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## JCC EDUCATORS JUNE, 2002 SEMINAR SOME RETROSPECTIVE COMMENTS

### INTRODUCTION

In preparation for our meetings at the end of June and beginning of July, I have tried to capture observations, concerns, suggestions -- some of them my own, and many those of others - that speak to the unfolding and outcomes of our last seminar and to the work that remains ahead of us. Due to time constraints combined with the desirability of getting these ideas out on paper as soon as possible, the document is developed pretty informally - informally, in the sense that it isn't systematically organized and may include significant overlaps. *The companion piece to this document attempts to capture key issues/questions/concepts/insights that were on the table during our June 2002 seminar.*

### SOME GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

1. As planned, a number of themes were interwoven in this seminar. The major subjects were the following: American Jewish identity; vision/practice; the projects. Our discussions of American-Jewish identity and of vision/practice were enriched by a number of activities over and above those listed in the program as devoted to these topics. Of notable importance were:
  - our opportunities to engage in text study (where we encountered the Gopnick article, the passage from the Torah dealing with the Spies, and the new magazine *HEEB* in another).
  - our site-visit to the Baltimore JCC, which became the basis for a rich conversation concerning different ways of thinking about vision and the disjunction between the way the program understands this notion and the way people in the field do.
  - The opportunity to look at three different versions of the movie *The Jazz Singer*, dating back to different periods in American Jewish history, each of which suggested different concerns, aspirations and conflicts in the protagonists. For example, whereas career-choice was a central issue to one generation, in the most recent re-make the issue was inter-marriage. Like the Gopnick article and our encounter with the magazine *HEEB*, this session gave us an opportunity to experience together the power of the arts as vehicles of Jewish education.
2. An additional theme, introduced for the first time in this seminar, concerned the place of nature in Judaism and in the work of JCC Jewish educators. In the seminar's introductory session participants were asked to go out into the outdoors, accompanied by three very different passages that involve references to nature (a passage from *I and Thou* dealing with ways of apprehending a tree; a passage from *Pirkei Avoth* that warns against looking up from one's learning to admire a tree, and a third passage that uses a tree as a metaphor). Participants were asked to read these passages, a couple of which were accompanied by radically different translations, in the outdoors, and to use this as a springboard to a conversation

concerning the place of nature in Judaism and in their own work as JCC educators. In later session, after reading the passage from this week's Parasha dealing with the Spies sent out to investigate the Land, participants were encouraged to go outside (it was dusk) and to quietly take in the sounds, sights, and smells that they encountered, and to share their experiences with a partner. A number of people commented on their enjoyment of an experience that was not as cognitively-oriented as most of our sessions have been.

3. The theme of 'the role of the JCC educator', though the intended focus of only one session, turned out to be more central in the life of the seminar. It was an intended focus of the session dealing with the Spies in the Torah: having encountered the passage in which ten of the 12 spies come back to Moses with the declaration that they appeared both to themselves and to the inhabitants of the land as no more than grasshoppers, they were asked to discuss how these words applied to them as Jewish professionals in their respective settings. But questions relating to the role of JCC educators surfaced again in a very powerful way in the session that followed our site-visit to the Baltimore JCC. In this session, important questions were raised concerning, for example:
  - Who are the clients of JCC educators. The members? The decision-makers?
  - How people who are not in the highest positions of leadership in the agency can foster significant change. Or can they?
  - Whether Jewish educators should think of themselves as managers/operatives or as leaders, and whether it's possible for them to help their agencies develop an agency-wide vision that includes not just administrators and other staff but also board members. In response to one participant's pessimistic comment, a number of individuals (from both the Mandel and JCCA worlds) expressed a more optimistic view, suggesting that this was a key challenge of the program.
  - The ways in which JCC educators can foster change in the agency and in clients and decision-makers: via Socratic discussion, via imposition, via nudging, via strategies that may be manipulative. Is it the job of the Jewish educator to be subversive? Is all education subversive? What do we mean by "subversive"? Questions were raised concerning both effectiveness of different approaches and the ethics of different approaches. This was a very preliminary discussion, with much room for further exploration.
  - Whether, given a magic wand, JCC educators around our table actually have an identifiable vision that they would want to actualize – or whether, in fact, their orientation is much more towards addressing particular problems that arise. How vision might actually inform their work was a question central to this discussion.
4. There were three session explicitly organized around vision.
  - A introductory session that began with a hearing and analysis of Martin Luther King's "I have a dream" speech. This session emphasized: a) the

value of having an inspirational articulation around which people can mobilize; b) a distinction between thick and thin visions, and the suggestion that in order for a vision to offer guidance one needs to move from vague slogans to more specific formulations (at the price of surfacing disagreements among competing specifications); c) suffusion as compared with programmatic approaches to the actualization of vision; d) the difference between thematic approaches to vision (“Do an Israel program!”) and an approach that is informed by educational purposes that derive from considerations that relate to one’s informing vision. As a way of concretizing some of the points made, this session culminated in an exercise that invited participants to translate slogans and themes (Israel, Tikkun Olam, Klal Yisrael) into educational aspirations made up of beliefs, attitudes, and dispositions.

- A second session that encouraged the participants to work on their own commitments at the level of vision (with the articulated understanding that this was a stage in a process that will involve encountering extant powerful conceptions developed by a range of individuals who have thought long and hard about these matters). After 45 minutes of quiet reflection, participants came together in small groups to see what each of them – or all of them collectively – would view as *essential to their visions* and *excluded by their visions*.
- A third session in which, as a single big group, staff and participants sought to take a commitment to “Celebrate diversity” (interpreted as involving both an opportunity for different kinds of Jews to express themselves and to grow in diverse directions *and* feeling a sense of responsibility for other Jews) and to translate it into practice in a JCC lobby and in a day camp setting. Here important distinctions were drawn between implementation and translation, and there was a chance to identify considerations additional to vision (for example, the outlook, expectations, developmental stage and aspirations of one’s clients) relevant to the move from theory to practice.

#### 5. Some miscellaneous evaluative comments.

- a. On the positive side, we made use of themes from earlier seminars (collective memory, neighborhood, and social capital) in the pre-seminar assignment, and people had a chance to share what they had done. On the negative side, not enough time was devoted to these assignments [my own opinion]. We are sometimes unhappy that people don’t invest more time and energy in these assignments. But if we don’t use them in a serious way, we may be discouraging a serious approach to them.
- b. There is a significant shared language that is developing among members of the group that includes concepts, issues, and questions. It is noteworthy, though, that while the theme of neighborhood/social capital has become part of the discourse of

the group, the theme of collective memory seems has not been integral to the universe of discourse at this point. Some concern was expressed by a couple of people that we haven't spent enough time on some key concepts like 'neighborhood' before moving on to others.

- c. Participants have a hard time thinking at the level of existential vision. There is a tendency to respond to questions about the kind of person you're hoping to cultivate with responses that speak about what an institution looks like. The exercises that we did during the seminar may well have helped some people be clearer about this. But more work is necessary if people are to move beyond slogans to conceptions that are specific enough to translate, and if they are to approach translation in a more systematic way. Follow-up exercises may prove very valuable here.
- d. More than one time in the seminar there was a feeling that we needed more time with a topic. We could have used more time in the first session dealing with vision, in the session dealing with the Parasha (the spies); and we could easily have benefited from another session with Bethamie on American Jewish identity. Perhaps we need to consider whether we should limit the number of questions/aspirations we try to take on in any given seminar so as to allow more time for those we do take up. Perhaps we should consider building into our seminars a set of "To be determined" sessions so that we have the flexibility to further develop themes requiring more attention or new themes that arise.
- e. Related to the last point, there was very little down-time during this seminar, and perhaps not enough for people to process our discussions, to connect with one another informally on personal and professional levels, or simply to relax. We need to consider whether, beyond a certain point, there are not just diminishing marginal returns but also counter-productive results.
- f. Overall, the group loved the visit to the JCC and the chance to listen to Buddy and Larry. Many expressed a strong desire to have similar opportunities in other communities.
- g. In addition to the absence of some people who have been part of the group (either because they have left their jobs or were otherwise unable to attend), a number of people came late, left early, or participated intermittently. In addition, there was quite a lot of coming in and out of sessions during the seminar. The impact of all this may need to be considered, and it may be worth discussing whether there is a need to respond to some of this.
- h. A number of people commented that the project-sessions, where they worked in small groups that included their mentors, were very valuable. It is important for us to remember as we guide

participants with these projects that the projects need to be arenas in which "it all comes together" – in which critical themes and questions in the life of the program are in some way reflected, in which their commitments at the level of vision get developed, and in which translation is represented in a reflective way.

- i. While the theme of vision was explored with attention to moving from slogans to something more concrete, and from something more concrete to translation, virtually nothing was done in the way of asking them to think in serious ways about the ways in which their commitments at the level of vision were anchored in particular understandings of Judaism; nor as already noted have they yet encountered significant extant conceptions of these matters in relation to which they could refine and/or revise their own ideas.
- j. In general, I thought presentations were very good, with a reasonable balance between frontal/non-frontal, big group/small group sessions. We need to more carefully monitor small group assignments for clarity. If we don't, there is a danger of losing valuable time trying to clarify the assignments in small groups or of sending groups in the wrong direction.
- k. We showed good flexibility in this program (shifting sessions around in response to our sense of the needs of the group) and changing the nature of sessions as we noticed the energy-level of the group and the available time.
- l. A lot of warmth, supportiveness among participants, a number of whom commented on their enjoyment of the experience and their sense that a safe space had been created, and on their sense that staff/participants integration had developed in a very desirable way.
- m. We are doing a good job of capitalizing on the diversity of the group, so that a range of people representing a variety of talents and insights actively lead sessions (in very appropriate ways, as with Melanie and Jody) and feed the conversations we have.
- n. A concern was expressed about whether the sequence of seminars we are developing and undergoing represents a coherent intellectual journey. The nature of that journey is, in any case, unclear to at least a few participants (although the person who articulated this was not particularly troubled by it).
- o. There seemed to be a lot of enthusiasm for the idea, suggested by LR during the seminar, that over meals each of us take a couple of minutes to share with the group things that have happened to them or that they have done since we were last together. It felt like a good group-building device - playful and informative without being intrusive.
- p. At least one person felt that there was insufficient time for text study in this most recent seminar.

6. Looking ahead, a number of ideas have been put on the table relating to how we should proceed in upcoming seminars. A number of ideas have been suggested by different people at different times:
  - At one point we had discussed the possibility of making spirituality/sacred space an organizing theme of the upcoming October seminar, possibly inviting Art Green to serve as an outside resource.
  - The conversations during our most recent seminar concerning ways of thinking about the role of the Jewish educator led some participants to think that this might usefully be an organizing theme, or in any case a kind of springboard to discussion at an upcoming seminar.
  - Some of us felt that the theme of vision and translation -- and more precisely, the desirability of helping participants make significant progress in developing their thoughts at the level of vision and becoming more adept at translating them -- needs to be central to the upcoming seminars, and a major consideration in deciding what we should be doing (both content and process-wise) in these seminars.
  - In developing the vision-piece of the program, a number of us have felt the need to take the participants beyond values-clarification to an encounter with powerful conceptions that can enrich their thinking, e.g., Brinker and Rosenak.
  - One person suggested that it might be an exciting activity and a bridge back to our recent June program to offer participants a chance at our next seminar to interview another participant concerning the configuration and development of their own Jewish identity.
  - In Jerusalem, Steve Cohen had posed the challenge of identifying an appropriate saying (visual or linguistic) that might be appropriate over the door (or in the lobby) of a JCC. This challenge seemed to greatly excite a number of people, but we have not yet followed up on it.
  - In Jerusalem, there had also been a lot of enthusiasm for Steve Cohen's comment that JCCs are more likely to draw people in if they become more morally serious places that speak to people's need to be engaged in something important. We have not yet picked up on this.
  - We introduced the theme of nature in this seminar, but did not do much with it. We also have not done much to focus on *the informal* dimensions of the work of JCC educators, an important matter in view of the fact that some of the participants continue to think about education as a kind of formal learning affair.
7. Some pertinent considerations as we move forward:
  - Progress along the vision/practice front. As participants continue to work on their own ideas, it will be important for them to encounter and struggle with powerful extant conceptions.
  - Executive participation and support.

- Progress on the projects.
- Use talents/competencies of participants to advantage.
- Avoid over-programming (leaving time to deepen our work on given topics, as for informal conversations and activities).
- We need to be thinking seriously not just about upcoming seminars but also about what goes on between seminars. With the project-phase of the program now really taking off, perhaps this will turn out to be the central in-between-seminars activity.
- We need to be thinking about follow-up experiences in the aftermath of the 18 months program.

For Bethamie

→ Israel Seminar  
1/02

**JCC JEWISH EDUCATORS SEMINAR  
SOME ISSUES OUT OUR THURSDAY AND FRIDAY SESSIONS**

**THURSDAY**

This day featured a visit to sites of Jewish memory in Israel: Har Hertzl, Kikar Rabin, and Haychal Ha-Atzma-ut. It offered an opportunity to think about the way Israel has attempted to commemorate critical events in ways that would connect Israelis and others to these events in ways that would evoke or affirm particular understandings, values, sentiments, etc. Each site offered an opportunity to think about three things: 1) what is being commemorated? 2) what ideas, appreciations, beliefs, values, ideals, etc. are the commemorators trying to communicate to those who visit the site? 3) What have those who designed the site done to communicate what they want to communicate in a powerful way? If the site 'works', why is this?

Our thinking about these matters were enriched by the suggestion, offered by Dave during our visit to Har Hertzl, that we think about attempts to memorialize events along three dimensions:

**Architecture:** to organize the physical space in such a way as to convey and evoke particular ideas, values, and commitments.

**Calendar/time:** locating the memorial in a temporal sequence that, in conjunction with what comes before and after, conveys a message judged appropriate and important in a powerful way (e.g., where Yom HaShoah and Yom HaZikaron are located between Pesach and Yom Ha-Atzmaut).

**Ceremonies:** The rituals employed in the time/place to evoke the memories and the messages thought appropriate by those who designed the memorial.

Using these categories as well as some other guiding questions (e.g., who/what is, and who/what isn't, included in a site like Har Hertzl? why was a site like Heychal Ha-Atzma-ut established as late as it was? why was the experience of visiting the site moving for some of us?, etc. ), we attempted to analyze the various sites we encountered.

Towards the end of the day we gathered in the Cinema Hotel for a session that allowed us, both together and in small groups, to reflect on and think about the implications for our work of what we had seen. At the heart of this session was an assignment, to be completed in small groups, that invited the group to think about what it might mean to construct/rekindle a memory in the minds and hearts of JCC members back home. Some groups interpreted this as an attempt to facilitate experiences that would themselves enter into the memory of those that underwent that (for example, at Maccabiah games) and other groups saw their challenge as that of connecting JCC members to events/places in Jewish life that they may never have experienced before.

## JCC EDUCATORS INITIATIVE: CURRICULUM SKETCH

### First Iteration

**Introductory.** Below is an initial sketch of the curriculum narrative -- the nature of the journey for JCC Educators Initiative. At the heart of initiative is the assumption that the program is designed to help participants develop increasingly thoughtful, informed and powerful educational visions that have the capacity to give real guidance to their work as JCC Jewish educators. This means attention to what these educators and their institutions are after (what outcomes they would take as indices of success) and to the implications for practice throughout the life of the JCC. It also means thoughtful attention to the problem of ensuring that what emerges through the program is not just the private vision of the Jewish educators, but ideas which, because they have the support of agency executives and other critical individuals, come to be those of the agency as an institution.

This approach is guided by Dewey's understanding of growth -- in this case, growth in the participants' understanding of what the JCC is after as a Jewish educating institution, of what their roles as educators are in relation to these aspirations, and of the implications of these ideas for practice. The Deweyan view makes the following assumptions:: 1) that participants, like all of us in the endeavors we engage in no matter what our stage in life, start with something rather than with nothing -- that is, they begin with more or less thoughtfully held beliefs about what they are doing, what they are trying to accomplish, and why, and more or less powerful tools for going about the achievement of their purposes; 2) that the job of an educational program is to provide educational experiences that enable the learners to grow from and beyond the understandings and tools with which they begin -- to develop tools and understandings that render them clearer and more informed about what they are trying to accomplish and increasingly effective in achieving them; 3) that ~~the~~ at the end of the program as at the beginning the understandings and tools that participants will possess will be provisional and revisable in light of future learning and experience -- no more than way-sations on the road to deeper and more powerful ideas and tools down the road. The difference between where the participants are at the end of the program than at the beginning is twofold: 1) at the end, their beliefs and tools have grown in ways that render them more competent than they were at the beginning, and 2) if the program is successful, the participants will leave the program better able to continue this process of growth on their own than they otherwise would be. For Dewey, these ideas apply (I think) to all educational programs and to all learners (no matter how sophisticated, competent, and knowledgeable they may be).

**Some guiding principles.** Based on our conversations, here are some guiding principles that need to be inform the development of the 18 month program. They are not ordered in any systematic way.

1. Both because of its essentiality in creating an environment that allows honest, serious, open, reflection and discussion of the kind that our program requires **and** because one of the outcomes of the program should be the emergence of a community of educators that continues to look to each other for stimulation, guidance, and support, it is important to establish a culture that encourage trust among the participants - a kind of safe-space. It is important to do this while at the same time making it clear that this is a culture that welcomes seriously probing of one's own and one another's understandings and assumptions. To effect this balance is hard but important.

2. Central to the program is the movement from practice to theory, and from theory to practice, with inputs drawn from both Jewish and other cultural resources. Especially, but not only because of the feedback from the JCC Jewish educators, it is critical that special emphasis be given to the movement from practice to theory (which sometimes get less attention than it deserves).

3. Related to #2, it would be wise to launch this program, in October, by providing the participants with a rich set of opportunities to unearth and articulate the beliefs and commitments that implicitly or explicitly guide their present approach to their work. To prevent the kind of superficiality that sometimes characterizes our efforts to articulate our guiding assumptions, carefully developed activities and exercises should be identified that will accomplish this purpose.

4. Rather than predesignate the basic categories/themes around which the dialectic of practic/theory/practice is played out on the road to more vision-driven practice, we should in the early stages of the program leave this open, paying careful attention to themes, questions, issues, uncertainties, disagreements, etc. that emerge from the group. Our early organizing ideas (e.g., community, ideal JCC Jew, Klal Yisrael, informal education, Israel) may prove helpful, and we can always introduce them down the road, but let's first see what themes -- perhaps very different ones - are central to the participants.

5. One dimension of the program's efforts to emphasize the movement from practice to theory is to make substantial use of JCC educators themselves as resources to the program with responsibility for both sharing in curriculum development and in teaching. Just as those who begin at the

level of theory need think seriously about how their ideas relate to problems of educational aspiration and practice, so too, the master practitioners who will share their work with their colleagues should be encouraged to reflect on the assumptions and tools at work in their practice. The integrated conception of the program that we imagine does not view these as two disparate parts of the program, but as inter-related. The conversation between theoretician and practitioner is integral both to curriculum development and to implementation. (Participants have expressed an interest in the arts, in outdoors education, in sports; all of them are fertile arenas in which to develop an approach to curriculum that takes advantage of the expertise of theoreticians and practitioners whose ideas have the capacity to enrich one another and the group.)

6. If the program is to develop habits of mind that make possible educational deliberations that put vision and implementation at the center, it is important that it include significant opportunities for **practicing** a. content-analysis (unearthing critical assumptions and other beliefs at work in our own and others' practice), b. thinking through the practical implications of commitments at the level of vision for the work of the JCC, and c. actually trying to implement proposed ideas.
7. Because of its power as an educational tool and because of its centrality to the world of the JCC, the program should provide meaningful informal times that allow rich opportunities to learn.
8. The program may be enriched by opportunities for the participants to gather in Reading Groups, organized books that illuminate the challenges and aspirations of the JCC and its Jewish educator. These groups would be self-guided to an extent, but would also receive guidance from the faculty to ensure that the activity fed the larger purposes of the program.
9. There should be opportunities to examine what is (or what passes for) 'Best Practice' in areas germane to Jewish education in JCCs. In selecting Best Practice examples, we should avoid insularity; it's important to draw on pertinent examples from beyond the Jewish world, e.g. of Early Childhood Education or Adult Education. Best Practice examples are not to be approached for their inspirational value (alone) but as opportunities to engage in serious content-analysis and, where relevant, critique. As with other aspects of the program, it offers the opportunity to test out and enlarge one's ways of thinking about what one is doing.
10. Informal learning (a term in need of exploration) being central to JCCs, it is important that the program offer participants the opportunity

to examine this idea and phenomenon -- in part, by undergoing and then analyzing experiences of informal learning.

11. Projects should be <sup>not</sup> solely individual affairs, isolated from the life of the community. Ways need to be found to use the projects as a vehicle of enriching the group's thinking and of using the group as a way of helping individuals more effectively carry out their projects.

Note that not all the ideas noted above are reflected in what appears below, and perhaps some of them will invite further clarification and discussion; nor are all the ideas that we discussed over the last few days represented in the points made above. But this is a start. While it may be important for the program to find room for these various ideas, we shouldn't think that if we find room for them, this suffices to create a worthy curriculum. How they are integrated, and whether the overall journey has a sense of direction that yields a reasonable feeling (on our part and the participants) that they are moving along in a way that is rewarding and fruitful -- these are the critical matters.

