? The resources of the Mandel Institute are at our disposal. Study/reflection plays a role in this overall process, but it isn't the end-all.

Point #1 would need to be changed: process-issues need to be addressed.

Gail and Barry will be part of this seminar.

Advantage of this re-conceptualization: The Mandel Institute becomes an advisor rather than a driver of the project.

Issues of credibility -- of CIJE and the Goals Project -- are critical. Who they are---what they can bring home with them-- are critical.

Goals as next year's theme in the Lead Communities: seminar is springboard.

SUMMARY OF MAJOR POINTS TO EMERGE IN CONVERSATION WITH GAIL AND BARRY (on Dec. 16) CONCERNING THE GOALS PROJECT, WITH SPECIAL ATTENTION TO A PROJECTED SUMMER SEMINAR IN ISRAEL

1. Our shared sense was that seminar should primarily deal with substantive rather than process-issues. Given the importance of having a vision of what one is aiming at for the whole enterprise of Jewish education, we thought it important for participants in the seminar to engage in some serious reflection on this matter. The aim is not - or not only - that they come to grasp how having such a vision can contribute to the work of Jewish educator, but that they actually spend serious time thinking about their own personal visions and the kinds of visions that might inform their work.

2. More concretely, the primary subject we felt that seminar should explore is the following: visions of a meaningful Jewish existence (a phrase that we felt somewhat more comfortable with than we were with "images of an educated Jew"), and the relationship between such a vision and the work of an educational institution. That is, what does it mean for an educational institution to be based on a particular vision of a meaningful Jewish existence? How does having such a vision inform the determination of goals, structures, in-service training, curriculum design, and so forth?

3. We would hope that participants would go home a) with some serious reflection under their belts concerning some significant visions of a meaningful Jewish existence, b) aware of the ways in which having such a vision can fruitfully inform the work of an educational institution; c) ready to go home to encourage local institutions to enter into the conversation concerning such a vision and to recognize the educational importance of so doing; d) with some concrete ideas about how to encourage this process back home.

4. We also felt that it was critical that as part of the seminar participants have a chance to locate the issues they would be exploring (which primarily relate to the educated Jew project) in relation to the entirety of the Goals Project. It would be critical in this connection to offer them a map, or a language for thinking about and differentiating between a variety of related but different ways of thinking about goals and visions. Some of the relevant points are included in Pekarsky's recent paper on goals. Our feeling was that the participants may be using terms like "goals" and "visions" in very different ways -- so different as to make genuine conversation very difficult. To facilitate such conversation and to make possible any real focus, this conceptual map be of critical importance.

5. Our understanding is that the seminar is primarily for the local project directors and for their lay leaders (and spouses).

6. Though more time may well be desirable, we thought it would be unrealistic to expect to get more than a week of their time (about

five days of work).

7. At the heart of the seminar we imagined opportunities to encounter significant visions of a meaningful Jewish existence, as articulate by people who are committed to them -- for example, Greenberg and Brinker. We felt that it was very important - politically and otherwise -- to include a representative of Reform Judaism in this seminar. After encountering these visions, participants would have the chance to take one of them and to explore its educational significance -- as a way of getting at the ways in which visions can help the work of the educator.

8. As elements in the seminar we also imagined: a) a pre-seminar effort on the part of all participants to wrestle in personal terms with some of the substantive questions that seminar would address; this would forward the work of the seminar in a number of ways. It would help generate both focus and motivation. b) well-crafted opportunities to study Jewish texts, with an eye towards making vivid to the participants how - in a variety of conceptions of a meaningful Jewish existence - text study enters in.

9. Our feeling was that the January Jerusalem meetings should be thought of as an effort to develop a proposal, or suggestions, for the summer seminar that reflects the concerns we have been discussing. The ideas that emerge will then come back to the North American team for review, elaboration, etc., in the light of their understanding of the relevant realities and needs in the three lead communities. Once they have turned the proposal into a plan, the Jerusalem team will have primary responsibility for working out the logistics.

10. We had what for me was a very important conversation concerning the relationship between vision, educational practice, and social reality. Among the points made were the following: a) though we recognize it as critical, the relationship between vision and educational practice is often not as clear, even for us, as it should be, and this matter needs urgent attention as we prepare for the seminar. Different ways of understanding this relationship need to be put on the table, and examples need to be found that illustrate the relationship at its best. b) We recognized that even if we were able to identify what an educational institution would look like that took a vision of a meaningful Jewish existence seriously, we would need to face up to social realities that might make such an institution hard to operate in a meaningful way at this moment in time -- realities that pertain to the attitudes and ways of life of the surrounding community, the educational and ideological background of available educators, etc. In this connection, we took note of the fact that even when a school has a vision and a curriculum that reflects it, teachers often feel driven early on to abandon it in favor "what interests and excites the kids" -- which becomes the criterion of success. The need to inform our work with both vision and social reality is critical to our success -- and attention needs to be paid to the relationship between them.