**Some initial thoughts about how to approach the first stages of the program (based on ideas discussed above and grounded in our work over the last couple of days).**

## OCTOBER

The movement from Practice to Theory is at the heart of the proposed October gathering that launches the group's journey. The challenge is to offer the participants varied and engaging opportunities (through pre-seminar activities and through activities of different kinds during the gathering) to unearth as carefully as they can the basic assumptions that currently define their understanding of what they are trying to do, why they think this is important, and what assumptions lead them to approach their work this way rather than that. It might also help them to highlight the matters that worry and perplex them. The inquiry might in part be organized around what, sitting around the table, the participants identify as their guiding beliefs; but it might usefully, and importantly, also offer some preliminary opportunities to analyze beliefs that are embedded in their current practice. Critical dimensions of this effort might include:

- Beliefs about the aims of Jewish education in the JCC setting, and about the conception of Judaism that are embedded in them.
- Beliefs about the kinds of clientele they should (and shouldn't) be trying to serve.

- Beliefs about the outlook, needs, and aspirations of their clientele.
- Beliefs about how people learn

As examples, activities might include:

- a pre-seminar assignment that invites participants to write up and explain 3 examples of work they are proud of, which texts will be carefully analyzed during the program;
- a symposium that offers three participants (picked because they are especially thoughtful and because we know they represent very different approaches) the opportunity to articulate the basic beliefs that guide their understanding of their work) and to respond to questions that push their own thinking further.
- An opportunity to carefully examine an instance of practice drawn from a setting in which none of them have a personal stake, but which can help participants better understand the potentialities of content-analysis and how one might approach it. Conceivably, the instance of learning will be one that they undergo in our conference, or it might come from a movie, or from literature.
- A live interview with a very thoughtful participant conducted by a very talented facilitator (I saw Daniel Marom do this beautifully with Daniel Lehmann at the Goals Seminar, and I'm told that Seymour did this effectively with Daniel Gordis at the same seminar) designed to show that person and everyone else present how, under appropriate questioning and prodding, deep assumptions can be exposed and their limitations exhibited.
- As a way of beginning to illustrate the power that theory has in helping to think about one's practice, one or more of these activities will bring in someone with a powerful theoretical perspective (from out of the Jewish or a different arena). This person's job will be to raise critical questions about assumptions embedded in an instance of practice that might not have occurred to the participants spontaneously, but which now create a measure of curiosity or perplexity. **This may be very important as a way of signaling to participants that this program may sometimes begin with but will go beyond values-clarification. It will encourage participants to search out rationales for their beliefs and to encounter alternative, sometimes richer ways of thinking about what they are doing with the help of powerful intellectual inputs.**

How they think about what they do?

Thus understood, October accomplishes a number of purposes:

1. It gives us a rich sense of the commitments - intellectual and moral, the beliefs and the guiding values - of the participants, of how they

understand what they are about. In a related vein, it gives us a much stronger understanding of what are for them critical themes and issues. It thus offers us a powerful foundation for further planning.

2. It offers the participants a wonderful opportunity to begin moving beyond where they started by getting them to develop a deeper awareness of the complex web of beliefs and assumptions that are at work in every day practice. If we are successful, they will also begin to identify arenas where their beliefs are lacking in clarity or appropriate evidence.
3. It offers participants some initial opportunities to acquire the ability to do content-analysis -- to analyze educational environments and/or practices with an eye to surfacing fundamental assumptions (about learning, about the clients, about aims, etc.) that are embodied therein.
4. It is responsive to the strong desire expressed by participants to learn about what one another is doing in their work and how they understand their work.

October should also offer the participants a general orientation to the program that makes clear how these few days will be used and how they fit into the life of the program. It should also launch the conversation about projects and their place in the program.

If we are successful, by the end of the October gathering, the participants will feel that they have grown in their understanding of their own work. At the conclusion, as at the beginning of this conference, it will be noted that key themes and questions that have emerged through these inquiries will become the foundation for inquiries to follow, and perhaps some pertinent examples can be offered. They should also be clearly apprised during October of some of the guiding intellectual commitments that give rise to a program that emphasizes vision, and what we hope to accomplish during the 18 months.

## **BETWEEN OCTOBER AND JANUARY**

A. The program's staff and faculty very carefully analyzes the rich data which ideally have been elicited during the conference in search of critical concepts, values, questions, debates, assumptions that were at work in what we have witnessed, and these will be used as a basis for developing the next stage of the program (which will take place in Israel in January).

Once some key themes/questions have been identified, we will face two critical challenges: one of them is to decide how to sequence them, and we still need to identify appropriate criteria for deciding this. A second

challenge will be to think about how to illuminate them. These might include:

- Identifying thoughtful practitioners and their theoretical counterparts to begin thinking through critical issues and questions that pertain to a particular theme, as well as to address the pedagogy for engaging the participants.
- Identifying competing theoretically grounded perspectives that pertain to theme in question (as when Professors Greenberg and Twersky disagree about who can meaningfully teach sacred texts).

B. Participants have two assignments during this period: guided by appropriate questions they begin to think about project-ideas; and they also are perhaps asked to pick an arena or a program within the JCC and to do the kind of content-analysis which they have begun to practice during the preceding conference. (Either in preparation for January or perhaps even before October, they should be given a reading assignment that exhibits powerful content-analysis -- perhaps from the work of Philip Jackson, as in *LIFE IN CLASSROOMS* or *THE MORAL LIFE OF SCHOOLS*.)

## JANUARY

Pre-October, it's hard to imagine what January will look like, but here is a possible scenario that could emerge out of October and the deliberations that follow it.

A. Launch the "Educated JCC Jew inquiry" -- whatever the differences in the people who walk through your doors, are there certain beliefs and values, lore, or vocabulary that you want all of them to share? Rationale: not only is this theme likely to emerge in October, it also excited a lot of interest on the Tuesday night of the May seminar, with more than one person saying that this inquiry should be central to our work. Jerusalem is wonderfully well-equipped to help us launch this conversation. As an example, Rosenak and Brinker offer rich, but very different views on this question, and their work could provide a good foundation for the participants' discussions. Given that we will be in Israel, the place of Israel in the way JCC's think about 'an educated JCC Jew' may also be appropriate. In the spirit of our conversations, in addition to hearing from them, we might structure the conference to offer participants a chance to articulate their own views. (If we go this route, it will be important to be prepared for the question of whether JCC education

should be organized around any conception of core-Jewish beliefs, values, understandings, etc.. Is this desirable and/or necessary?)

- B. Note that while October emphasized Practice to Theory, in dealing with such thinkers we could begin challenging participants to move in the other direction - from theory to practice.
- C. Given the setting, this could be a good occasion for thinking about Israel as a tool for Jewish education, with attention to guiding beliefs that may be at work in using 'this tool'.
- D. The Israel setting is also conducive to undergoing and beginning to examine learning experiences that are informal in character, including the ways in which settings educate. (This could be an opportunity to launch the conversations about the way nature fits into Jewish education.)
- E. In January, opportunities should be offered for the participants to make serious head way in clarifying their projects.

At the end of January, which is, after all, a substantial learning experience, we step back and see where we are. But, in principle, we continue doing what we have begun - to build on critical questions and themes identified in October and subsequent seminars, and to use them as vehicles of encouraging participants, with the help of appropriate inputs from theory and practice, to continue the process of clarifying their guiding beliefs and becoming more thoughtful and competent when it comes to embedding them in practice. Beyond this, key dimensions of subsequent gatherings might include:

- Each gathering might include some meaningful opportunity for the group to engage with one another around their projects.
- Between meetings, reading groups might take on the challenge of reading key texts (e.g., books that illuminate the situation of Americans and American Jews). Guided by appropriate questions of their own design and that of the staff, they would gather during gatherings to explore what the book is suggesting, whether it's plausible, and what, if true, it has to offer JCC Jewish educators as they think about their work.

✱ (It may be that an ongoing dimension of these gatherings will be an opportunity to think in rich ways about Americans and American Jews, with attention to pertinent implications for JCCs)/

## Beginning Ideas for JCCA Mandel Jewish educators program

### General Domain of the project:

Nature and the environmental have emerged in the past decades as critical issues not only for public policy but also for personal development. While segments of the Jewish community have been involved in the development of environmental policies and the growing library of Jewish books on nature, much of the Jewish community has remained marginal in these areas. Or perhaps better stated, environment and ecology have remained marginal to the political and spiritual agenda of the organized Jewish community. As an example, over the first ten years that the Covenant Foundation has given grants for educational innovation, especially informal educational innovation, they gave only one grant that involved the environment, and that was in their first grant cycle.

Yet some of the best learning occurs out-of-doors; the out-of-doors enhances spiritual experiences; young Jewish adults often find their way back to Judaism through environmentalism and ecology; many Jewish holidays have agricultural or environmental components to them; Judaism (though we forget because of our 2000 years of exile) is a land-based religion.

Clearly, environmental education needs a boost in the organized Jewish community and what better place to pursue that than in JCC's. Such a pursuit fits within both the general vision of the JCC (to be a place that invites and involves all members of the Jewish community - and these programs are not only inherently equitable, but valuable); and in the primary educational strength of the JCC, that of informal Jewish education.

In addition, many JCC's have land either around their main campuses or at their camps to pursue vast environmental and nature programs. But, it should also be noted, that such programs do not require land. Most JCC's also have built-in constituencies who could use and benefit from such programs: pre-schools, camps, healthy elderly, young families, after school programs.

Ideally, this environmental education program would be year-round, for all ages. Given the variety of possible target groups, and given that it is not possible to pursue all venues and groups at once, we will need to choose one venue within to work.

The two most natural venues would be the pre-school and the camp. Each would be pre-disposed to having an environmental component, each has staff who could pilot this, and each has a built-in constituency who would use the program. However, the sophistication of the program would be enhanced by directing this effort at the camp, which incorporates a range of ages from 5 to 16.

The camp also has within its mission a nature component, so not only is it natural to bring this learning curriculum (to give the project a handle for the moment) to them, the camp might also be encouraged to devote one of their regular specialists to this Jewish nature

specialty. Such concentrated attention to the implementation of this curriculum would be beneficial to the camp and to the project.

This would also respond to two other questions: opportunity for implementation and enduring impact.

Piloting this at a camp means that there will be immediate implementation. In addition, there may be a benefit of having the nature specialist be able to participate in the creation of the curriculum.

As for impact, depending on how this curriculum would be developed, it could be adapted for the pre-school, after-school kids, teens and even adults.

Clearly, foundations such as the articulation of a guiding philosophy that articulates Jewish attitudes toward nature which would inform this curriculum and subsequent programming; educational aims that would guide the various elements of the curriculum and programs would be among the first elements of the project to be developed. Even more, given the fact that there may be a multitude of philosophies and educational aims to choose from, much thought must be given to the process in which these questions will be explored. At this JCC, as at many others I imagine, process is critical to the overall success of the curriculum's and programs' implementation.

## **SUMMARY OF JCC EDUCATORS AND EXECUTIVE DIRECTORS SEMINAR**

May 2001

### **BACKGROUND**

Planned by a team that included representatives from the Mandel Foundation, the JCCA, and the Jewish Community Centers, the May seminar was designed to generate 'buy-in' on the part of possible participants and their executives, as well as to elicit input from these individuals that would be of value to the Planning Team in further developing the program. The program was therefore announced as a combination of demonstration (of major dimensions of the proposed 18-month program) and consultation. It began on Monday, May 7, 2001 in the evening and concluded on May 9 around noon. It took place at a hotel conference center in Pearl River, NY, approximately 45 minutes from New York City. It included 14 pairs of JCC executives and their Jewish educators. Below is a general summary of what transpired.

Informing the planning of the seminar was the hope that it would illustrate the overall program's interest in helping participants work towards powerful conceptions, grounded in Jewish and general thought, of the aims of Jewish education in the JCC settings and to think through the educational implications of these conceptions. Since this would involve both carefully analyzing the guiding assumptions at work in existing practice and struggling with big ideas that might carry implications for practice, we wanted to organize a seminar that allowed for both kinds of activities, along with opportunities to engage with pertinent intellectual inputs drawn from both Jewish and general thought. Any number of important issues that bear on the JCC's mission and work might prove useful springboards to these kinds of inquiries; and after considerable deliberation, we decided to organize the seminar around the the JCC's interest in being an inclusive institution that welcomes diverse kinds of constituencies and points of view.

### **MONDAY EVENING**

#### **INTRODUCTION AND WORDS OF WELCOME (Howard Charish, Allan Finkelstein)**

The group gathered in the dining room around 6:30 pm and spent about half an hour informally meeting new people and renewing ties with old friends. With name-tags in place, we sat down to a convivial dinner that was preceded by words of welcome from both Allan Finkelstein and Howard Charish. Allan and Howard **PLEASE FILL IN.....**

#### **SESSION 1: Diversity and the JCC - uncovering challenges and opportunities through an examination of pre-seminar assignments**

The evening-session was organized around the pre-seminar assignments that the teams had sent in a couple of weeks before the conference began. This assignment invited the teams to describe a problematic situation they had faced that had originated in their efforts to be an inclusive institution, along with how they had proceeded to interpret and address this situation. In this session, three or four teams gathered s sub-groups along with two facilitators. Each team had the opportunity to describe the problematic situation it had written up and to respond to questions posed by the others who were present. In addition to offering an opportunity for the participants to become acquainted with some of their colleagues and their institutions, this session was designed to identify a range of questions and issues that might profit from further attention. Each sub-group was asked to keep a record of these issues; and at the end of the session, a representative of the sub-group was asked to share with the group as a whole one significant issue or question that had arisen in their discussions. Among the major issues/questions that were brought back to the group as a whole were the following:

1. What criteria should be used for deciding from whom it is acceptable to accept funds to support agency purposes? Can we identify a value-system that will help us decide such matters?
2. Given its unique set of constituencies and role, what kinds of Shabbat experiences ought to be encouraged in JCC settings?

3. What does it mean 'to create community' in the JCC? Does one have to go for 'the least common denominator' (striving to offend the fewest number of people) -- or should the JCC include diverse opportunities for expression, each appropriate to a different constituency? Or, are there other possibilities?
4. When you make hard decisions, whom or what (including what values) are you protecting? And, in a related vein, when you make these decisions, whose definitional structures (for example, of who counts as a Jew) do you accept?
5. To what extent and in what ways, should staff members embody and promote the Jewish vision of the institution?
6. What's involved in making policy decisions on educational, and not just political, grounds?

Although participants had already had a long day, and the hour was late, the sub-groups functioned in an animated and enthusiastic way, and there seemed to be enormous energy in the room. Equally important, many significant issues were articulated.

**Evaluation of the session.** Though this session felt very successful in respect of engagement and productivity, three concerns were raised. The first is that some people felt that they did not have enough time to do justice to the cases that had been presented. Second, some felt that participants would have benefited from a fuller explanation at the outset, one that introduced the theme of the seminar and clarified both why we were focusing on diversity/inclusivity at this conference and how this initial exercise fit into the conference as a whole. The latter concern was responded to at the beginning of Daniel Gordis' session on Tuesday morning. Third, the acoustics in the room we were scheduled to meet in were such that the noise-level was quite high, with the result that the small group conversations felt more labored than they otherwise would have been.

## **TUESDAY**

### **SESSION 2: Me, We, and the JCC - The Presentation of Self in JCC Life**

Led by Jonny Ariel, this session was designed to offer participants a chance to get to know one another better, to develop as a group, and to reflect on the sources of their own and others' identity as Jews and human beings. Since this particular conference and the program as a whole will be concerned with questions of identity (in particular, the identity of the participants as Jewish educators and the leaders of Jewish institutions, and the identities of the varied people who walk into JCCs), it seemed fitting and important to begin our work by reflecting on questions relating to identity.

At the heart of the session was the following exercise: each participant, including the program's faculty, was asked to tape a large sheet of white paper on a wall, and then to fill it in, in response to a range of questions that Jonny had prepared. The instructions/questions included but were not limited to the following:

- 1) Somewhere near the middle of the sheet, make a list of the nicknames you have been called, and indicate who used them.
- 2) On the upper right hand side of the sheet, draw a bookshelf, and 'place' on it the four or five books that have most influenced you.
- 3) On another part of the sheet, draw your family.
- 4) On yet another part of the sheet, draw a family-tree that goes back to your grandparents. Next to your grandparents and parents, indicate traits of character or of mind that you have gotten from them.
- 5) Draw a large heart, and in the middle of it, put a Jewish saying that captures the heart of what you are about in your work.

When we had completed this exercise, we had a chance to do a kind of gallery-walk around the room and to view what were essentially rich self-portraits that all of us had drawn. Many seemed to feel that the questions had succeeded in eliciting qualities of self and self-perception that really illuminated each person,

and this made the gallery walk a fascinating experience, one significantly richer and deeper than most 'getting to know one another' exercises.

The session culminated in some comments by Jonny Ariel that enabled the group to reflect on the exercise in relation to some larger questions relating to the nature of identity and its sources. He emphasized the notion that identity is shaped through interaction, and that our identity is made up not just of what distinguishes us from one another but also of what we share. His comments also included some interesting observations about the difficulty of developing a stable identity in the modern world. He compared an earlier period in history where our lives had a pilgrim-like quality (in that there was an unwavering sense of direction) to our own period in which life has a more tourist-like quality (in the sense that we move through a succession of different environments, each perhaps interesting and a source of growth, but without any larger sense of direction and purpose). Commenting on the difficulty of rooting one's identity in the modern world, Jonny compared modernity to a kind of desert: like footprints in the sand, new identities come with ease, but a gust of wind may be sufficient to dislodge them.

**Evaluation of this session.** There seemed to be a lot of enthusiasm during this session, though some of the concerns expressed late Monday night resurfaced. That is, some felt that there was a need to more effectively contextualize what we were doing so that participants would have a better sense of what this seminar and the 18-month program as a whole are about. This need was addressed at the beginning of the next session (and then again at a number of points along the way.)

### **SESSION 3: What is a Jew? Challenges from the Tradition to Contemporary Life**

This session began with some general comments by Daniel Gordis that were designed to give some context to this session and to the seminar as a whole. He reminded the group of the seminar's two major purposes, demonstration and consultation, and stressed the importance of getting feedback from participants. He also drew attention to a fundamental principle that guides educational initiatives with which the Mandel Foundation is involved: that leadership at its best is vision-driven, and that vision-driven leadership requires a continuing dialogue between theory and practice. Neither alone is sufficient: practice without powerful guiding ideas is blind; but powerful ideas that do not find meaningful expression in, and are not tested by, our practical endeavors are also problematic. **Both**, in active association with one another, are needed!

This dialogue between theory and practice is, Daniel went on to suggest, embedded in the design of this seminar. Last night we had used the pre-seminar assignments that participants had submitted as a springboard to discussions of the way issues relating to diversity and inclusiveness surface in live, practical contexts. These discussions would help to ensure that the content-sessions at the heart of this day's work would be grounded in, and would meaningfully refer back to and illuminate, the participants' practice-related contexts and issues.

Against this more general background, Daniel explained that this session would focus on different conceptions of the essence of Jewishness. Since, at some level, a JCC's Jewish educational program needs to be grounded in some conception of what it means to be Jewish, it's important to wrestle with this question and to see how it has been addressed in Jewish history. It is, Daniel suggested, a myth that prior to modernity there was a single clear conception of what it means to be a Jew; and, in fact, if we look at Jewish history, we discover that *variety of conception*, rather than *singularity*, is the norm. At least four different conceptions have been prominent; and though each of them had advocates who passionately believed their favored conception to be the only legitimate one, a look at the broad sweep of our history suggests plurality of conception. As we prepared to look at these four models, Daniel asked the participants to consider whether any of these traditional models speak to them or to their clienteles -- and if not, what does this mean? And what model of being Jewish **would** resonate with them and their constituencies?

The four models developed by Daniel originated in texts dealing with conversion, conversion being an idea that highlights our understanding of what it means to be 'inside' rather than 'outside' of Judaism. Put differently, what does one become when one becomes a Jew?

As Daniel prepared to put on the table these four conceptions, an important question was raised by one of the participants. [In fact, throughout the conference, questions and insights coming from the group enriched and deepened the issues on the table.] This person wondered whether the criteria used to determine who should be admitted into the Jewish people are the same as those criteria that define membership for those who are already on the inside of the community. Daniel acknowledged the value of the question as well as the credibility of the tacit suggestion that in fact the two sets of criteria may not be identical; but he suggested that, nonetheless, attention to the kinds of criteria that have at different points in Jewish history been employed to evaluate potential members can help us think seriously about what it means to be a Jew.

Following this exchange, guided by appropriate texts, Daniel proceeded to characterize the following four models of Jewishness.

**A. The biblical period: the Jew as Israelite -- a tribal model.** The Torah itself, Daniel noted, says virtually nothing about how one becomes a Jew, but embedded in the text there appears to be a kind of tribal model (that is described by Shaya Cohen in a text entitled *Beginnings of Jewishness*). The tribal conception defines Jewishness on the model of a family to which one belongs by virtue of being born into it and living on its territory. Others (the resident-alien, the Ger Toshav) can live among members of the tribe, but can't actually join it. According to Daniel, this model of membership in the Jewish community begins to die with the Babylonian Exile in 586 B.C.E, at which point the geographic ties of the group to the territory become seriously attenuated. At this point, a new model that emphasizes the Jew as foreigner comes to the fore (see B., below.).

Before we moved on to the second model, members of the group observed that the category of Ger Toshav (resident-alien) that was significant in biblical times is important in our own era as well. There are many 'strangers' who live among us – for example, non-Jewish spouses, non-Jews who use the services of the Jewish community, and Jews whose connection to Jewish life is very attenuated. This point may well be worth revisiting in later seminars.

**B. The Rabbinic Period I: The Jew as the oppressed outsider.** Well-articulated in rabbinic sources, this second conception says that the critical condition of membership in the Jewish people is a willingness to share the lot (i.e., to accept the destiny) of a people that is 'persecuted and oppressed, despised, harassed and overcome by afflictions.' According to this conception, Jews live on the margins of the communities in which they find themselves: they are marginal. Moreover, their vocation as a people is to take care of oppressed people who also live on the margins of the community. Before we moved on to the next conception, it was noted that this conception of what it means to be a Jew, like the first one, is very far removed from the way American Jews understand their situation. As a community in America, we neither are, nor do we aspire to be, marginal and oppressed. Increasingly, we are insiders rather than outsiders.

**C. Rabbinic Period II: The Jew as the one who obeys God's commandments.** According to this third conception, the critical condition one must meet in order to enter the Jewish people is a commitment to adhere to the details of the code of behavior that is identified by the Halakha. To submit your will to the Will of God by 'towing the Halakhic line' is the core of Jewishness.

In a way that harked back to an earlier question concerning whether the criteria for entering the community continue to apply once one has achieved membership, Daniel turned our attention to the case of a person who agrees to adhere to the Halakha at the point of conversion but then fails to honor that commitment. In particular, he cited Rabbi Moshe Feinstein's view that such a person is not to be considered a true convert at all: "It is obviously not good for either God or the Jewish people that converts like these should be mixed into the Jewish people...it is clear that these are not converts at all."

**D. The contemporary period: A return to biblical roots?** Due to time-constraints, we didn't have much time to analyze this conception. In a Responsum, by Rabbi Isaac Herzog asserts that the desire to settle in Israel – a desire that is not propelled by necessity but that is 'for the sake of heaven' - is a sufficient sufficient to establish one's membership in the Jewish community. ("It becomes clear that their

desire is to embrace the People Israel, in its land...and this is a good motivation, and there is no need to accept their acceptance [by the Bet Din]."

Reflecting on the four models, Daniel noted that they are all rejected by most of American Jewry. This, he suggested, puts before us a challenge: "If not these models, which one?? That is, what model of Jewishness are you prepared to put at the center of your JCC, and to use as a basis for programmatic and other decisions?" This commented called forth the following responses.

One person wondered out loud whether the question 'What does it mean to be a Jew?' is a good question. He worried that if asked in our institutions, it might be terrifying. Daniel agreed that it's a potentially dangerous question, and that whether and how one raises it within one's institution is a matter to be approached very carefully. But he urged the view that, far from being removed from contemporary JCCs, some kind of answer to the question of what it means to be a Jew is, inevitably, already implicit in JCC practice. If so, it becomes important to examine this practice with an eye towards surfacing what this conception of Jewishness is and to consider whether, on reflection, this conception ought to be embedded in our practice. One way of deepening such an inquiry is through a consideration of competing conceptions of Jewishness (of the kind we have been considering).

Reflecting on this exchange and on the morning as a whole, another participant commented that the critical issue (whether she was speaking just in her capacity as a JCC educator or more generally was not clear) is not the essence of Judaism but, rather, the boundaries of membership in Jewish life. In addition, based on her reflection on the four conceptions, she offered her view that there is a progression from geographic boundaries, to legal/social boundaries, to a new conception (with Rabbi Herzog) that integrates the two kinds of boundaries.

Against this background of discussion, we broke into sub-groups with the instruction that we use a series of questions formulated by Daniel to guide our discussion. These questions were designed a) to encourage participants to judge whether any of the four models (or selected elements of these models) resonate for them personally or with their constituencies; b) to stimulate thinking about whether some other model might more effectively characterize the core of what constitutes 'Jewish belonging' in contemporary America; c) to think about the costs and benefits – the wisdom – of trying to define the core elements of Judaism.

Preliminary impressions suggest that discussions in the breakout groups were animated, but that groups varied dramatically with respect to how closely they followed the questions that had been proposed. But even when they did not follow these questions, the discussions gave participants an opportunity to react in rich ways to the presentation they had just heard. As an example, consider the interplay in one of the breakout groups:

- Isn't it important to draw a distinction [that had not been drawn in the larger session] between the criteria for being regarded as Jewish, on the one hand, and *Jewishness*?
- Another person asked: Is there really a need to identify with any single model of what it means to be a Jew? Can't a JCC function adequately – don't they already - without such a conception?
- Agreeing with the comment that JCCs are not informed by any sense of the essence of Judaism, someone else suggested that, in contrast to many denominational institutions, JCCs don't have a Jewish destination for their clientele. [There were frequent references in the group to individualized trajectories of growth]. What does it mean to have a guiding vision, this person continued, when you are not guided by a sense of destination?
- Listening to this exchange, another participant expressed skepticism concerning the claim that JCCs are *not* informed by any conception of Judaism. Tacitly agreeing with what Daniel Gordis had said in his presentation, he suggested that, whether we recognize it or not, implicit in our practices are judgments about what counts as Jewish. Rather than avoid this question, he added, we should be looking at where in our practice views concerning what Jewishness is are at work, and we should be thinking about who should be deciding – and how? – our institution's views on this matter.

Other themes were also expressed in this small group. For example:

- one person relayed some concerns about the enterprise of reflecting systematically about what JCCs are doing. There is, he intimated, a kind of unarticulated wisdom implicit in day-to-day practice, and the attempt to think about these matters systematically might prove paralyzing.
- One person commented that a model of being Jewish grounded in the ideas of Mordecai Kaplan might have been more resonant with the world of JCCs.
- Someone commented that starting with models of Jewishness is somewhat foreign to the culture of JCCs. We, said this person, don't start with models but with people. [This sounds like a theme that may be worth trying to understand more deeply.]

**Evaluation of this session.** Despite the awkwardness of the large room and the bad acoustics, Daniel Gordis' presentation was excellent and catalyzed some rich discussion. Two concerns are, however, worthy of mention. 1) The Jewish educators were noticeably more active and engaged in this session, particularly in the larger session, than were the executives, some of whom seemed disengaged and expressed discomfort with the overly-intellectual character of the discussion. 2) As noted above, in the breakout groups, the facilitators, by pre-agreement, were not forceful in guiding the discussion. The assumption here was that the guiding questions provided in the notebooks would be sufficient to steer the conversation. In practice, though, this left a kind of leadership void in some groups and yielded discussions which often went far afield. This is important to keep in mind for future planning -- and was in fact taken into account in planning the evening's breakout groups (See below).

#### **SESSION 4: 'Jewish Diversity: Perspectives from the Multicultural Wars.'**

Led by 'the other Daniel', Daniel Pekarsky (a.k.a. Dan), this session was designed to approach issues of intra-Jewish diversity from a radically different perspective: the starting-point was not Jewish sources but contemporary debates in general education concerning multiculturalism -- debates that deal with the nature and value of diversity and its place in education and social life. The idea behind this session was to sketch the way these debates play out in American life, and then to see whether, and if so, how, they apply to Jewish life.

The starting-point of Dan's presentation was the presence of significant diversity (both within American life and within the Jewish community). He noted that our approach to this diversity must itself be grounded in an assessment of its significance. At a time when there are radically dissimilar, but typically under-examined, appraisals of this diversity (with some urging us to 'celebrate diversity' and others proclaiming how dangerous it is in shrill tones), it becomes important to try to understand and evaluate these appraisals in a dispassionate way.

Early on, Dan noted that Jews can relate to the multiculturalism debates in two very different ways. On the one hand, the Jewish people are one of many groups (and a particularly interesting one, at that) which make up America's multi-cultural mix; on the other hand, the Jewish community is itself a multi-cultural society (in the sense that it is made up of a variety of different sub-groups, representing diverse outlooks, values, and practices). While both perspectives ultimately have a bearing on JCCs, this particular presentation is interested in the second perspective -- that is, in how the ideas at work in recent multiculturalism debates illuminate the way we think about intra-Jewish diversity.

Against this background, Dan described a 19<sup>th</sup> century debate that pitted Archbishop Hughes of New York City, representing the concerns of Irish-Catholics, against NY's Public School Society. The disagreement revolved around the question of whether Catholics should be eligible for public funds. Dan then moved on to consider more recent debates concerning the place of cultural differences in American life. While the actors in the contemporary debate are different (with minorities like Latinos and African Americans replacing the Irish-Catholics), the actual debates are quite similar. At the heart of these debates have been three propositions that have been passionately affirmed and contested both in the past and in the present:

1. The so-called 'common culture' to which all sub-groups have been asked to subscribe is, according to critics of American life, actually the culture of a particular, socially dominant group; and this culture is a threat to the values and the outlook of minority cultural groups. Put differently, the so-called common culture is congenial to the outlook of some groups that make up American society and hostile to the outlook of others.
2. An adequate multi-cultural society is one that does not just provide its different cultural sub-groups with the opportunity to have 'their share of the pie' in American life; it is a society that offers each of these sub-groups the opportunity to nurture in its members cultural awareness, cultural pride, and cultural identity. In a way that reminds one of Horace Kallen's vision of cultural pluralism, this vision of a multi-cultural society imagines America as a kind of federation of cultures. *But, as suggested by Charles Taylor, contemporary multiculturalists go beyond Kallen in insisting that the ability of cultural minorities to be self-affirming depends on their being given **recognition** by other cultural sub-groups, especially those that have historically ignored or mis-recognized these groups. For there is a deep connection in contemporary personal and political life between self-affirmation and recognition by others.*
3. In sharp contrast to the view articulated in #2 is the position of individuals like Arthur Schlesinger who believe that encouraging groups to grow in their own diverse directions will ultimately destroy the overall unity of the community. The need today is to encourage not diversity but commonality and an awareness of the ideals, ideas, and practices that unite us. The community's well-being depends on achieving this commonality. Anything else is a kind of social suicide.

Participants in this session were invited to think about intra-Jewish diversity in relation to these ideas. More specifically, variants of the following questions were used to guide their discussion in smaller sub-groups:

1. Public schools have prided themselves on representing a common culture that is neutral as between the varied outlooks and values of its diverse constituencies. Its critics, though, have claimed that the so-called common culture embodied by our public schools is actually the culture of a particular, socially dominant sub-group, and that other groups are marginalized by it; that is, they are made to feel like 'outsiders' whose outlook and values are 'second-class'. Is there any merit to this critique as applied to the Jewish culture that greets the diverse individuals that come to JCCs? That is, is this public culture more congenial to the outlook of some of its constituencies than to that of the others? If so, is this a problem?
2. In discussing multiculturalism, Charles Taylor has written on 'the need for recognition', urging that it is the withholding of recognition from different cultural sub-groups that is the source of many of the tensions between the cultural groups that make up the larger community.
  - a. To what extent is 'recognition', or the absence thereof, a major problem in contemporary Jewish life -- that is, in the relationship between the organized community and its diverse constituencies and in the relationships among these constituencies?
  - b. How, if at all, does JCC practice currently address the problem of recognition?
  - c. What might it mean for the JCC to tackle a 'recognition'-agenda? (What kind of recognition might it seek to encourage, and how might this be reflected in its approach to its work?)

Small group discussion of the third proposition (Do we need a common, unifying core, and if so what would it include?) was reserved for our evening session (See below.)

**Evaluation of this session.** There were some spirited interchanges in the large group that focused on whether the JCC was, is or ever should be in any way 'a neutral' entity that stands above the fray of competing Jewish groups and perspectives, with most feeling that the ideal of neutrality is misconceived; and according to reports from some participants, some of the small group discussions dealing with the theme of recognition were very interesting. Once again, the size of the room and the acoustics made the

development of a sense of community hard to achieve, and this problem was compounded by the fact that by 2 p.m., when Dan's session began, participants seemed pretty tired.

In addition, in the name of engaging the group more actively early on, Dan made the decision to explore certain questions in Chevruta and in small groups early in the session, with the result that too little time was left to explain and consider the implications of the important concept of recognition. Dan had expected a significant amount of interest in the way the 'need for recognition' theme might play out in American Jewish life and in JCCs. There was a much greater interest, however, in the third theme (dealing with the alleged need for a common core) that was at the center of the group's work in the evening session.

#### **SESSION 5: Art History and Community: Seeing Diversity in Jewish life.**

Seated in a semi-circle in a dark room, facing a slide of a picture entitled "Jews Praying on the Day of Atonement, 1878," by Maurycy Gottlieb (1856-1879), Led by Jody Hirsh, we spent about 45 minutes together trying to make sense of this very interesting, somewhat enigmatic picture that was painted only a short time before Gottlieb's death at the age of 24. In line with the conference's theme of diversity, the picture offered representations of very different kinds of Jews (with the suggestion, though, that many of the figures may have represented the painter himself at different stages of life). But as we probed Gottlieb's work and circumstances, Jody stressed a different theme related to diversity: even as we focus on diverse kinds of **groups**, we should not forget that as **individuals** we are also very different kinds of beings; therefore, diversity at the level of the individual should also figure significantly into our analyses and deliberations.

**Evaluation of the session.** Sitting in the darkened room and playfully working to interpret this picture as a group, there was a very comfortable feeling in the room. Everyone seemed to find the experience very rewarding, with a high level of engagement. At the conclusion of this session, we took a break and re-convened in the evening for the day's final session.

#### **SESSION 6: In Search of a Common Core in the Midst of Our Diversity**

In Session 4, two conceptions of a community made up of diverse groups had been sketched out. One of them gives pride of place to diversity. It takes it as a given that diverse groups should be encouraged to nurture their distinctive outlook and ways, and it emphasizes the need for each of these groups to be respectful towards and, more strongly, to grant recognition to other groups. Near the end of the afternoon session, we had a chance to think about how this vision of community might map on to Jewish communal life today.

The second conception of a community made up of diverse groups that was discussed in the afternoon was grounded in Arthur Schlesinger's view that too much diversity is a dangerous thing, and that the need of the hour is to identify a common core of ideals, beliefs, and/or understandings that will unite us. How this view might map on to Jewish life today had not been explored in the afternoon and was the subject of the evening's session (Session 6).

Barry Holtz led this session and, in a relatively brief introduction, he succeeded in contextualizing this session in relation to the earlier sessions of the day. **[Perhaps Barry could briefly fill in the main points of this integration.]** He then divided the group into smaller breakout groups, with the assignment of responding to some fairly specific questions. In order to ensure that these sub-groups stayed on task, he encouraged the facilitators to actively make sure that their groups remained focused on the following questions:

**1. Critics of contemporary forms of multiculturalism urge the need for American to hold some significant thing or things in common, or else risk coming unglued as a community. Today, similar concerns are being expressed in relation to the diverse sub-groups that make up the American Jewish community.**

- a. Assuming that it is important for members of the Jewish community to share some thing or some things in common, what do you think this something should be? (You might begin by identifying a number of possibilities, and then decide from among them which one(s) is (are) essential.)
- b. How might the ideas raised in our morning session (with Daniel Gordis) shape approaches to a 'common core' for the life of a Jewish Community Center?
- c. Do you think this concern with 'commonality' is overblown as applied to the American Jewish Community?
- d. How would you go about implementing these common values in your JCC?

**Evaluation of the session.** Reasons for the smashing success of this session include:

- a. Barry's excellent introduction,
- b. the questions - particularly a) and d), seemed, for many of the participants, to get at something important,

As a result of some combination of these and/or other circumstances, the breakout group discussion were, by virtually all accounts, animated, rewarding, and very fruitful. When, after these sessions, participants joined together in a large semi-circle to reflect on their experience thinking about these questions together, the reports were exceptionally enthusiastic, and more than one person expressed the view that in this session we had succeeded in tapping into an important question that needed to be central to the program's overall agenda.

Though it was late (close to 10 p.m.) and everyone was tired, a strong sense of community seemed to have emerged among the group, and a number of people spontaneously expressed excitement about the program that we were in process of launching. Not only were the executives among the people expressing excitement, but more than one of them expressed the hope that a way would be found to keep them included in the program during the upcoming eighteen months. On this note of enthusiasm, we called it a day!

## **LATE NIGHT MEETING OF THE JOINT PLANNING TEAM**

According to our original plan, we would, on Wednesday morning, engage in a translation exercise designed to illustrate how differences at the level of conception carry significant implications at the level of practice. This session would be the logical next step, after a day (Tuesday) that had been spent clarifying our views on the place of diversity in Jewish life. But when the Joint Planning Team gathered together at the end of the day, the sense of the group was that something else was needed on Wednesday morning -- namely, a sustained opportunity for the executives and for the educators, in separate groups, to express their hopes, concerns, and suggestions in anticipation of the upcoming program. It was therefore decided that after breakfast on Wednesday morning we would gather in two groups, one made up of executives and the other made up of educators, to discuss these matters. This would be followed by a concluding session of the group as a whole focused on the projected layout of the 18 month program.

## **WEDNESDAY MORNING**

### **SESSION 7: EDUCATORS CAUCUS/EXECUTIVES CAUCUS**

**Educators caucus.** Cippi Harte, who facilitated this session, suggested that participants begin by talking with one another about what they do in their jobs, but, fearing that this would consume their time together and believing that there might be other ways of sharing this information, the participants expressed a preference for moving on to other questions. These questions, along with their varied responses, are summarized below.

**Question #1: What major issues are you facing in your work as a JCC Jewish educator?** Responses included the following:

1. I am spread too thin. I don't have enough time to think.
2. We are desperate for more funding to support our programs, and this raises questions about who we should be accepting money from, and how we should be spending the scarce resource we have. An issue that arose in this connection is whether worrying about how to get money should be part of the job-description of a JCC Jewish educator. As one person put it, should the job be limited to 'building community and affecting people's lives?').
3. How does, or should, the Jewish education we offer in JCCs differ from what they do in Synagogues? Should our programs focus on religion? Perhaps not, said one person. Should they more heavily emphasize the arts and culture?
4. How might the JCC meaningfully address people who feel alienated from Judaism as a religion, from shuls, and from traditional texts? In seeking an answer to this question, there is a prior need to more fully understand who these people are.
5. What place might nature/the outdoors have in the JCC's Jewish programming?
- \* 6. What is the job of a JCC educator? This question got raised in a number of contexts. How much time should I be spending working with staff, with the Board, or with clients? Is the Jewish educator 'a program person' or should this person principally enhance Jewish education in other ways -- for example, by communicating a powerful vision to critical individuals or by serving as a teacher or resource person to those directly involved in program development and delivery?
7. One participant described the 'core-businesses' of JCCs as Early Childhood Education, Camping, and Physical Education/Fitness. They are 'core businesses' in the threefold sense that they are the major profit-centers; they are the agency's life-blood and are counted on to bring clients into its orbit; **and** they are central to the agency's identity. The key question, said this individual, is this: What can we, the Jewish educators, do in these arenas? What would be appropriate experiences in these domains, and how could we go about creating them? Missing from our conference (but hopefully, he said, not from the program as a whole) were opportunities to reflect on the way Judaism fits into these core-businesses.
8. The Jewish educator needs credibility in the eyes of the Executive Director and the Board. Through what kinds of routes might this credibility be achieved? Said one person: there's a need to elevate the Jewish educators, perhaps by adding new responsibilities and/or titles to their profiles.
9. There is a need to figure out how to involve lay leaders in the Jewish educational side of the JCC.
10. Jewish educators fit awkwardly into the existing agency system, and this is sometimes problematic. They often have more freedom than other agency-personnel; there is no expectation of **OP** they get higher salaries; and they are often off meeting with the community's lay leaders. Other agency staff may resent this! Particularly when the Jewish educators are relieved of responsibilities that others in the agency take for granted, there is a danger that they will be viewed as prima donnas, as outsiders.
11. Is there a danger that some of the respect that rabbis need to maximize their effectiveness will be undermined when, as JCC educators, they are asked to function in non-rabbinic ways?

**Question #2: What are you hoping for from the JCCA/Mandel Foundation program?** The question elicited a range of concerns which participants hoped might be addressed in the program. Ideas expressed include the following:

- \* 1. An opportunity to think about when and how Jewishness should infuse different JCC programs and activities. For example, should a commitment to engage in learning be required of Board members? How Jewish is 'too Jewish' in, say, the day care program?
- \* 2. It would be useful to focus our inquiries on different department of JCC practice, e.g. camping, early childhood education, etc., with an emphasis both on broader philosophical considerations and on strong practical matters that include marketing strategies, sharing of materials, etc.
3. There is a need to better understand American culture as it affects the lives -- the needs, the interests, the values, and the perspectives - of those that the JCC serves and of those that it would like to serve but does not.
4. Related to #3 and #4, the view was expressed that though the agency's 'core-businesses' are important, they may be insufficient to attract all the potential constituencies we might want to attract. In addition to trying to better understand these other populations, there is a need to figure out what kinds of things they are likely to find attractive.

- 5. Related to #3, one person expressed the need to understand the population of Jews who feel entirely disengaged from the Jewish people and Jewish life.
- 6. One person expressed a need to develop program-marketing skills.
- 7. How might the Arts be effectively used as an educational tool in the JCC setting?
- 8. At least two persons expressed the hope that we would explore how nature might be integrated into the JCC's Jewish educational efforts.
- 9. Do we -- should we- have some conception of 'the successful Jewish person' who emerges from engagement in the world of JCCs, and if so, what would this person look like?
- 10. What are the key principles of adult learning, and what implications do they carry for the work of JCCs with adults? Might there be other ideas and trends in general education that would be relevant to the work of JCC Jewish educators?
- 11. One person suggested focusing on what he described as the unique, *nonformal* educational potential of JCCs.
- 12. Much enthusiasm greeted the suggestion that the program should include meaningful opportunities to engage in Tora Li'Shema, including opportunities to teach one another.
- 13. Related to #12, there was also enthusiasm for the idea that the program be built in such a way as to draw on the talents of the JCC educators, by providing them with meaningful opportunities to serve as resources to the program and/or as co-teachers.
- 14. The program should be built in a way that allows the educators to share with one another what they are doing and concerned about at the local level.
- 15. There was also some interest in a suggestion that we create and use a ListServe in order to continue conversations between meetings.
- 16. A question was raised concerning whether the program would offer participants the opportunity to grow as mentors so that they can better serve new people who come into the field.
- 17. Participants should be sent reading-materials prior to our next meeting and, more generally, between meetings. Among the suggestions: a list of participants' job descriptions and 'think pieces' that pertain to what the group will be studying.
- 18. It was suggested that it would be useful for the program's core faculty to spend time in JCC environments.

**Executives Caucus.** In their discussion, the JCC executives identified some general concerns as well their aspirations for this Jewish Educators initiative.

**General concerns.** In addition to a question about whether the Jewish educators will be able to implement the ideas they generate through the program, a number of the Executives' concerns focused on the role of Jewish educators in JCCs. There is considerable unclarity concerning how best to describe the role of the educator. Under this general heading, a number of points/questions were put on the table:

- a. The role of a JCC educator is different from that of a rabbi.
- b. Should the Jewish educator have the same responsibilities around budgetary matters as do other agency professionals, or should his/her talents and energies be concentrated elsewhere?
- c. When the Jewish educator is in a communal setting, does he/she speak for the JCC?  
Historically, it was noted, only the executive would speak on behalf of the agency.
- d. It was noted that there is not (yet) in place 'an upwardly mobile career track' for Jewish educators, and that this is a matter that will need attention.
- e. Someone commented that some of the foregoing questions relating to role cannot yet be meaningfully answered because "JCC Jewish educator" as a role is just emerging. Hopefully, this program will help shed light on some of these matters.
- f. The following concern was expressed: as JCC educators come to assume leadership roles in their communities, will they remain JCC-focused and program-focused?

**Aspirations for the Mandel/JCCA initiative.** A range of different ideas were expressed by those present, with widespread support voiced for the first two items:

- a. Ongoing involvement of the executives with the initiative as it unfolds, including: participating in one of the seminars; periodic conference calls; sharing materials; establishment of a small working/advisory group of executives.
- b. The need to develop a comprehensive communications strategy that will interpret the educators' involvement in this initiative to JCC boards and staff, with attention to the aims and outcomes of the initiative.
- c. Help participants' develop a clearer, deeper understanding of their profession as JCC Jewish educators. This (or closely related points) was also otherwise expressed: The program should help the participants 'create the professor of JCC Jewish educators; it should help them work towards an understanding of the business they are in. What their role is, someone commented, is a matter that needs to be worked through in conversation with executives.
- d. Help the educators develop an enhanced ability to help the executive to steer the ship.
- e. An opportunity to 'recharge the batteries and to emerge with increased passion to change the world through the JCC.
- f. The emphasis should be on studying, not on training; this should be viewed as opportunity to be part of a think-tank and to have a creative experience.
- g. At the same time, others mentioned more practical hopes: the development of implementation strategies and developing a deeper understanding of their political responsibilities.
- h. An opportunity to get to know colleagues in a way that encourages networking and continued sharing.
- i. Developing great pride.

## **SESSION 8: CONCLUDING SESSION - AN OVERVIEW OF THE WHOLE**

The concluding session began with some brief observations by Dan Pekarsky concerning the distinctive features of the Mandel/JCCA's programmatic approach to leadership development, an approach that had been demonstrated throughout the course of our two day seminar. At the heart of this approach is the conviction that effective leaders are guided by a powerful vision that speaks to the whys and wherefores, to the fundamental aims, of their efforts. It is, however, essential that this vision not be half-baked, but that it emerge through careful reflection and discussion that are informed by rich ideas drawn from both Jewish and general sources. It is, however, equally important, as Daniel Gordis had noted on Tuesday, that one think systematically about the implications of this kind of a vision for the various dimensions -- for the nitty gritty -- of agency-practice.

As a way of fostering growth along these dimensions, our 18 month program will encourage participants to move from practice to theory and back again to practice in a spiral that, in principle, is unending. Existing practice will be analyzed with an eye towards identifying possibly unrecognized but fundamental embedded assumptions about the aims of the enterprise, about the nature of Judaism, about how people change, etc. At the same time, powerful ideas drawn from Jewish and other arenas will be subjected to critical analysis, with attention to their implications for the way JCCs understand their mission and challenges. The expectation is that through such inquiries participants will emerge with more adequate, better understood guiding ideas and that they will then systematically examine the implications of these guiding ideas for practice in their institutional settings. If this approach is successful, participants will emerge with an informed and differentiated understanding of their fundamental aspirations as Jewish educators, along with a concrete sense of the implications of these aspirations for their work.

As a way of illustrating the program's approach, the May seminar was designed to give participants a chance to engage in several of the inquiries identified above.. We had a chance, in examining the pre-seminar assignments, to search out fundamental beliefs that are at work in our ordinary practice. And at

least two of the major sessions on Tuesday offered participants a chance to wrestle with theoretical perspectives that may carry implications for the way we might understand the aims of JCC practice. Finally, at least one session (the Tuesday night discussion of a core that might unite us) offered participants a chance to struggle with what they themselves take to be core-aspirations around which Jewish education in JCCs should be organized.

Missing from the range of activities that had made up the conference was the opportunity to engage in a translation exercise, i.e., to systematically think through the implications of a commitment at the level of vision for practice in a particular agency-domain. But such opportunities will be central to the program as a whole.

In concluding his remarks, Dan commented that the approach to leadership development he had just outlined is compatible with addressing many of the issues and hopes that the educators had articulated in the earlier Wednesday morning session.

In the very last part of the concluding session, participants had a chance to review and raise questions concerning the document that articulates the entire 18-month program. And with this the May seminar came to a conclusion.

# SUMMARY OF JCC EDUCATORS AND EXECUTIVE DIRECTORS SEMINAR May 2001

## BACKGROUND

Planned by a team that included representatives from the Mandel Foundation, the JCCA, and the Jewish Community Centers, the May seminar was designed to generate 'buy-in' on the part of possible participants and their executives, as well as to elicit input from these individuals that would be of value to the Planning Team in further developing the program. The program was therefore announced as a combination of demonstration (of major dimensions of the proposed 18-month program) and consultation. It began on Monday, May 7, 2001 in the evening and concluded on May 9 around noon. It took place at a hotel conference center in Pearl River, NY, approximate 45 minutes from New York City. It included 15 pairs of JCC executives and their Jewish educators. Below is a general summary of what transpired.

Informing the planning of the seminar was the hope that it would illustrate the overall program's interest in helping participants work towards powerful conceptions, grounded in Jewish and general thought, of the aims of Jewish education in the JCC settings and to think through the educational implications of these conceptions. Since this would involve both carefully analyzing the guiding assumptions at work in existing practice and struggling with big ideas that might carry implications for practice, we wanted to organize a seminar that allowed for both kinds of activities, along with opportunities to engage with pertinent intellectual inputs drawn from both Jewish and general thought. Any number of important issues that bear on the JCC's mission and work might prove useful springboards to these kinds of inquiries; and after considerable deliberation, we decided to organize the seminar around the the JCC's interest in being an inclusive institution that welcomes diverse kinds of constituencies and points of view.

Though we were prepared for shifting direction in response to the emerging needs of the group, in the conference was designed to take participants on a particular intellectual journey. After a general, welcoming session, participants would h

## MONDAY EVENING

### INTRODUCTION AND WORDS OF WELCOME (Howard Charish, Allan Finkelstein)

The group gathered in the dining room around 6:30 pm and spent about half an hour informally meeting new people and renewing ties with old friends. With name-tags in place, we sat down to a convivial dinner that was preceded by words of welcome from both Allan Finkelstein and Howard Charish. Allan and Howard **PLEASE FILL IN.....**

## **SESSION 1: Diversity and the JCC - uncovering challenges and opportunities through an examination of pre-seminar assignments**

The evening-session was organized around the pre-seminar assignments that the teams had sent in a couple of weeks before the conference began. This assignment invited the teams to describe a problematic situation they had faced growing out of their efforts to be an inclusive institution, along with how they had proceeded to interpret and address this situation. In this session, three or four teams gathered as sub-groups along with two facilitators. Each team had the opportunity to share the problematic situation it had written up with the others and to respond to questions posed by the others who were present. In addition to offering an opportunity for the participants to become acquainted with some of their colleagues and their institutions, this session was designed to identify a range of questions and issues that might profit from further attention. Each sub-group was asked to keep a record of these issues; and at the end of the session, a representative of the sub-group was asked to share with the group as a whole one significant issue or question that had arisen in their discussions. Among the major issues/questions that were brought back to the group as a whole were the following:

1. What criteria should be used for deciding from whom it is acceptable to accept funds to support agency purposes? Can we identify a value-system that will help us decide such matters?
2. Given its unique set of constituencies and role, what kinds of Shabbat experiences ought to be encouraged in JCC settings?
3. What does it mean 'to create community' in the JCC? Does one have to go for 'the least common denominator (striving to offend the fewest number of people) -- or should the JCC include diverse opportunities for expression, each appropriate to a different constituency? Or are there other possibilities?
4. When you make hard decisions, whom or what are you protecting? And, in a related vein, when you make these decisions whose definitional structures (for example, of who counts as a Jew) do you accept?
5. To what extent and in what ways, should staff members embody and promote the Jewish vision of the institution?
6. What's involved in making policy decisions on educational, and not just political, grounds?

Although participants had already had a long day, and the hour was late, the sub-groups functioned in an animated and enthusiastic way, and there seemed to be enormous energy in the room. Equally important, many important issues were articulated.

**Evaluation of the session.** Though this session felt very successful in respect of engagement and productivity, three concerns were raised. The first is that some people felt that they did not have enough time to do justice to the cases that had been presented, and the second is that some felt that participants would have benefited from a fuller explanation at the outset of why we were focusing on diversity/inclusivity at this conference and how this exercise fit into the the conference as a whole. The latter

concern was responded to at the beginning of Daniel Godis' session on Tuesday morning. Third, the acoustics in the room we were scheduled to meet in were such that the noise-level was quite high, with the result that the small group conversations felt more labored than they otherwise would have been.

## **TUESDAY**

### **SESSION 2: Me, we, and the JCC - the presentation of self in JCC life**

Led by Jonnie Ariel, this session was designed to offer participants a chance to get to know one another better, to develop as a group, and to reflect on the sources of their own and others' identity as Jews and human beings. Since this particular conference and the program as a whole will be concerned with questions of identity - the identity of the participants as Jewish educators and the leaders of Jewish institutions, and the identities of the varied people who walk into JCCs, it seemed fitting and important to begin our work by reflecting on questions relating to identity.

At the heart of the session was the following exercise: each participant, including the program's faculty, was asked to tape a large sheet of white paper on a wall, and then to fill it in, in response to a range of questions that Jonnie had prepared. The instructions/questions included but were not limited to the following:

- 1) Somewhere near the middle of the sheet, make a list of the nicknames you have been called, and indicate who used them.
- 2) On the upper right hand side of the sheet, draw a bookshelf, and 'place' on it the four or five books that have most influenced you.
- 3) On another part of the sheet, draw your family.
- 4) On yet another part of the sheet, draw a family-tree that goes back to your grandparents. Next to your grandparents and parents, indicate traits of character or of mind that you have gotten from them.
- 5) Draw a large heart, and in the middle of it, put a Jewish saying that captures the heart of what you are about in your work.

When we had completed this exercise, we had a chance to do a kind of gallery-walk around the room and to view what were essentially rich self-portraits that all of us had drawn. Many seemed to feel that the questions had succeeded in eliciting qualities of self and self-perception that really illuminated each person, and this made the gallery walk a fascinating experience, one significantly richer and deeper than most 'getting to know one another' exercises.

The session culminated in some comments by Jonnie Ariel that enabled the group to reflect on the exercise in relation to some larger questions relating to the nature of identity and its sources. He emphasized the notion that identity is shaped through interaction, and that our identity is made up not just by what distinguishes us from one another but also by what we share. His comments also included some interesting observations about the difficulty of developing a stable identity in the modern world. He

compared an earlier period in history where our lives had a pilgrim-like quality (in that there was an unwavering sense of direction) to our own period in which life has a more tourist-like quality (in the sense that we move through a succession of different environments, each perhaps interesting and a source of growth, but without any larger sense of direction and purpose). Commenting on the difficulty of rooting one's identity in the modern world, Jonnie compared modernity to a kind of desert: new identities come with ease, but a gust of wind may be sufficient to dislodge them.

**Evaluation of this session.** There seemed to be a lot of enthusiasm for this session, though some of the concerns expressed late Monday night about need to contextualize what we were engaged in so that participants would have a better sense of what we were about. This need was addressed at the beginning of the next session (and then again at a number of points along the way.)

### **SESSION 3: What is a Jew? Challenges from the Tradition to contemporary life**

This session began with some general comments by Daniel Gordis that were designed to give some context to this session and to the overall conference. He reminded the group of the conference's two major purposes, demonstration and consultation, and stressed the importance of getting feedback from participants. He also drew attention to a fundamental principle that guides educational initiatives with which the Mandel Foundation is involved: that leadership at its best is vision-driven, and that vision-driven leadership requires a continuing dialogue between theory and practice. Neither alone is sufficient: practice without powerful guiding ideas is blind; but powerful ideas that do not find meaningful expression in, and tested by, our practical endeavors are also problematic. **Both**, in active association with one another, are needed!

This dialogue between theory and practice is, Daniel went on to suggest, embedded in the design of this conference. Last night we used the pre-seminar assignments that participants had prepared as a vehicle of focusing on the way issues dealing with diversity and inclusiveness surface in live, practical contexts. These discussions will help to ensure that the content-sessions at the heart of today's work will be grounded in, and can meaningfully refer back to and illuminate, the participants' practice-related contexts and issues.

Against this more general background, Daniel G. explained that this session would focus on different conceptions of the essence of Jewishness. Since, at some level, a JCC's Jewish educational program needs to be grounded in some conception of what it means to be Jewish, it's important to wrestle with this question and to see how it has been addressed in Jewish history. It is, Daniel suggested, a myth that prior to modernity there was a single clear conception of what it means to be a Jew; and, in fact, if we look at Jewish history, we discover that variety of conception, rather than singularity is the norm. At least four different conceptions have been prominent; and though each of them had advocates who passionately believed their favored conception to be the only legitimate one, a look at the broad sweep of our history suggests plurality of conception. As we prepared to look at these four models, Daniel asked the participants to consider

whether any of these traditional models speak to them or to their clienteles -- and if not, what does this mean? And what model of being Jewish **would** resonate with their constituencies?

The four models developed by Daniel come out of texts dealing with conversion, conversion being an idea that highlights our understanding of what it means to be 'inside' rather than 'outside' of Judaism? Put differently, what does one become when one becomes a Jew?

As Daniel prepared to put on the table these four conceptions, an important question was raised; in fact, across the whole conference, questions and insights coming from the group enriched and deepened the issues on the table. In this case, one person wondered whether the criteria used to determine who should be admitted into the Jewish people are the same as those that define membership for those who are already on the inside of the community. Daniel acknowledged the value of the question as well as the credibility of the tacit suggestion that in fact the criteria are different; but he suggested that, nonetheless, attention to the kinds of criteria that have at different points in Jewish history been employed to evaluate potential members can help us think seriously about what it means to be a Jew.

In any event, guided by appropriate texts, Daniel proceeded to characterize the following four models of Jewishness.

**A. The biblical period: the Jew as Israelite, a tribal model.** The Torah itself, Daniel noted, says virtually nothing about how one becomes a Jew, but embedded in the text there appears to be a kind of tribal model (that is described by Shaya Cohen in a text entitled *Beginnings of Jewishness*). The tribal conception defines Jewishness on the model of a family to which one belongs by virtue of being born into it and living on its territory. Others (the resident-alien, the Ger Toshav) can live among members of the tribe, but can't actually join it. According to Daniel, this model of membership in the Jewish community dies with the Babylonian Exile in 586 B.C.E, at which point the geographic ties of the group to the territory become seriously attenuated. At this point, a new model that emphasizes the Jew as foreigner comes to the fore (see B., below.).

Before we moved on to the second model, members of the group observed that the category of Ger Toshav (resident-alien) that was significant in biblical times is important in our own era as well. There are, that is, many 'strangers' who live among us -- for example, non-Jewish spouses, non-Jews who use the services of the Jewish community and Jews whose connection to Jewish life is very attenuated. This point may well be worth our revisiting.

**B. The Rabbinic Period I: The Jew as the oppressed outsider.** Well-articulated in rabbinic sources, this second conception says that the critical condition of membership in Jewish people is a willingness to share the lot, to accept the destiny, of a people that is 'persecuted and oppressed, despised, harassed and overcome by afflictions.' According to this conception, Jews live on the margins of the communities in which they find

themselves, they are marginal. And their vocation as a people is to take care of oppressed people who also live on the margins of the community. Before we moved on to the next conception, it was noted that this conception of what it means to be a Jew, like the first one, is very far removed from the way American Jews understand their situation. As a community in America, we neither are, nor do we aspire to be, marginal and oppressed. Increasingly, we are insiders rather than outsiders.

**C. Rabbinic Period II: The Jew as the one who obeys God's command.** According to this third conception, the critical condition one must meet in order to enter the Jewish people is a commitment to adhere to the details of the code of behavior that is identified by the Halakha. To submit your will to the Will of God by 'towing the Halakhic line' is the core of Jewishness.

In a way that harked back to an earlier question concerning whether the criteria for entering the community continue to apply once one has achieved membership, Daniel turned our attention to the case of a person who agrees to adhere to the Halakha at the point of conversion but then fails to honor that commitment. In particular, he cited Rabbi Moshe Feinstein's view that such a person is not to be considered a true convert at all. "It is obviously not good for either God or the Jewish people that converts like these should be mixed into the Jewish people...it is clear that these are not converts at all."

**D. The contemporary period: A return to biblical roots?** Due to time-constraints, we didn't do much with this conception, but at its heart is the notion, articulated in a Responsum by Rabbi Isaac Herzog, that the desire to settle in Israel – a desire that is not propelled by necessity but that is 'for the sake of heaven' - is a sufficient condition of joining the Jewish community. ("It becomes clear that their desire is to embrace the People Israel, in its land...and this is a good motivation, and there is no need to accept their acceptance [by the Bet Din].")

Reflecting on the four models, Daniel noted that they are all rejected by most of American Jewry. But this, he suggested, puts before us a challenge: If not these models, which one?? That is, what model of Jewishness are you prepared to put at the center of your JCC, and to use as a basis for programmatic and other decisions? This commented called forth the following responses.

In response, one person wondered out loud whether the question 'What does it mean to be a Jew?' is a good question. He worried out loud that if asked in our institutions, it might be terrifying. Daniel agreed that it's a potentially dangerous question, and that whether and how one raises it within one's institution is a matter to be approached very thoughtfully. But he urged the view that, far from being removed from contemporary JCCs, some kind of answer to the question of what it means to be a Jew is, inevitably, already implicit in JCC practice. If so, it becomes important to examine this practice with an eye towards surfacing what this conception of Jewishness is and to consider whether, on reflection, this is the model that ought to be embedded in our

practice. One way of deepening such an inquiry is through a considering of competing conceptions of Jewishness (of the kind we have been considering).

Reflecting on this exchange and on the morning as a whole, another participant commented that the critical issue (whether she was speaking just in her capacity as a JCC educator or more generally was not clear) is not the essence of Judaism but, rather, the boundaries of membership in Jewish life. Reflecting on the four conceptions, she offered her view that there is a progression from geographic boundaries, to legal/social boundaries, to a new conception (with Rabbi Herzog) that integrates the two kinds of boundaries.

Against this background of discussion, we broke into sub-groups with the instruction that we use a series of questions formulated by Daniel G. to guide our discussion. These questions were designed a) to encourage participants to judge whether any of the four models (or selected elements of these models) resonate for them personally or with their constituencies; b) to begin thinking about whether some other model might more effectively characterize the core of what constitutes Jewish belonging in contemporary America; c) to think about the costs and benefits – the wisdom – of trying to define the core elements of Judaism.

Preliminary impressions suggest that discussions in the breakout groups were animated, but that groups varied dramatically with respect to how closely they followed the questions that had been proposed. But even when they did not follow these questions, the discussions gave participants an opportunity to react in rich ways to the presentation they had just heard. As an example, consider the discussion in one of the breakout groups. There was in this group a rich discussion concerning the alleged need to identify a guiding answer to the question, “What is at the heart of being a Jew?” The following points were juxtaposed in this conversation. In one particular breakout group, the discussion brought out the following:

- Isn't it important to draw a distinction, undrawn in the larger session, between the criteria for being regarded as Jewish, on the one hand, and Jewishness?
- Another person asked: Is there really a need to identify with any single model of what it means to be a Jew? Can't a JCC function adequately – don't they already – without such a conception?
- Agreeing with the comment that JCCs are not informed by any sense of the essence of Judaism, someone else suggested that, unlike, for example, many denominational institutions, JCCs don't have a Jewish destination for its clientele [there were frequent references in the group to individualized, multi-directional trajectories of growth]. What does it mean to have a guiding vision, this person continued, when you are not guided this sense of destination?
- Listening to this exchange, another participant expressed skepticism concerning the claim that JCCs are informed by any conception of Judaism. Recognize or acknowledge it or not, implicit in our practices are judgments about what counts as Jewish, and, rather than avoid this question, we should be looking at where in our practice views concerning what Jewishness are at work, and we should be

thinking about who should be deciding – and how? – our institution's views on this matter.

Other kinds of themes were also sounded in this small group. For example:

- one person expressed some concerns about the enterprise of reflecting systematically about what JCCs are doing. There is, he intimated, a kind of unarticulated wisdom implicit in day-to-day practice, and the attempt to think about these matters systematically might prove paralyzing.
- One person commented that a model of being Jewish grounded in the ideas of Mordecai Kaplan might have been more resonant with the world of JCCs.
- Someone commented that starting with models of Jewishness is somewhat foreign to the culture of JCCs. We, said this person, don't start with models but with people. [This sounds like a theme that may be worth understanding and exploring more deeply.]

**Evaluation of this session.** Despite the awkwardness of the large room and the bad acoustics, Daniel Gordis' presentation was excellent and catalyzed some rich discussion. Two concerns are, however, worthy of mention. 1) The Jewish educators were noticeably more active and engaged in this session, particularly in the larger session, than were the executives, some of whom seemed disengaged and expressed discomfort with the overly-intellectual character of the discussion. 2) As noted above, in the breakout groups, the facilitators, by pre-agreement, not forceful in guiding the discussion, the assumption being that the guiding questions would be sufficient to steer the conversation. In practice, though, this left a kind of leadership void in some groups and discussions which often went far afield. This is important to keep in mind for future planning (and was in fact taken into account in planning the evening's breakout groups (See below).

#### **SESSION 4: 'Jewish diversity: perspectives from the multicultural wars.'**

Led by 'the other Daniel', Daniel Pekarsky (a.k.a. Dan), this session was designed to approach issues of intra-Jewish diversity from a radically different perspective – the starting-point being not Jewish sources but contemporary debates in general education concerning multiculturalism -- debates that deal with the nature and value of diversity and its place in education and social life. The idea behind this session was to sketch the way these debates play out in American life, and then to see whether, and if so, how, they apply to Jewish life.

The starting-point of Dan's presentation was the fact of diversity (both within American life and within the Jewish community). He noted that how we should respond to this diversity must itself be grounded in an assessment of its character. At a time when there are radically dissimilar, but typically under-examined, appraisals of this diversity (with some urging us unthinkingly to 'celebrate diversity' and others proclaiming how

dangerous it is in shrill tones), it becomes important to try to understand and evaluate these appraisals in a dispassionate way.

Early on, Dan noted that Jews can relate to the multiculturalism debates in two very different ways. On the one hand, they are one of many groups (and a particularly interesting one, at that) which make up America's multi-cultural mix; on the other hand, the Jewish community is itself a multi-cultural society (in the sense that it is made up of a variety of different sub-groups, representing diverse outlooks, values, and practices). While both perspectives ultimately have a bearing on JCCs, this particular presentation is interested in the second perspectives -- that is, in how different ways of thinking about the interplay of different cultures in the larger society might illuminate the way we think about the way to approach intra-Jewish diversity.

Against this background, Dan began by painting a 19<sup>th</sup> century debate that pitted Archbishop Hughes of New York City, representing the concerns of Irish-Catholics, against NY's Public School Society around the question of whether Catholics should be eligible for public funds, we then moved on to consider more recent debates concerning the place of cultural differences in American life. While the actors in the contemporary debate are different (with minorities like Latinos and African Americans replacing the Irish-Catholics), the actual debates are quite similar. At the heart of these debates have been three propositions that have been passionately affirmed and contested both in the past and in the present:

1. The so-called 'common culture' to which all sub-groups have been asked to subscribe to is, according to critics of American life, actually the culture of a particular, socially dominant group, and this culture is actually hostile to, and a threat to, the values and the outlook of minority cultural groups. Put differently, the so-called common culture is congenial to the outlook of some groups that make up American society and hostile to the outlook of others.
2. An adequate multi-cultural society is one that does not just provide its different cultural sub-groups with the opportunity to have 'their share of the pie' in American life; it is a society that enables each of these sub-groups the opportunity to nurture in its members cultural awareness, cultural pride, and cultural identity. In a way that reminds one of Horace Kallen's vision of cultural pluralism, this vision of a multi-cultural society imagines America as a kind of federation of cultures. *But, as suggested by Charles Taylor, contemporary multiculturalists go beyond Kallen in insisting that the ability of cultural minorities to be self-affirming depends on their being given **recognition** by other cultural sub-groups, especially those that have historically ignored or mis-recognized these groups. For there is a deep connection in contemporary personal and political life, between self-affirmation and recognition by others.*
3. In sharp contrast to the view articulated in #2 is the the position of individuals like Arthur Schlesinger who believe that encouraging groups to grow in their own diverse

directions will ultimately destroy the overall unity of the community. The need today is to encourage not diversity but commonality and an awareness of the ideals, ideas, and practices that unite us. The community's well-being depends on achieving this commonality. Anything else is a kind of social suicide.

Participants in this session were invited to think about intra-Jewish diversity in relation to American Jewish life. More specifically, variants of the following questions were used to guide their discussion in smaller sub-groups:

1. Public schools have prided themselves on representing a common culture that is neutral as between the varied outlooks and values of its diverse constituencies. Its critics, though, have claimed that the so-called common culture embodied by our public schools is actually the culture of a particular, socially dominant sub-group, and that other groups are marginalized by it; that is, they are made to feel like 'outsiders' whose outlook and values are 'second-class'. Is there any merit to this critique as applied to the Jewish culture that greets the diverse individuals that come to JCCs? That is, is this public culture more congenial to the outlook of some of its constituencies than to that of the others? If so, is this a problem?
2. In discussing multiculturalism, Charles Taylor has written on 'the need for recognition', urging that it is the withholding of recognition from different cultural sub-groups that is the source of many of the tensions between the cultural groups that make up the larger community.
  - a. To what extent is 'recognition', or the absence thereof, a major problem in contemporary Jewish life -- that is, in the relationship between the organized community and its diverse constituencies and in the relationships among these constituencies?
  - b. How, if at all, does JCC practice currently address the problem of recognition?
  - c. What might it mean for the JCC to tackle a 'recognition'-agenda? (What kind of recognition might it seek to encourage, and how might this be reflected in its approach to its work?)

Small group discussion of the third proposition (Do we need a common, unifying core, and if so what would it include?) was reserved for our evening session (See below.)

**Evaluation of this session.** There were some spirited interchanges in the large group that focused on whether the JCC was, is or ever should be in any way 'a neutral' entity that stands above the fray of competing Jewish groups and perspectives, with most feeling that the ideal of neutrality is misconceived; and according to reports from some participants, some of the small group discussions dealing with the theme of recognition were very interesting. That said, this session seemed to drag some. Once again, the size of the room and the acoustics made the development of a contained sense of community hard to achieve, and this problem was compounded by the fact that by 2 in the afternoon, which is when Dan's session began, participants seemed pretty tired.

In addition, in the name of engaging the group more actively early on, Dan made the decision to explore certain questions in Chevruta and in small groups early in the session, with the result that too little time was left to explain and consider the implications of the important concept of recognition. Whether for this or for other reasons, there did not seem to be as deep an interest as Dan had expected in the way the 'need for recognition' theme might play out in American Jewish life and in JCCs. There was a much greater interest, however, in the third theme (dealing with the alleged need for a common core) that was at the center of the group's work in the evening session.

### **SESSION 5: Art History and Community: Seeing iversity in Jewish life.**

This session was led by Jodi Hirsh. Seated in a semi-circle in a dark room, facing a slide of a picture entitled "Jews Praying on the Day of Atonement, 1878," by Maurycy Gottlieb (1856-1879), Led by Jody Hirsh, we spent about 45 minutes together trying to make sense of this very interesting, somewhat enigmatic picture that was painted only a short time before Gottlieb's death at an early age. In line with the conference's theme of diversity, the picture offered representations of very different kinds of Jews (with the suggestion, though, that many of the figures may have represented the painter himself at different stages of life). But as we probed Gottlieb's work and circumstances, Jodi stressed a different theme related to diversity: even as we focus on diverse kinds of **groups**, we should not forget that also as **individuals** we are very different kinds of beings -- that diversity at the level of the individual should also figure significantly into our analyses and deliberations.

Sitting in the darkened room and playfully working to interpret this picture as a group, there was a very comfortable feeling in the room. Everyone seemed to find the experience very rewarding, with a high level of engagement. At the conclusion of this session, we took a break and re-convened in the evening for the day's final session.

### **SESSION 6: In search of a common core in the midst of our diversity**

In Session 4, two conceptions of a community made up of diverse groups had been sketched out. One of them gives pride of place to diversity: it takes it as a given that diverse groups should be encouraged to nurture their distinctive outlook and ways, and it emphasizes the need for each of these groups to be respectful towards and, more strongly, to grant recognition to other groups. Near the end of the afternoon session, we had had a chance to think about how this vision of community might map on to Jewish communal life today.

The second conception of a community made up of diverse groups that was discussed in the afternoon was grounded in Arthur Schlesinger's view (see above) that too much diversity is a dangerous thing, and that the need of the hour is to identify a common core of ideals, beliefs, and/or understandings that will unite us. How this view might map on to Jewish life today had not been explored in the afternoon and was the subject of the evening's session (Session 6).

Barry Holtz led this session and, in a relatively brief introduction, he succeeded in contextualizing this session in relation to the various sessions that had gone before. **[Perhaps Barry could briefly fill in the main points of this integration.]** He then divided the group into smaller breakout groups, with the assignment of responding to some fairly specific questions. In order to ensure that these sub-groups stayed on task, he encouraged the facilitators to actively make sure that their groups remained focused on the central questions. take a more active role than they had been asked to take in previous breakout sessions. The groups were asked to investigate the following questions:

**1. Critics of contemporary forms of multiculturalism urge the need for American to hold some significant thing or things in common, or else risk coming unglued as a community.**

- a. **Do you think this concern with 'commonality' is overblown (as applied to the American community and as applied to the Jewish community)?**
- b. **Assuming that it is important for members of the Jewish community to share some thing or some things in common, what might or ought this something to be? (Begin by identify a number of possibilities, and then decide from among them which one(s) is (are) essential.)**

**JOY: NOTE THAT THIS IS NOT THE PRECISE SET OF QUESTIONS THAT WE USED, BUT IT IS IN THE SPIRIT OF THE QUESTIONS WE USED. DO YOU HAVE THE ACTUAL TEXT? IF SO, PLEASE REPLACE.**

Perhaps because of Barry's excellent introduction, perhaps because the questions (particularly b) seemed to many participants to get at something important, perhaps because facilitators were more forceful in guiding the discussion, or as a result of some combination of these and/or other circumstances, the breakout group discussion were, by virtually all accounts, animated, rewarding, and very fruitful. When, after these sessions, participants joined together in a large semi-circle to reflect on their experience thinking about these questions together, the reports were exceptionally enthusiastic, and more than one person expressed the view that in this session we had succeeded in tapping into an important question that needed to be central to the program's overall agenda.

Though it was late (close to 10 pm) and everyone was tired, a strong sense of community seemed to have emerged among the group, and a number of people spontaneously expressed excitement about the program that we were in process of launching. Not only were the executives among the people expressing excitement, but more than one of them expressed the view that a way would be found to keep them included in the program during the upcoming eighteen months. On this note of enthusiasm, we called it a day!

**LATE NIGHT MEETING OF THE JOINT PLANNING TEAM**

According to our original plan, after a day of beginning to clarify our views on the place of diversity in Jewish life, we would, on Wednesday morning, engage in a translation exercise designed to illustrate how differences at the level of conception carry significant implications at the level of practice. But when the Joint Planning Team gathered together at the end of the day, the sense of the group was that something else was needed on Wednesday morning -- namely, a sustained opportunity for the executives and for the educators, in separate groups to express their hopes, concerns, and suggestions in anticipation of the upcoming program. It was therefore decided that after breakfast on Wednesday morning we would gather in two groups, one made up of executives and the other made up of educators, to discuss these matters. This would be followed by a concluding session of the group as a whole focused on the projected layout of the 18 month program.

## **WEDNESDAY MORNING**

### **SESSION 7: EDUCATORS CAUCUS/EXECUTIVES CAUCUS**

**Educators caucus.** Cippi Harte, who facilitated this session, suggested that participants begin by talking with one another about what they do in their jobs, but, fearing that this would consume their time together and believe that there might be other ways of sharing this information, expressed a preference for moving on to other questions. These questions, along with their varied responses, are summarized below.

**Question #1: What major issues are you facing in your work as a JCC Jewish educator?** Responses included the following:

1. I am spread too thin. I don't have enough time to think.
2. We are desperate for more funding to support our programs, and this raises questions about who we should be accepting money from, and how we should be spending the scarce resource we have. An issue that arose in this connection is whether worrying about how to get money should be part of the job-description of a JCC Jewish educator (or should the job be limited, as one person put it, to 'building community and affecting people's lives?').
3. How does, or should, the Jewish education we offer in JCCs differ from what they do in Synagogues? Should our programs focus on religion? Should they more heavily emphasize the arts and culture?
4. How might the JCC meaningfully address people who feel alienated from Judaism as a religion, from shuls, and from traditional texts? In seeking an answer to this question, there is a prior need to more fully understand who these people are.
5. What place might nature/the outdoors have in the JCC's Jewish programming?
6. What is the job of a JCC educator? This question got raised in a number of contexts. How time should I be spending working with staff, with the Board, or with clients? Is the Jewish educator 'a program person' or should this person principally enhance Jewish education in other ways -- for example, by communicating a powerful vision to critical individuals or by serving as a teacher or resource person to those directly involved in program development and delivery?

7. One participant described the 'core-businesses' of JCCs as Early Childhood Education, Camping, and Physical Education/Fitness. They are 'core businesses' in the threefold sense that they are the major profit-centers; they are the agent's life-blood and are counted on to bring clients into its orbit; **and** they are central to the agency's identity. The key question, said this individual is this: What can we, the Jewish educators, do in these arenas? What would be appropriate experiences in these domains, and how could we go about creating them? Missing from our conference (but hopefully, he said, not from the program as a whole) were opportunities to reflect on the way Judaism fits into these core-businesses.
8. The Jewish educator needs credibility in the eyes of the Executive Director and the Board. Through what kinds of routes might this credibility be achieved?
9. There is a need to figure out how to involve lay leaders in the Jewish educational side of the JCC.
10. Jewish educators fit awkwardly into the existing agency system, and this is sometimes problematic. They often have more freedom than other agency-personnel; there is no expectation of OP; they get higher salaries; and they are often off meeting with the community's lay leaders. Other agency staff may resent this! Particularly when the Jewish educators are relieved of responsibilities that others in the agency take for granted, there is a danger that they will be viewed as prima donnas, as outsiders.

**Question #2: What are you hoping for from the JCCA/Mandel Foundation**

**program?** The question elicited a range of concerns which participants hoped might be addressed in the program. Ideas expressed include the following:

1. An opportunity to think about when and how Jewishness should infuse different JCC programs and activities? For example, should a commitment to engage in learning be required of Board members? How Jewish is 'too Jewish' in, say, the day care program?
2. It would be useful to focus our inquiries on different department of JCC practice, e.g. camping, early childhood education, etc., with an emphasis both on broader philosophical considerations and on strong practical matters that include marketing strategies, sharing of materials, etc.
3. There is a need to better understand American culture as it affects the lives -- the needs, the interests, the values, and the perspectives - of those that the JCC serves and of those that it would like to serve but does not.
4. Related to #3, the view was expressed that though the agency's 'core-businesses' are important, they may be insufficient to attract all the potential constituencies we might want to attract. In addition to trying to better understand these populations, there is a need to figure out what kinds of things they are likely to find attractive.
5. Related to #3, one person expressed the need to understand the population of Jews who feel entirely disengaged from the Jewish people and Jewish life.
6. One person expressed a need to develop program-marketing skills.
7. How might the Arts be effectively used as an educational tool in the JCC setting?
8. At least two persons expressed the hope that we would explore how nature might be integrated into the JCC's Jewish educational efforts.

9. Do we -- should we- have some conception of 'the successful Jewish person' who emerges from engagement in the world of JCCs, and if so, what would this person look like?
10. What are the key principles of adult learning, and what implications do they carry for the work of JCCs with adults?
11. One person suggested focusing on what he described as the unique, *nonformal* educational potential of JCCs.
12. Much enthusiasm greeted the suggestion that the program should include meaningful opportunities to engage in Tora Li'Shema, including opportunities to teach one another.
13. There was also enthusiasm for the idea that the program be built in such a way as to draw on the talents of JCC educators, by providing them with meaningful opportunities to serve as resources to the program and/or as co-teachers.
14. There was also some interest in a suggestion that we create and use a ListServe in order to be able to continue conversations between meetings.
15. A question was raised concerning whether the program would offer participants the opportunity to grow as mentors so that they can better serve new people who come into the field.

#### **Executives Caucus. NEEDS TO BE FILLED IN**

### **SESSION 8: CONCLUDING SESSION - AN OVERVIEW OF THE WHOLE**

Our concluding session began with some brief observations by Dan Pekarsky concerning the distinctive features of the Mandel/JCCA's programmatic approach to leadership development, an approach which the Joint Planning Team hoped had been demonstrated in our two days together. At the heart of this approach is the conviction that at the core of effective of leaders one finds a powerful vision that speaks to the whys and wherefores, to the fundamental aims of their efforts and what would count as success. It is, however, essential that this vision not be half-baked, but that it emerge through careful reflection and discussion that are informed by rich ideas drawn from both Jewish and general sources. It is, however, equally important, as Daniel Gordis had noted on Tuesday, that one think systematically about the implications of this kind of a vision for the various dimensions -- for the nitty gritty -- of agency-practice.

As a way of encouraging growth along these dimensions, our program will encourage participants to move from practice to theory and back again to practice in a way that, in principle, is unending. Existing practice will be analyzed with an eye towards identifying possibly unrecognized but fundamental assumptions about the aims of the enterprise, about the nature of Judaism, about how people change, etc. Making use of theory, of powerful ideas drawn from Jewish and other arenas, these ideas will be subjected to critical analysis, with the hope that participants will emerge with more adequate, better understood guiding ideas. And then the implications of these ideas for practice will be systematically examined. If this approach is successful, the result will be

that participants will emerge with an informed and differentiated understanding of their fundamental aspirations as Jewish educators, along with a concrete sense of the implications of these aspirations for their work.

As a way of illustrating the program's approach, our own conference was designed to give participants a chance to engage in several of the inquiries identified above.. We had a chance, in examining the pre-seminar assignments, to search out empirical and value-assumptions, as well other fundamental beliefs, that are at work in our ordinary practice. And at least two of the major sessions on Tuesday offered participants a chance to wrestle with theoretical perspectives that may carry implications for the way we might understand the aims of JCC practice. Finally, at least one session (the Tuesday night discussion of a core that might unite us) offered participants a chance to struggle with what they themselves take to be core-aspirations around which Jewish education in JCCs should be organized.

Missing from the range of activities that had made up the conference was the opportunity to engage in translation , i.e., to systematically think through the implications of a commitment at the level of vision for practice in a particular agency-domain. But such opportunities will be central to the program as a whole.

In concluding his remarks, Dan commented that the approach to leadership development he had just outlined with compatible with addressing many of the issues and hopes that the educators had articulated in the earlier Wednesday morning session.

In the very last part of the concluding session, participants had a chance to review and raise questions concerning the document that articulates the entire 18-month program. **DOES MORE NEED TO BE ADDED HERE?** And with this our conference came to a conclusion.

## **THE VISION THEME IN THE OCTOBER, 2001 INTRODUCTORY SEMINAR**

**[I was unable to find my summaries from this seminar; I was only able to locate the assignment immediately following, one that highlights the vision-dimension of the program. This was, though, the seminar where we dealt with Putnam's *Bowling Alone* and where, though an effective assignment developed by Jonny Ariel, the participants explored JCC's modeled on three different models of community – Normtown, Main Street, and Soap Box City. See Jonny for details of this. -- DP]**

### **ON VISION AT THE HEART DISCUSSION**

In his presentation, Dan Pekarsky lays out a number of interweaving assumptions that enter into a vision-guided approach to education. Review these assumptions and jot down your reactions. Do they make sense to you? What questions do they raise? Etc.

**Assumption 1: Vision at the heart**

In a vision-guided educating institution, practice (e.g., programs, activities) is usefully viewed as a vehicle of achieving educational outcomes, and these outcomes are grounded in, or derived from, what he called 'an existential vision' – that is, a conception of the kind of person and community one aspires to cultivate through the educational process. (Here 'kind of person' refers to such things as sensibilities, attitudes, values, skills, interests, understandings, behaviors, etc.) In this sense, vision guides practice, providing a basis for decision-making and evaluation. Far from being a frill, having a powerful vision is an enormously practical planning tool, offering the potential for a coherent sense of direction.

**Assumption 2: The need for an *educated* vision.**

Precisely because of the central role that a vision of the kind of person that one hopes to cultivate plays in a vision-guided institution, it is not a good idea to ride with a vision that has not been subjected to careful examination. An educated vision is one that arises out of a careful process of thoughtful reflection informed by powerful ideas. This involves sustained opportunities to examine, test, and develop one's own initial beliefs about what an adequate guiding vision would look like by looking carefully at the rationales for, the deep presuppositions and the implications of these beliefs, through a process that includes serious encounters with pertinent ideas from out of Jewish and general worlds, dialogue with one's colleagues, and seriously considering alternatives to one's views..

**Assumption 3: The genius of translation**

As important as coming up with an educated vision may be, it is at best only half the work. Equally important and equally difficult is figuring out what it means to translate the vision meaningfully into practice so that it suffuses an institution's culture and lives in its varied domains, core-businesses, and activities (from hiring to architecture, from Early Childhood to the basketball program, from budgeting to the restaurant). The effort to determine what a commitment to the vision entails in the institution's varied settings and activities is hard work, requiring imagination, disciplined thinking, and knowledge of various kinds. To the extent that an institution succeeds in identifying the implications of its guiding vision for practice and actually organizing itself around this vision, it has become a vision-driven institution.

**Assumption 4: It's hard work but it's worth it.**

Though clarifying one's guiding vision, figuring out its implications for practice, and actually organizing the institution's life around the vision are hard (and never-ending!) work, it's worth it. There is credible evidence that educating institutions that organize themselves around powerful visions are much more effective than most.

**SOME KEY THEMES AND ISSUES (ISRAEL TRIP)**

January 2002

1. Foundational stories/historical narratives play a powerful role in shaping our identity as human beings and Jews, as well as our sense of who we are and what our purposes are as a Jewish community.
2. There is a complex interplay between historical narratives and the present. These narratives shape our understandings of the present in which we find ourselves; but at the same time, the needs, interests, and conflicts at work in the present strongly influence which foundational/historical narratives we choose to emphasize and how we interpret them.
3. A community's (or a JCC's) sense of purpose, of what it stands for, is not something dictated by history. Rather, our sense of purpose, of what we stand for as a community, needs to be grounded in serious moral/philosophical reflection. Once clarified, this conception of what we are about can give us guidance in deciding how and what to present of our history. **But: who is the "we" who can and should legitimately develop this vision of community? An elite of leaders? "The people"? Who? And what might the process of developing it look like?**
4. Historical narratives can be unidimensional, simple, and designed to elicit patriotism and a sense of moral superiority that unequivocally justifies the community's aspirations. But historical narratives can also be subtle, nuanced, and complex, exhibiting a self-critical attitude toward the community's traditional myths and narratives (that is, a willingness to call into question the accuracy or historicity of the community's traditional myths and narratives). Which kind of a narrative to tell to whom (especially to young children!) is a difficult question requiring much thought.
5. Engaging with the past (through the study of ancient texts) has the potential to render us relatively indifferent or blind to the moral demands of the present, to blunt our moral sensibilities; but, as Eli Kahan exhibited, it may also have the power to heighten our moral sensitivities to the world around us. Whether or not it does so, may depend not just on what texts are taught but on how they are taught.
6. Complete liberation from the past in the form of complete forgetfulness can empty the present of all meaning; but sometimes throwing off the weight of the past can free us up to try new things and to see things afresh. In very different ways, Dada and early Zionism exhibit this principle (although in each case the past, or certain aspects of the past, continued to inform and guide these movements).
7. We have been speaking of the way foundational and historical narratives can powerfully affect our sense of who we are and what we should be doing as a community. Isn't there a danger of manipulating the past – of deliberately misrepresenting it – in order to nurture a particular identity?
8. What is the effect on us, and is it desirable, to listen to conflicting narratives of our nation's or people's history? What are the potential risks and gains?
9. Imaginative literature – novels, plays, and poems – is interwoven with the theme of memory. Oftentimes, its capacity to evoke a rich response depends on the presence of memory, on our knowledge of past events and works of literature, as in the Amichai poems and the Grossman novel. At the same time, imaginative

literature helps us develop a living connection to a past that otherwise might feel remote and not ours. Literature may thus be a vehicle of creating a kind of memory of events and situations which we didn't immediately experience.

10. The work of historians is not to be confused with the development of collective memory. Historians are not the source of the community's collective memory, but their work may, in conjunction with other forces, function to call its contents into question. Far from being the work of historians, collective memory grows out of and is sustained through the totality of a community's institutional life.
11. We remember not with our minds but with our whole bodies. Collective memory is not an affair of the mind alone; it remains vivid through being enacted through songs, rituals, and other activities.
12. Sites of memory have at least three dimensions: the place/event/person that is remembered; the idea/emotional response/question that we want to convey or elicit through the experience; the design of the memorial in such a way as to actually convey this idea/emotional response/question. The effort to design memorials so as to convey or elicit some new understanding or emotional response involves three inter-related components: architecture of the place; sequencing the memorial in time; and the design of an appropriate ritual. Recall in this connection our visit to Har Hertzl.
13. Embedded in our practices and in our intuitive ideas are a host of often unrecognized assumptions of various kinds. The price of keeping these ideas implicit is that they control us and escape being seriously evaluated.
14. Though we often think of evaluation as coming after practice, evaluation is possible and desirable long before an idea is actually tried out. We could save ourselves many headaches if we subject our ideas to careful scrutiny at the hands of tough critics long before we consider implementation. Such scrutiny might consider questions like the following: What is our conception of success, what assumptions does it embody, and are these assumptions defensible? How will the world be better off if we are successful in this sense? What is the likelihood that the proposed strategy will really be successful in the designated sense? What is the likelihood the sheer mortals will be capable of actually implementing this strategy?
15. The core-businesses of JCCs should not be confused with their core-mission. What makes the core-businesses core is their contribution to economic viability. The mission of JCCs is a separate matter, requiring careful reflection; but how this matter is addressed will have implications for the core-businesses (if we are think in terms of encouraging institutions which, like Canp Ramah , are animated by a vision that lives even in the details.
16. What might it mean, and would it be desirable – for JCCs to go beyond the ethos of social capital and associationalism and to adopt an identity as a 'morally serious institution' which engages their members in addressing serious Jewish issues that are on their minds and in acting in the service of some larger moral good that carries them beyond themselves? What might conceptions of moral goodness might be considered as guides? What does Judaism have to say about this? And, in the end, what might it mean for any such conception to guide practice, say, in the sports program?

17. Can the JCC “stand for something serious” and yet still be a pluralistic, inclusive institution? Are there tradeoffs that need to be considered?

**SOME MAJOR THEMES/QUESTIONS/CONCEPTS IN OUR SEMINAR  
June, 2002, Baltimore Maryland**

**VISION-DRIVEN (AND OTHER APPROACHES TO) PRACTICE**

**Kinds of vision.** Existential or institutional

**Characteristics of Vision.** Inspirational; thin (slogans like ‘brotherhood’, ‘Tikun Olam’ or Menschlichkeit) or thick (specificity)

**Dimensions of existential vision.**

- Beliefs/attitudes/conduct (mind/heart/hand)
- Essential/important/permissible/beyond the pale

**Actualizing a vision.** Programmatic and/or suffusion approaches

**Magic wand exercise.** If you had a magic wand and could create the JCC of your dreams and the outcomes of your dreams, what would these look like? Do we have answers to these questions?

**Translation and implementation.** Establishing vision-driven practice requires two different kinds of activities.

- *Translation* is the attempt to take commitments at the level of vision and to figure out what an institution dedicated to them would look like in matters ranging from architecture, interior design, and art, to programming, hiring and budgeting.. Translation requires not just an understanding of the vision but also ideas (hopefully, reliable) concerning many other matters, including the background, age, outlook, etc. of the clientele and the cultural milieu.
- *Implementation* is the attempt to bring the institution into line with this vision-inspired design, a process that requires, among other things, working with various constituencies, including, for example, staff.
- [This is not to say that translation and implementation are necessarily separable. If, for example, staff are involved in the effort to translate, this could make for greater ease in implementation.]

**Three approaches to practice.**

- 1) I change things in response to problems that arise.
- 2) I try to actualize a vision (existential and/or institutional).
- 3) A halfway house between the first two approaches is: I change things in response to problems that arise, but I do so *guided by my existential vision*.

**Social work and educational perspectives on vision and on the role of JCCs: How are they different? How can they be brought into meaningful conversation?**

**What's the role of leadership and community-process in the development of vision?**

**The risks and benefits of a consensus-building approach**

### **AMERICAN JEWISH IDENTITY**

- **Who are American Jews? How do they live? How do they see things? How do they understand their Jewishness in relation to the rest of their lives?**
- How might answers to these questions be relevant to the work of JCCs?
- What windows are available to us (other than research) into these questions? For example, magazines like *The New Yorker* or *Heeb*?
- Do we know much enough, for purposes of our work, about Generation X and Generation Y? How can we learn more?

### **Outsider-ness.**

- What does it mean to be an outsider or an insider?
- Jews as traditionally outsiders, and achieving Jewish identity as reclaiming 'outsider-status'
- Just like Gopnick's son is bewildered by the cartoon-conventions and therefore can't read through the text to the meaning, American Jews (like Gopnick) who are so far outside Jewish culture that they don't have the background knowledge (facts, conventions, etc.) that enable them to understand and participate in the culture when they encounter it. *How much and what do you need to know in order to participate in the culture? And what is the way to help people don't have this knowledge to acquire it?*
- "Outsider-ness" also makes possible interpretations of texts and experiences – sometimes very exciting ones - that are unlikely to surface for those who have been grown up within the tradition. (Two examples: Neusner coming to the study of Mishna as an adult; Michael Brooks commenting to a group of students who

had never encountered the Akeda before, “I envy you, because you can read the beginning of this story, without knowing the ending.”).

1) Recognizing that novices to a tradition are capable of coming up with unorthodox, novel exciting readings makes it possible for educators to affirm the novice-status of newcomers as an opportunity to contribute rather than to convey to them that they are inadequate vessels to be filled with received wisdom.

2) One person noted that there is a risk that, unguided, novices might come up with ‘inappropriate’ interpretations. This led us into a discussion of whether such interpretations are to be feared or to be viewed as opportunities for education. The question of what would count as an inappropriate interpretation wasn’t explored.

### **Ways of thinking about American Jews (Shaul and Bethamie’s sessions)**

- *From “What acts are Jewish?” to “How do Jews act?” and “What acts have Jewish meaning to American Jews?”* [for example, Jon’s jello, and Shaul’s lamb] in research on American Jewish identity.
- *Descriptive and normative perspectives on Jewish identity.* What definition of ‘meaningful Jewish life’ do we tend to use, do researchers on American Jewish identity use, and do we think ought to be used in judging the vitality of Jewish life?
- *Some key dimensions of Jewish identity research.*
  - 1) Jewish Behaviors (ritual, or otherwise defined by the researcher, according to his/her understanding of Jewishness).
  - 2) Behaviors people themselves regard as expressions of their Jewishness.
  - 3) Subjective sense of centrality/importance/commitment
- *Processes of identity development: **Imprinting, reflecting, imagining***
- *Three types found in American Jewish life. **High activity/high centrality; low activity/low centrality; mixed.***
- *What’s going on with ‘low activity/high centrality’ people? Who are they? What makes them tick? What’s their trajectory? And how is this relevant to the work of JCC educators?*
- *How account for people with strong adult sense of ‘meaningful Jewish identity’?* Recent research suggests, says Bethamie, that imprinting is a significant explanatory concept for understanding those who come from Orthodox backgrounds. For the non-Orthodox, voluntary educational experiences (like

camp, Hillel, Israel trips) are pivotal, with ‘significant relationships’ playing a critical role.

- *Conflicts that gnaw at American Jews.* What window into the conflicts that American Jews struggle with are we offered by looking at the three versions of *The Jazz Singer*? What conflict would gnaw at the protagonists in a contemporary remake?

## THE WORK OF JCC EDUCATORS

### Leaders or managers – and what’s the difference between them?

**How foster institutional change when you’re not the one in charge of the agency?** Do you educate your leadership? Do you nudge? Do you otherwise seek to move the leadership (say, your Board) to recognize the need to move in the direction you think desirable?

**Is it possible to bring the diversity of JCC professional leaders, lay leaders, staff leaders, and other interested community parties to a shared understanding of the JCC’s Jewish mission? If so, how?**

**JCC educators and the Meraglim/spies:** How do we perceive ourselves, and how are we perceived by others? Grasshoppers? Giants? Others?

**Who are the core-clients of JCC educators?** Members? Decision-makers? Staff?

### The nature of the educators’ work.

- To what extent, if at all, is the educator’s work *subversive*? *What does it mean for it to be subversive?* Is it part of the educator’s job to influence those he/she is educating? In what sense? In what ways?
- What is the difference between imposing, influencing, educating, manipulating, and shaping? Which of these reflect – or what other terms – describe what JCC educators do do or should be doing? How do we distinguish between ethical and unethical methods of influencing people?
- Parents – said one person – have the right and responsibility to shape their youngsters’ outlook and dispositions in ways that bypass the youngsters’ awareness and rationality? Is this true – and if so, in what domains? And if it is true, is this also true of JCC educators?
- What role do caring/authentic relationships with Jewish human beings play in the Jewish journeys of those who achieve ‘a meaningful Jewish identity’? Does it matter what kind of Jewishness these people embody, or just that the

caring/authentic relationship arises in a Jewish setting? How important to the work of JCCs are such relationships? What do we mean, though, when we characterize relationships as authentic or caring?

- ***Imprinting.***

1. What is it? Is it a useful concept that points to an important phenomenon?
2. Is it a concept for describing something that happens to human beings that we're comfortable with?
3. Is adult-imprinting possible? Our conversation began with the hypothesis that it wasn't, but the hypothesis was later introduced that perhaps it is possible, especially when a person is entering into a completely unfamiliar domain.
4. Do, can, and/or should '*imprinting* experiences' go on in JCCs? Is this an important concept for JCC work?

- What is/might be the place of *nature* in the work of JCC Jewish educators? In what ways might be a resource/vehicle for Jewish education? Guided by what possible understanding of its place in Judaism?
- What role could *the arts* (e.g., movies like *The Jazz Singer*, magazines like *Heeb*, or the Gopnick article) play in Jewish education in JCC settings?
- What role can **jarring experiences or experiences with shock-value** have in educational settings like JCCs? Might they get our attention, and engage us, and thus open the door for learning and growth? Should JCCs always be completely comfortable, *haimish* environments?

## **JCC EDUCATORS JUNE, 2002 SEMINAR SOME RETROSPECTIVE COMMENTS**

### **INTRODUCTION**

In preparation for our meetings at the end of June and beginning of July, I have tried to capture observations, concerns, suggestions -- some of them my own, and many those of others - that speak to the unfolding and outcomes of our last seminar and to the work that remains ahead of us. Due to time constraints combined with the desirability of getting these ideas out on paper as soon as possible, the document is developed pretty informally - informally, in the sense that it isn't systematically organized and may include significant overlaps. *The companion piece to this document attempts to capture key issues/questions/concepts/insights that were on the table during our June 2002 seminar.*

### **SOME GENERAL OBSERVATIONS**

1. As planned, a number of themes were interwoven in this seminar. The major subjects were the following: American Jewish identity; vision/practice; the projects. Our discussions of American-Jewish identity and of vision/practice were enriched by a number of activities over and above those listed in the program as devoted to these topics. Of notable importance were:
  - our opportunities to engage in text study (where we encountered the Gopnick article, the passage from the Torah dealing with the Spies, and the new magazine *HEEB* in another).
  - our site-visit to the Baltimore JCC, which became the basis for a rich conversation concerning different ways of thinking about vision and the disjunction between the way the program understands this notion and the way people in the field do.
  - The opportunity to look at three different versions of the movie *The Jazz Singer*, dating back to different periods in American Jewish history, each of which suggested different concerns, aspirations and conflicts in the protagonists. For example, whereas career-choice was a central issue to one generation, in the most recent re-make the issue was inter-marriage. Like the Gopnick article and our encounter with the magazine *HEEB*, this session gave us an opportunity to experience together the power of the arts as vehicles of Jewish education.
  
2. An additional theme, introduced for the first time in this seminar, concerned the place of nature in Judaism and in the work of JCC Jewish educators. In the seminar's introductory session participants were asked to go out into the outdoors, accompanied by three very different passages that involve references to nature (a passage from *I and Thou* dealing with ways of apprehending a tree; a passage from *Pirkei Avoth* that warns against looking up from one's learning to admire a tree, and a third passage that uses a tree as a metaphor). Participants were asked to read these passages, a couple of which were accompanied by radically different translations, in the outdoors, and to use this as a springboard to a conversation concerning the place of nature in Judaism and in their own work as JCC educators. In later session, after reading the passage from this week's Parasha dealing with the Spies sent out to investigate the Land, participants were encouraged to go outside (it was dusk) and to quietly take in the sounds, sights, and smells that they encountered, and to share their experiences with a partner. A number of people commented on their enjoyment of an experience that was not as cognitively-oriented as most of our sessions have been.
  
3. The theme of 'the role of the JCC educator', though the intended focus of only one session, turned out to be more central in the life of the seminar. It was an intended focus of the session dealing with the Spies in the Torah: having encountered the passage in which ten of the 12 spies come back to Moses with the declaration that they appeared both to themselves and to the inhabitants of the land as no more than grasshoppers, they were asked to discuss how these words applied to them as Jewish professionals in their respective settings. But questions

relating to the role of JCC educators surfaced again in a very powerful way in the session that followed our site-visit to the Baltimore JCC. In this session, important questions were raised concerning, for example:

- Who are the clients of JCC educators. The members? The decision-makers?
  - How people who are not in the highest positions of leadership in the agency can foster significant change. Or can they?
  - Whether Jewish educators should think of themselves as managers/operatives or as leaders, and whether it's possible for them to help their agencies develop an agency-wide vision that includes not just administrators and other staff but also board members. In response to one participant's pessimistic comment, a number of individuals (from both the Mandel and JCCA worlds) expressed a more optimistic view, suggesting that this was a key challenge of the program.
  - The ways in which JCC educators can foster change in the agency and in clients and decision-makers: via Socratic discussion, via imposition, via nudging, via strategies that may be manipulative. Is it the job of the Jewish educator to be subversive? Is all education subversive? What do we mean by "subversive"? Questions were raised concerning both effectiveness of different approaches and the ethics of different approaches. This was a very preliminary discussion, with much room for further exploration.
  - Whether, given a magic wand, JCC educators around our table actually have an identifiable vision that they would want to actualize – or whether, in fact, their orientation is much more towards addressing particular problems that arise. How vision might actually inform their work was a question central to this discussion.
4. There were three session explicitly organized around vision.
- A introductory session that began with a hearing and analysis of Martin Luther King's "I have a dream" speech. This session emphasized: a) the value of having an inspirational articulation around which people can mobilize; b) a distinction between thick and thin visions, and the suggestion that in order for a vision to offer guidance one needs to move from vague slogans to more specific formulations (at the price of surfacing disagreements among competing specifications); c) suffusion as compared with programmatic approaches to the actualization of vision; d) the difference between thematic approaches to vision ("Do an Israel program!") and an approach that is informed by educational purposes that derive from considerations that relate to one's informing vision. As a way of concretizing some of the points made, this session culminated in an exercise that invited participants to translate slogans and themes (Israel, Tikkun Olam, Klal Yisrael) into educational aspirations made up of beliefs, attitudes, and dispositions.
  - A second session that encouraged the participants to work on their own commitments at the level of vision (with the articulated understanding that

this was a stage in a process that will involve encountering extant powerful conceptions developed by a range of individuals who have thought long and hard about these matters). After 45 minutes of quiet reflection, participants came together in small groups to see what each of them – or all of them collectively – would view as *essential to their visions* and *excluded by their visions*.

- A third session in which, as a single big group, staff and participants sought to take a commitment to “Celebrate diversity” (interpreted as involving both an opportunity for different kinds of Jews to express themselves and to grow in diverse directions *and* feeling a sense of responsibility for other Jews) and to translate it into practice in a JCC lobby and in a day camp setting. Here important distinctions were drawn between implementation and translation, and there was a chance to identify considerations additional to vision (for example, the outlook, expectations, developmental stage and aspirations of one’s clients) relevant to the move from theory to practice.

5. Some miscellaneous evaluative comments.

- a. On the positive side, we made use of themes from earlier seminars (collective memory, neighborhood, and social capital) in the pre-seminar assignment, and people had a chance to share what they had done. On the negative side, not enough time was devoted to these assignments [my own opinion]. We are sometimes unhappy that people don’t invest more time and energy in these assignments. But if we don’t use them in a serious way, we may be discouraging a serious approach to them.
- b. There is a significant shared language that is developing among members of the group that includes concepts, issues, and questions. It is noteworthy, though, that while the theme of neighborhood/social capital has become part of the discourse of the group, the theme of collective memory seems has not been integral to the universe of discourse at this point. Some concern was expressed by a couple of people that we haven’t spent enough time on some key concepts like ‘neighborhood’ before moving on to others.
- c. Participants have a hard time thinking at the level of existential vision. There is a tendency to respond to questions about the kind of person you’re hoping to cultivate with responses that speak about what an institution looks like. The exercises that we did during the seminar may well have helped some people be clearer about this. But more work is necessary if people are to move beyond slogans to conceptions that are specific enough to translate, and if they are to approach translation in a more systematic way. Follow-up exercises may prove very valuable here.

- d. More than one time in the seminar there was a feeling that we needed more time with a topic. We could have used more time in the first session dealing with vision, in the session dealing with the Parasha (the spies); and we could easily have benefited from another session with Bethamie on American Jewish identity. Perhaps we need to consider whether we should limit the number of questions/aspirations we try to take on in any given seminar so as to allow more time for those we do take up. Perhaps we should consider building into our seminars a set of "To be determined" sessions so that we have the flexibility to further develop themes requiring more attention or new themes that arise.
- e. Related to the last point, there was very little down-time during this seminar, and perhaps not enough for people to process our discussions, to connect with one another informally on personal and professional levels, or simply to relax. We need to consider whether, beyond a certain point, there are not just diminishing marginal returns but also counter-productive results.
- f. Overall, the group loved the visit to the JCC and the chance to listen to Buddy and Larry. Many expressed a strong desire to have similar opportunities in other communities.
- g. In addition to the absence of some people who have been part of the group (either because they have left their jobs or were otherwise unable to attend), a number of people came late, left early, or participated intermittently. In addition, there was quite a lot of coming in and out of sessions during the seminar. The impact of all this may need to be considered, and it may be worth discussing whether there is a need to respond to some of this.
- h. A number of people commented that the project-sessions, where they worked in small groups that included their mentors, were very valuable. It is important for us to remember as we guide participants with these projects that the projects need to be arenas in which "it all comes together" – in which critical themes and questions in the life of the program are in some way reflected, in which their commitments at the level of vision get developed, and in which translation is represented in a reflective way.
- i. While the theme of vision was explored with attention to moving from slogans to something more concrete, and from something more concrete to translation, virtually nothing was done in the way of asking them to think in serious ways about the ways in which their commitments at the level of vision were anchored in particular understandings of Judaism; nor as already noted have they yet encountered significant extant conceptions of these matters in relation to which they could refine and/or revise their own ideas.

- j. In general, I thought presentations were very good, with a reasonable balance between frontal/non-frontal, big group/small group sessions. We need to more carefully monitor small group assignments for clarity. If we don't, there is a danger of losing valuable time trying to clarify the assignments in small groups or of sending groups in the wrong direction.
  - k. We showed good flexibility in this program (shifting sessions around in response to our sense of the needs of the group) and changing the nature of sessions as we noticed the energy-level of the group and the available time.
  - l. A lot of warmth, supportiveness among participants, a number of whom commented on their enjoyment of the experience and their sense that a safe space had been created, and on their sense that staff/participants integration had developed in a very desirable way.
  - m. We are doing a good job of capitalizing on the diversity of the group, so that a range of people representing a variety of talents and insights actively lead sessions (in very appropriate ways, as with Melanie and Jody) and feed the conversations we have.
  - n. A concern was expressed about whether the sequence of seminars we are developing and undergoing represents a coherent intellectual journey. The nature of that journey is, in any case, unclear to at least a few participants (although the person who articulated this was not particularly troubled by it).
  - o. There seemed to be a lot of enthusiasm for the idea, suggested by LR during the seminar, that over meals each of us take a couple of minutes to share with the group things that have happened to them or that they have done since we were last together. It felt like a good group-building device - playful and informative without being intrusive.
  - p. At least one person felt that there was insufficient time for text study in this most recent seminar.
6. Looking ahead, a number of ideas have been put on the table relating to how we should proceed in upcoming seminars. A number of ideas have been suggested by different people at different times:
- At one point we had discussed the possibility of making spirituality/sacred space an organizing theme of the upcoming October seminar, possibly inviting Art Green to serve as an outside resource.
  - The conversations during our most recent seminar concerning ways of thinking about the role of the Jewish educator led some participants to think that this might usefully be an organizing theme, or in any case a kind of springboard to discussion at an upcoming seminar.
  - Some of us felt that the theme of vision and translation -- and more precisely, the desirability of helping participants make significant progress in developing their

thoughts at the level of vision and becoming more adept at translating them -- needs to be central to the upcoming seminars, and a major consideration in deciding what we should be doing (both content and process-wise) in these seminars.

- In developing the vision-piece of the program, a number of us have felt the need to take the participants beyond values-clarification to an encounter with powerful conceptions that can enrich their thinking, e.g., Brinker and Rosenak.
- One person suggested that it might be an exciting activity and a bridge back to our recent June program to offer participants a chance at our next seminar to interview another participant concerning the configuration and development of their own Jewish identity.
- In Jerusalem, Steve Cohen had posed the challenge of identifying an appropriate saying (visual or linguistic) that might be appropriate over the door (or in the lobby) of a JCC. This challenge seemed to greatly excite a number of people, but we have not yet followed up on it.
- In Jerusalem, there had also been a lot of enthusiasm for Steve Cohen's comment that JCCs are more likely to draw people in if they become more morally serious place that speak to people's need to be engaged in something important. We have not yet picked up on this.
- We introduced the theme of nature in this seminar, but did not do much with it. We also have not done much to focus on *the informal* dimensions of the work of JCC educators, an important matter in view of the fact that some of the participants continue to think about education as a kind of formal learning affair.

#### 7. Some pertinent considerations as we move forward:

- Progress along the vision/practice front. As participants continue to work on their own ideas, it will be important for them to encounter and struggle with powerful extant conceptions.
- Executive participation and support.
- Progress on the projects.
- Use talents/competencies of participants to advantage.
- Avoid over-programming (leaving time to deepen our work on given topics, as for informal conversations and activities).
- We need to be thinking seriously not just about upcoming seminars but also about what goes on between seminars. With the project-phase of the program now really taking off, perhaps this will turn out to be the central in-between-seminars activity.
- We need to be thinking about follow-up experiences in the aftermath of the 18 months program.

## THE OCTOBER 2002 JCC EDUCATORS SEMINAR: SOME BRIEF SUMMARY/EVALUATION COMMENTS

As promised, and in lieu of a integrative summary at the end of the conference, here is an attempt to summarize some major dimensions of our recent October seminar.

### A. Visionary leaders

In the person of individuals like Barry Shrage, Debbie Hirshman, Bernie Steinberg, and Mark Sokoll, a number of participants felt that they had had the opportunity to encounter and speak with some genuinely visionary leaders -- individuals who seemed to embody passionately held convictions concerning what their enterprise was fundamentally about and were prepared to act in accordance with these convictions.

Barry Shrage explicitly denied that charisma has anything to do with visionary leadership: the key, he believes, is having a powerful vision that you genuinely believe in and persistence. A number of our participants seemed less sure about this and seemed to wonder whether visionary leadership required certain personality characteristics.

### B. Vision

In encountering the individuals referred to above, we had the chance to encounter a number of very different guiding visions (of JCCs and/or Jewish community). What was striking about these conceptions is the following:

- They were, especially in some cases (e.g., Steinberg), the product of careful, rigorous reflection.
- Limited - that is, from all the things that someone might think important, these visions identified a small number of things that are of critical significance.
- Passionately held by the leaders.
- Come to be widely known and shared within their institutions.
- In conjunction with various other assumptions, these visions dictate practice, down to the details. Here are some examples:

1. **Hillel: Towards deeply informed choice and pluralism.** The Kashrut policy of Harvard Hillel (which insists on high Kashrut standards in the kitchen but affirmingly allows Reform groups to bring treif food into the building) is a direct reflection of this Hillel's commitment to offer its students the opportunity to make genuine choices among competing streams of Jewish existence, to affirm the legitimacy of different streams within Judaism and to maintain Hillel as a pluralistic environment.

Hillel's architecture (which makes sure that each group sees others pursuing their own activities in their own way, and which allows for a common space in which different groups interact) also embodies the institution's commitment at the level of vision.

2. **The Manhattan JCC: The ingathering of us all -- towards full inclusion.** Debbie Hirshman's insistence on inclusivity is associated with a serious effort to leave nobody feeling marginalized or peripheral. An example of this effort is her policy of excluding Hebrew from the walls of the building (lest non-Hebrew speakers feel like they are less than fully adequate members of the community) and her creation of a swimming pool whose floor can be raised and lowered in ways that make the pool accessible to the elderly and the handicapped.
3. **Increasing literacy and supporting synagogue communities - the Boston agenda.** Barry Shrage's vision of a community in which Jewish literacy, Tzedek and Chesed are central, and which emphasizes face-to-face communities, gives rise to practices that emphasize the development of literacy among the general Jewish public, as well as the strengthening of synagogue communities. A consequence of this orientation is that agencies like JCCs are not recognized as pivotal communal agencies but, rather (and like Federation), as tools to be used to the larger community's principal Jewish agenda. A related consequence is that the community's dollars are increasingly going to promote literacy and to synagogues, and decreasingly to other endeavors (including JCCs).

C. **Some [possibly] compelling guiding ideals.** Our encounters with various thinkers brought us face-to-face with a number of different ideas that might prove central to a worthy guiding vision. These included:

1. **Live options and choice.** Harvard Hillel's guiding vision, informed by William James' ideas concerning the conditions of something being a live option and by a conception of Judaism which gives centrality to *choice*, emphasizes the need to make Jewish options intellectually possible and compelling and emotionally resonant *via* a thoughtful effort to enhance Jewish literacy.
2. **Inclusivity, voice, and pluralism.** Debbie Hirshman's JCC emphasizes the need to make room for the many groups/constituencies that have been marginalized in Jewish life. The ideal to which she aspires emphasizes *inclusivity, voice, democratic participation*/ It tries to be welcoming to groups that, in the past, have felt excluded, e.g., non-religious Jews, gay Jews, Jews who don't bring Hebraic or other forms of knowledge, individuals with disabilities. It envisions a community in which different groups can all participate, all of them informed by respect for the others, all of them aware that not all decisions will go their way.
3. **Feeling connected and cared for.** For Mark Sokoll, the principal aspiration of a JCC is for its members to feel cared for -- 'moments of connection', as he put it. Or: the JCC should be concerned with the heart and mind of every individual; and the community should be in the heart and mind of every individual. What exactly these phrases meant, however, was exemplified with a couple of

anecdotes but not explained. Its vagueness was reminiscent of Martin Luther King Jr.'s, "Let's all sit together at the table of brotherhood." -- inspiring but not entirely clear.

4. **Spirituality.** Art Green's presentation left us wondering about the nature of spirituality, about the place of the spiritual domain in our understanding of Judaism, about how the spiritual can be accessed, and about its role in the mission of the JCCs (See below). Are there arenas in which the spiritual can be accessed -- e.g., the arts, face-to-face interaction, meeting human need - that are especially suited to JCCs?

**D. American-Jewish identity.** A number of our discussions re-focused us on American-Jewish identity. For example:

- Who are the so-called *seekers*, and what percentage of American Jews do they make up?
- Marlene Booth's *Yiddle in the Middle* poignantly reminded us of Jews who live outside of major metropolitan areas -- in this case, in Iowa. Whether her depiction of them was time time-bound (capturing the world of the 'fifties but not true to life today) was something we didn't consider. But her insight that for Iowa's Jews 'to fit into the mainstream' was not to get lost in the crowd but to excel in the Iowa-way struck at least one of us as very powerful.

**E. Role of the Jewish educator.**

Several of our discussions focused our attention on the role of the Jewish educator. For example:

- Alvin Mars helped bring us to an awareness that the avowed, public mission of the Jewish educator may be very different from his/her deepest aspirations. In Alvin's case, his most serious agenda was to influence not the children but the staff.
- Mark Sokol challenged the sometimes-heard idea that Rabbis and Rabbi-educators need to maintain a kind of professional dignity/alooftness. On the contrary, he thinks it important to demystify the Rabbinic role, e.g., by turning a rabbi like himself into a rock-singer. The ideal is to make yourself completely accessible to those who in the normal course of events might be intimidated by you.
- Sokoll also challenged the idea that JCC educators should occupy some special, elevated perch in JCCs, and that they are responsible for transforming the agency. He described the latter view as the 'Messiah-complex'. His contrary view is that JCC educators are like other professional staff in JCCs -- the swim staff, the early childhood teacher, the sports instructor and the Jewish educator each have an area of expertise; and it is the job of each group to teach and listen to the others.

**F. Is the JCC a gateway institution and a tool of the Jewish community's larger purposes, or is it itself a meaningful community that will serve, for some Jews, as a destination? If the latter, what kind of community should the JCC be?**

Debbie Hirshman and Mark Sokol offered us images of JCCs that would serve as meaningful communities for their members -- though their respective institutions would differ in numerous respects. Barry Shrage, on the other hand, urged that, although communities may sometimes spring up in JCCs (for example, among Board members), they should not be thought of as communities from the standpoint of formulating communal policy. Rather, like Federations, JCCs should be thought of tools of communal policy, tools that contribute to the cultivation of synagogue-communities and Jewish literacy.

**G. Putting our intellectual tools to work.**

What was striking about this particular seminar is that intellectual tools that we have been developing across the seminars to date -- concepts like *existential vision*, *institutional vision*, and *suffusion* became vehicles of analyzing the presentations and institutions we encountered in the course of this conference. Similarly, concepts like "social capital" and ideas from out of our previous discussions of American Jewish identity re-entered our discussion in appropriate and useful ways at various points in our discussions.

**H. Issues that arose that may be worth exploring further include:**

*The limits of inclusivity.* Alisa Orent's text-session dealing with inclusivity drew our attention to the range of different groups found in American Jewish life and encouraged us to think about ways of welcoming them. At the same time, it raised questions about the limits of inclusivity/pluralism. Where/how/why do we draw our limits? "Right-wing fanatics?" "Messianic Jews"? Or what??

**I. Evaluation.**

Based on comments by participants and staff, it would appear that this conference was perhaps the most successful to date. Comments were made to the effect that:

- the relationship between theory and practice was appropriately emphasized;
- a number of the presenters were the bearers of powerful visions and virtually all of them presented very well;
- "Things finally seemed to be coming together."

In a negative vein,

- some lamented the absence of those no longer with the program;
- some were troubled by the decreased amount of time available for 'round-ups' and text-study;

- some, but perhaps not everyone, felt there was insufficient time for de-briefing sessions.
- Some - especially staff people - felt that we need to do some hard thinking about the projects.

**JCC EDUCATORS PROGRAM  
SUMMARY OF JERUSALEM PLANNING MEETING,  
Sunday, June 30, 2002**

Grounded in our discussion of where we seem to be in relation to the program's larger aims, this session focused on programmatic matters. In the words of one our colleagues, "What the hell are we doing in October?" Inspired by this lofty formulation, we settled into a productive conversation that enabled us to make considerable progress in thinking about both the October and January seminars. Below is a summary of some of the major points made in our discussion.

**1. Clarifying our challenge.** We played with more than one formulation of what we should be thinking about. One person identified major themes that have defined our seminars to date (social capital/neighborhood, collective memory, American Jewish identity) and asked us to consider whether, given the limited amount of time left to us in the program, the energies of our participants would best be served by focusing on themes like spirituality and community. Might there be other themes that might prove more promising in relation to our principal purposes.

Reflecting on our work to date, another participant commented that we have spent a lot of time thinking about what is, but not enough on what ought to be. For example, we focused on what contemporary Jews are like, not on what we hope they will become. Building on the flow of our conversation, he suggested that we should be thinking of our programmatic agenda in relation to three major questions:

- a) What is a meaningful Jewish community, and what is an educated Jewish person?
- b) What is the special role of the JCC in helping to achieve the aspirations identified by these conceptions?
- c) What role should the Jewish educator play in helping to achieve this agency-agenda? Or, put in another language, how are we – and our participants – to understand the professional identity of JCC Jewish educators?

Responding to this formulation, one participant expressed some discomfort with what he felt was the suggestion embedded in the latter formulation that the JCC and the JCC educator were primarily focused on repairing or building the larger community rather than on the clientele that walk through their doors. This comment elicited a number of responses including the following:

- There is no inherent incompatibility between thinking about what we hope the larger community will ideally look like and having an inward focus. On the contrary, getting clearer about our aspirations for the community as a whole may put us in a better position to think about what we should be emphasizing in our work with the people who walk through our doors. If, for example, one of the things we think important in the Jewish community of our dreams is civilized conversation across group-divides, this might carry implications for what we do with the diverse groups of people who walk into our agency. That is, an interest in 'the ideal Jewish community' question needn't imply that we will address it in JCCs other than through our work with our own colleagues.

- Moving in a different direction, another participant suggested that it is important for the JCC, in general, and for the Jewish educator, in particular, to face outwards to some degree, i.e., to engage not just in outreach but in the larger community conversation concerning the nature of Jewish life and our needs as a community.

**2. Insisting on the integrity of the initiative.** Beyond the points that were central to our conversation on Friday about the need to keep some of our core ideas (like vision and translation) at the heart of our programmatic agenda, three new points were made that relate to this general theme. The first of them was made by one person but not discussed; the second two were the subjects of considerable discussion.

- We need, one person suggested, to find a way to cut down on the amount of coming-and-going that has become typical in the course of our sessions at programs.
- The sense of the group seemed to be that we may not be doing justice to some of the themes we take up, e.g., neighborhood and American-Jewish identity. That is, we may unwisely be jumping to other themes before we have explored them and their implications for the work of JCC educators in sufficient depth. Revisiting some of these themes in ways that continue to deepen them may be very important.
- The observation made by one thoughtful participant that, though he wasn't particularly disturbed by it, he didn't sense the thematic narrative that held the initiative as a whole together, was troubling to a number of us, and there was some interest in identifying what the narrative of the program as a whole is and presenting it to the participants. If it's wisely chosen, rather than superimposed in an artificial way, it might contribute to our planning as the initiative proceeds.

**3. The search for meaning (or meaning-making) as a possible overarching theme.**

Building on a suggestion made on Friday that perhaps we should be thinking about the theme of spirituality as a sub-theme of the broader theme of "the search for meaning", the suggestion was made that perhaps we could weave a meaningful narrative for the program as a whole around this concept. That is, perhaps the idea informing the overall initiative is that JCCs are in the business of helping people in their quest for meaning, where 'meaning' encompasses a variety of things including a sense of connection to others, a new or deeper connection to Judaism, the sense that one is making a contribution to the lives of one's clients or, as in the case of Mort Mandel, to Jewish life. The role that memory plays in giving meaning to our lives and projects is also easily related to this general theme. While the wisdom of making this theme a kind of official organizing theme for the initiative as a whole may need further deliberation, *if* - and it's a big "if" we decide that this would prove a fruitful organizing theme, it could provide a backdrop to our treatment of spirituality (itself intimately connected with, or a species of, the search for meaning). In addition, it suggested at least three programmatic ideas that might be worth considering:

- An invitation to Mort Mandel to address the group, perhaps next May, concerning the ways in which his role as a lay leader adds meaning to his own life.

- An introductory session at our next seminar that frames the program's narrative in relation to this theme.
- An exercise, perhaps in the course of our next gathering, that invites participants to speak to one another about where they themselves find meaning in their JCC work and how they attempt to facilitate the search for meaning among those they work with in JCC settings.

**4. Spirituality as a theme for an upcoming gathering.** Whether or not we take "the search for meaning" as an overarching theme for the whole program, the sense of the group seemed to be that the theme of spirituality does deserve to be the focus of some of our upcoming work. At least two reasons were offered for this idea: a) the participants themselves have requested the opportunity to think about this issues; and, b) the theme of spirituality, especially in the hands of someone like Art Green, has the potential to deepen our understanding of the concerns, needs, and aspirations of American Jews today. It would thus serve not just as a bridge from our last seminar to the present, but as an opportunity to address a concern that we had jointly identified – namely, the need to take some of the themes we have been dealing with in earlier seminars to deeper levels. As just noted, Art Green seemed to us ideally suited to helping the group think about issues pertaining to spirituality in ways that illuminated American Jewish realities and needs; and it was suggested that Barry Holtz be asked to contact him.

Should Art Green prove unable to come, we identified Arnie Eisen as someone who might be a very fine substitute. The alternative would be to defer the spirituality piece of the program, and to use October to begin wrestling with the theme of community (possibly with the help of Michael Brooks. *See below.*).

**5. The theme of community.** Although we have treated the theme of community in our discussion of social capital/neighborhood, we felt, as we did in the case of American Jewish identity, that it needed to be explored more deeply. The rationale for viewing "community" as a pivotal theme included the following points:

- The JCC *is* - or, in any case, may most usefully be thought of as – a community, and it is important to think about what kind of a Jewish community it should aspire to be, especially given the fact that it welcomes individuals of diverse Jewish (and other) stripes into its world.
- The theme of community invites reflection concerning the kind of Jewish community we should be aspiring to cultivate, and the role that the JCC should be playing in the process of helping to create such a community. How the JCC understands what an ideal Jewish community is may carry important implications for how it understands itself as a Jewish community and for what it views as its central challenges.
- Our forays into the theme of community to date have tended to focus on general sociological perspectives, but have not done two critical things: a) they haven't sufficiently encouraged the participants to struggle with the question of what an improved Jewish community would look like – an inquiry that would also shed light on the kinds of Jews they would like to cultivate; b) while the participants have thought about sociological accounts that discuss the need for and the benefits of community, they haven't encountered powerful, if conflicting, Jewish perspectives concerning the kind of Jewish

community we should attempt to encourage. Such an encounter has the capacity to ratchet up their own thinking concerning the kind of community they aspire to encourage.

- We have readily available to us a number of thinkers – including Menachem Brinker, Michael Rosenak, and Michael Brooks – who have the capacity to stimulate our thinking about these matters. In the case of Brinker and Rosenak, they could offer different perspectives on an ideal Jewish community; in the case of Brooks, he could catalyze some exciting, but very different ways of thinking about how to understand and approach the challenge of repairing Jewish culture.

Although some concerns were expressed about overly-focusing on the theme of community in Israel, as well as about bringing an American like Brooks to Israel to discuss community, the group seemed to gravitate towards the idea of making the theme of community a significant, but not the only, part of the Israel seminar in January 2003. Conceivably, Brooks would be invited not to this seminar but to our May 2003 seminar.

**5. The role of cases in our program.** In the course of our deliberations, the suggestion was made that it might be desirable to start off the work of the upcoming seminar with an examination of a concrete case. As an example of what he had in mind in the reference to a case, the person making this suggestion sketched out the following situation: some non-Jewish parents who send their children to the JCC's Early Childhood education program come to the agency with the complaint that the materials in the lobby dealing with the situation in the Middle East are extremely and misleadingly one-sided; and the agency needs to decide not just what to respond, guided by what considerations, but the right process through which to develop a response.

In part, the suggestion that we begin with such cases was anchored in the recollection of the great – in the view of some, unparalleled – excitement of the participants the very first night of the program when they were discussing cases they themselves brought with them from out of their work; the suggestion also was influenced by participants' own request, at our last seminar, that more of our work begin with practice rather than theory. Finally, the suggestion that we begin with a case was a response to our desire to give the participants a chance to use categories and themes that have been central to the program to interpret and respond to a concrete situation that might arise in the context of their work. Not only might this show them, as we enter the second half of the program, how these themes and categories can jointly illuminate their work, it would also give us some index of the extent to which these ideas are entering into the way they think. (With the latter point in mind, one person suggested that perhaps we should divide the group into two sub-groups, only one of which is explicitly asked to use program-themes and categories in making sense of the case, and to see whether they address the challenge posed by the case differently).

Though, as someone emphasized in our conversation, developing good cases requires very careful work, such cases can prove powerful educational tools. They are "powerful" not just in the sense that they have the capacity to engage, but also in the sense that they enable people to bring together diverse kinds of ideas (including lead-categories like vision, translation, and implementation) to make sense of a

problematic situation and have the power to lead them to struggle with important foundational issues in away that is anchored in practice. Such considerations led to a more general discussion of the desirability of creating a kind of cases-bank that could serve as a resource not just for this particular sequence of seminars but also for future programs. In addition to our own attempts to develop some powerful cases in the immediate period ahead of us, it was suggested that we might turn to the participants for help in this arena: not only would it be useful to scan some of the cases they wrote up in preparation for our very first seminar, we might invite them to help us in the generation of new cases. Such cases, if well-crafted, would be a significant contribution of our program to the JCC movement and to the general field of Jewish education.

The importance of developing well-crafted engaging cases led one person to emphasize the desirability of creating scenarios that involve people and in which there is the potential for tension concerning how the problem at hand should be addressed. Someone suggested that perhaps the work of Judy Shulman dealing with cases would be a good resource for us as we think about how to develop adequate cases, and another person suggested that we might draw on some extant cases (e.g., a case that was used effectively by the Mandel Foundation in another context, or the case that became the basis for the case-study developed in the Harvard Business School text dealing with the phenomenal growth of the Willow Creek Church outside Chicago).

**6. Do we need to announce seminar-specific themes?** As we were giving thought to the sequence of themes that should define the program's curricular journey, one person wondered we really need to publicly tag each seminar with a particular theme. In the first place, our actual seminars tend to burst the seams of the announced theme; in the second place, having an announced theme may artificially limit us, leading us, for example, to feel that we have "to do a theme", or to do justice to it, within one particular seminar, rather than allowing us to continue exploring it in the company of other themes in a more integrated way across the program as a whole. His suggestion: announce to the participants that on our road to greater clarity concerning the nature of our work, in the months to come we will be spending time with the following cluster of pivotal themes to which we will be returning in various ways and in different combinations as we move along. In the spirit of this suggestion, somebody else commented that if we did choose to go this route, a paragraph introducing the itinerary for a particular seminar might prove as good, if not a better, orientation-tool for the participants than characterizing the seminar under a single rubric.

On the other side of this issue was a concern that when people walk into a seminar, they benefit from having a conceptual handle that gives them some sense of what to expect. If -- *and this may be a critical "if" in thinking about this issue* - the announced theme meets this need and doesn't create expectations that put artificial limits on planning particular seminars or the curricular journey as a whole or on our discussions at the seminars, then there is would not seem to be any harm in using such themes as a way of giving focus to our deliberations and meeting the need of participants for orientation.

We did not come to closure concerning this very interesting question.

**7. Don't mis-take themes for educational purposes!** As we explored the thematic dimensions of upcoming seminars, one person felt the need to remind the group that we should not confuse themes with educational purposes. Whatever the theme we choose to explore, it needs to be viewed and curricularized in a way that will help the participants develop greater clarity and depth of vision, to become more thoughtful about and adept in doing translation, to think about what they would count as success, to identify implementation-issues, etc.

**8. Missing themes.** It is noteworthy that a number of matters that, to greater or lesser degrees, we have viewed as part of our agenda, are not represented in this week's discussions. These include: *the use of space/architecture, informal education, nature*. Whether – and if so, how – one or more of them should enter into our conception of upcoming seminars is a matter we may want to return to. It is also worth noting that the theme of “role of Jewish educator” – which, though an overarching theme, was also identified a particular motif in the first iteration of the October seminar – did not enter into yesterday's attempt to sketch the trajectory of our upcoming seminars.

**9. Where we seem to be programmatically.** Our deliberations seem to have led us in the following direction:

*October* – Using the theme of spirituality as a vehicle of deepening our conversation of American Jewish identity and struggling with its pertinence to the mission of JCCs and the work of JCC educators. Ideally, Art Green will prove a major resource, and the seminar will take place in Boston, offering us the opportunity to do a site visit to the local JCC. In ways that need still to be clarified, we may want to take advantage of the presence in Boston of Barry Shrage and/or Marc Sokol, and we may want to turn to Israel Scheffler to think more richly about the role of educator. As we deliberate about such possibilities, we need to temper the desirability of rich mix with concern for coherence, overload, and the participants' expressed desire to have some time to discuss their own practice.

*January* – Whatever else we do in Israel, one thematic strand appears to be *community*, with the possibility of drawing on Professors Brinker and Rosenak, as well as Michael Brooks, to help our participants struggle with different conceptions of community in relation to which they can clarify and deepen their own views on this matter, with attention to the implications for their own work. Given that we cannot leave all of the planning for the Israel visit until after the October seminar, it may be worth spending some of the time still available to us in our present meetings trying to conceptualize other dimensions of the upcoming Israel program.

*May 2003* – We have done much with this seminar yet, but we have discussed the possibility of using the projects as a springboard to some of our discussions and of inviting the executive directors to participate at this time (though the idea of inviting them to Israel has also not been ruled out).

We have also discussed the possibility/desirability of engaging the participants more regularly between our gatherings; and the idea on the table is some kind of once-monthly phone-conference, possibly in sub-groups attached to particular mentors. The organizing questions/themes etc. for these conversations probably needs more

attention. In a related vein, we have discussed the possibility/desirability of entering into conversations with the executive directors in between seminars. The content and aims of these conversations also need more attention.

**Note: Because Bethamie Horowitz has agreed to write up our rich conversation with her concerning evaluation of the initiative, I haven't attempted to summarize this conversation here.**

## JCC EDUCATORS PLANNING MEETINGS JERUSALEM SUMMARY OF MEETING 1, June 29, 2002

At the beginning of our meeting, we agreed that we would begin our discussions by attempting to assess our progress to date, as well our needs, in relation to the program's major aims. After briefly reviewing these aims, as well a report that attempts to bring together a number of disparate reactions to our work to date (and especially to our most recent Baltimore seminar), we spent the better part of the morning working towards a sense of where we are relative to our major aspirations. Against this background, we then reviewed a proposal for October (and beyond) that was developed as a springboard to our conversation. Below is a summary of some of the major themes and points that were discussed.

**1. We can't do everything!** The sense of the group was that we could not meaningfully accomplish everything that we might think important in the course of these 18 months. There was, for example, agreement among us that, though laudable, the idea of doing the group projects that were discussed in earlier iterations of the program was probably unrealistic (**but see the last paragraph of Item 3 below for an important qualification**).

In a similar vein, there was a shared sense that it would be very difficult to do justice to **vision, translation, and implementation** in the course of the eighteen months; but there was not a clear sense of agreement with respect what the requisite balance should be. Here are some of the views that were expressed.

- a. Our program conception has emphasized the idea of "vision at the heart"; and although some of us felt that we had made considerable progress on this front, others were concerned that not enough attention had been spent on "what ought to be", i.e., on helping participants struggle in a carefully way with what they should be aspiring towards, informed by powerful Jewish and general ideas. The view was also expressed that participants had yet to get clear on the distinction between existential and institutional visions. The suggestion was that much more needed to be done on this front, and that it would be especially valuable to have our participants encounter rich normative conceptions of, say, Jewish community, in relation to which they might develop their own.
- b. One person expressed the view that it was unrealistic to expect our participants to emerge with a well-developed vision at the end of the eighteen months and suggested that we should count ourselves successful if they are 'well on the road' to having a vision. An alternative view accepted the contention that participants would not emerge with a well-developed vision, but urged that participants we should help participants develop some less-than-fully-developed views in the course of the program, with the understanding that these are way-stations on the road to more fully developed conceptions.
- c. Another set of views focused on the theme of **translation**. So far the participants have had two major opportunities to practice translation – of ne of them in our very first gathering, where they had a chance to translate different conceptions of neighborhood into practice, and the second at the end of our most recent seminar where they were asked to think about how to translate a

- particular conception of 'Celebrate diversity' in to practice (guided by Jonny Ariel). Two points were made: first, that the participants have begun to make real progress on this front (and perhaps to appreciate the power of a guiding conception to give direction to practice), but that a lot more work needs to be done in this area. Second, in the view of at least one person, the capacity and translate vision into practice may be the most important thing we can offer middle-level practitioners who will not have the primary responsibility for crafting their institution's guiding vision. If they can emerge from the program with an approach to planning and programming that begins with big ideas and educational aspirations and undertakes to identify their practical implications, this would be a very significant achievement.
- d. Yet another suggestion focused on **implementation**. Whereas *translation* focuses on what an institution or a curriculum would look like if a particular vision is taken very seriously, *implementation* has to do with moving an institution from where it is towards this imagined state. Implementation requires sophistication concerning organizational (or social) change. It's fine and good to be able to imagine an institution or a core-business, or a new kind of program which is coherent with one's vision; but it's all for naught if one doesn't have the ability to bring the institution in this direction. Though nobody challenged the importance of this point, it was noted that, unlike the themes of vision and translation, that of implementation is not the strong suit of the Mandel Foundation.
  - e. Though one approach might be to decide which among these potential programmatic emphases deserve(s) center-stage, another approach would be to find a way of addressing all three. In this spirit, it was suggested that we might pick a narrow strand at the level of vision and take it through the steps of translation and implementation – most meaningfully, perhaps, by focusing on only one of the JCC's core businesses, e.g., camps.
  - f. Another way of making room for the implementation-theme would be to ask the participants to explore it in the contexts of their project (which, ideally, already deal with the themes of vision and translation). The suggestion was that between January, 2003 and our concluding meeting the participants try to take one implementation-step and, in a memo to us, explain why they proceeded as they did and what happened. These matters would be discussed at our last gathering.

**2. Engaging executives.** Thus far, we have done very little to engage the executives (beyond the initial conference which they attended). The sense of the group seemed to be that it was important not just to maintain their support for their educators' participation (by convincing them of the benefits to the agency), but also to find ways to encourage them to become more active partners in the effort to make the Jewish dimension of the agency more central. It is important that they themselves become identified with whatever becomes the agency's vision of what it is about as a Jewish institution.

There was not much enthusiasm for the idea that the executives be included in the upcoming October seminar. The sense was that this might disrupt the overall flow of the seminar. Nor did we arrive at any clear sense of when they should be invited to participate: one possibility would be to bring them for part of the Israel seminar next

winter, and another person suggested that perhaps they should be present for part of our concluding gathering next May, where the emphasis might be on guiding visions. There seemed to be some interesting in this possibility.

There was a lot of enthusiasm for the idea that we should be engaging the executives in between our gatherings, probably by telephone. The occasion for the conversation could be the project, or else their reactions to the initiative as a whole, or else some more specific question. There was some discussion of whether the conversation should be a three-way conversation that includes the educator.

**3. The projects.** Not that much was said about the projects (since we will be discussing them more fully when Barry Holtz arrives). But the idea of creating a template for the final document which includes such categories as *need, feasibility, relationship to guiding vision, how success will be judged, etc.* was greeted with enthusiasm. It was felt that such a template might prove a useful guide for both participants and their mentors. One person reminded the group of the availability of the Mandel faculty as consultants to participants as they pursue their projects, and suggested that participants should be encouraged to make use of such resources; among other things, this might offer some of the participants a greater chance to be guided by women as they develop their ideas.

The idea was floated that at our last gathering the projects should be center-stage; but at least one person, and possibly more, felt that we should avoid turning discussion of the projects at that stage into a kind of show-and-tell; there are, after all, other ways of acquainting the participants with one another's work. Rather, if projects are to be central to our final gathering, they should be used as vehicles of encouraging some serious thinking – perhaps about the guiding visions that inform them.

While the idea of collectively developed group projects was thought to be too ambitious for this program, the suggestion was made that it would be important to collect the write-ups of the individual projects into a single volume (both electronic and hard-copy). The knowledge that their projects would become part of such a volume might inspire the participants to create a higher quality document than they otherwise might. More importantly, such a volume would be a resource to the movement, suggesting both programmatic ideas and a certain way of thinking about program-development (as represented by the categories identified in the template). Though it may not be consonant with the culture of the movement and of our group to announce that only project write-ups that meet certain standards will be part of the volume, we did agree that it would be important for the mentors to work with participants so as to bring their ideas and articulations to a high level of quality.

**4. Developing a sense of collegiality.** The sense of the group was that the group was developing very well. People seem to feel comfortable with one another; they enjoy being together and learning together; they are capable of voicing and discussing disagreements in a non-threatening way; and their conversations are marked by some of the key themes that the program has emphasized. This is all the more impressive, given the substantial diversity (along a number of dimensions) of the group.

At the same time, a critical question was raised concerning the kind of collegiality that we hoped to be encouraging: do we mean more by “collegiality” than

“community of support”? Do we also have in mind that they will be serious resources to each other – or ‘critical friends’ – as their work unfolds, or that they will see each other as part of a cadre of educational leaders who jointly contribute to the movement? How we understand the kind of collegiality we want to encourage may well have a bearing on what we should be doing.

It was noted in this connection that having a serious colleague *at the local level* (‘colleague’ in the strong sense of someone to whom one can turn for ideas, for critique, for advice, for brainstorming, etc.) is terrifically valuable. Whether there is anything we can do to facilitate this, or to compensate for the inability to arrange this at the local level, was not further discussed.

Finally, it was suggested that it might be a very good idea to bring the participants themselves into the conversation about the development of a community of colleagues – what they hope for from one another as colleagues and what structures would be conducive to the development of this kind of collegiality.

**5. In-between gatherings of the group.** What does it mean to have ‘an eighteen month program’? Is it a program that actively engages the participants over the whole of an eighteen month period in a way that goes beyond periodic participation in our gatherings? Or does it mean that over a period of 18 months participants come together for some thirty days? Though neither of these extreme formulations capture reality, we seemed to agree that, though this may change somewhat now that the projects have begun in earnest, our program to date has been episodic. That is, it’s tended to be confined to our gatherings, between which little is expected of the participants and little contact is maintained with them.

Underlying this phenomenon there seems to have a working assumption that because of the nature of the work of JCC educators it is unrealistic to expect much serious work of them in between our gatherings. When this assumption was surfaced for discussion, different views were expressed – with at least one person subscribing to this assumption and at least one person suggesting that there would be little difficulty in engaging the participants in between seminars for meaningful discussions. Here, again, this is not a matter of either/or but of how much it’s realistic to expect of them [and of what is necessary if the program is to have a significant impact].

There was general enthusiasm for the idea that it would have been desirable from the very beginning of the program to engage the participants in once-monthly conference calls around significant topics; and the sense of the group was that it was not too late to introduce this practice at this stage of the program. Two ways of organizing this activity were suggested: a) a general conference call at a given time to which all program-participants would be invited; b) small sub-groups, possibly made up of individuals working with the same mentors on projects, for discussions of both projects and of significant topics of a more general nature.

**6. Follow-up to the eighteen months.** There seemed to be general agreement that it would be important to create meaningful follow-up experiences and/or structures that would facilitate such experiences, but we did not explore this matter in depth.

**7. Theory/practice balance.** It was noted that a number of participants seemed to feel that the program to date unduly emphasized theory at the expense of opportunities to hear and about and discuss questions of practice. Three responses to this problem have been identified (the third one articulated not at our meeting, but already at our Baltimore seminar):

- Create more opportunities for the participants to discuss questions of practice, either by reducing the time devoted to theory or by extending our seminars so as to give time to such questions.
- Don't squander the rare opportunity to think about the work in broader, more conceptual ways by reducing the program's more theoretical cast.
- Rather than going, as we have been, from vision/theory to practice, we should build into the program rich opportunities to go from practice to theory – that is, to begin with practices that the participants are already engaged in and to work towards the underlying assumptions that are at work in them. This might meet the participants' desire to deal more centrally with their own practice and the program's interest in encouraging more theoretical thinking about what they are or might be doing.

**8. From 'spirituality' to 'the search for meaning'.** Reviewing a first attempt to imagine what the upcoming October seminar might look like, one person commented that theme of spirituality may not be so central to the JCC agenda as to warrant organizing a substantial part of a gathering around it; perhaps it should figure as a more minor theme. In response, it was noted that the idea to focus on spirituality came from the participants themselves – that is, this is an issue that seems to be important and of interest to them. Listening to this conversation, one member of our group suggested that perhaps we should think of the spirituality-theme as one of several themes that fall under the larger category of *the search for meaning*; and that perhaps this more general rubric might prove a worthy organizing principle. There seemed to be great interest in this idea, with someone noting that even the work of JCC Board members often falls in this category. A concern was, though, expressed about whether one could do justice to this theme in a three-day seminar, and the suggestion was made that perhaps October could be the beginning of an inquiry into this matter that would extend into our next January seminar.

**9. Role of the JCC educator.** The proposal for October also focused on *the role of the JCC educator*. Not much was said about the wisdom of this focus.

**10. Missing elements: the JCC in the Community; the informal dimension.** In our discussion of the way our program has been dealing with the question of vision, the comment was made that we have yet to deal with the question of the place/role of the JCC in the ecology of the community in which it finds itself. It is noteworthy that, although the programmatic proposal for next December emphasized the theme of community, this particular question was not, but perhaps should be, included in the formulation. It was also observed that although we have reason to believe both that informal education is for many worthy educational purposes much more effective than formal education and that JCCs are extremely suited to informal education, we have very done very little in this arena; nor does the proposal for October and January speak to this matter.

## June – July 2002 :: JCCA-Mandel Initiative Planning Meetings Tentative Schedule

Friday	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday
<p>Where are we now in relation to our aims for the Initiative ...</p> <p>... in process evaluation ...</p> <p>... issue of consistency of participation ....</p> <p>October – Segment I Daniel Pekarsky will distribute a brief overview of some preliminary ideas, and we'll work from there</p>	<p>[REMEMBER – LATE START]</p> <p>October – Segment II Continuation of the discussion of October, including theme, location, speakers, construction of the program, etc.</p> <p>Evaluation – phone conversation with Bethamie at 3:30, followed by ...</p> <p>discussion of where we'd like people to be after the initiative; i.e., what would constitute success?</p>	<p>Projects and templates for projects and their presentation</p> <p>January – dates and theme, and discussion of basic responsibilities</p> <p>January – continuing discussion of content</p>	<p>How to keep the participants involvement between Seminars</p> <p>Followup to the 18 months</p> <p>NO LATER THAN 1:30 – Next Steps</p>

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June 27, 2002

To: JCCA-Mandel planning team  
From: Barry Holtz  
Re: Mentors and Projects

Friends:

In advance of the meetings in Jerusalem, here are a few thoughts that we should keep in mind vis a vis the “mentors and projects” aspect of our initiative.

1. At the most recent seminar the session on projects seems to have been very well received. People seemed to enjoy, in particular, the chance to work in small groups around the ideas that participants brought. I thought having the mentor and his mentees together working on each person’s ideas was particularly helpful and energizing. We should keep this in mind for the next session.
2. I think right now we have a project idea more or less set for all 17 participants, but they are in different stages of development. I was hoping that people would have a work plan prepared. Not everyone did. We need to make sure that each person has a plan for the next 6 months. Mentors should follow up with mentees about this.
3. Mentors need to work out contact (via phone) with mentees but we should be realistic about our situation. Folks, it’s the summer! Everyone is in a different situation regarding travel and vacation. So it’s not going to be easy to have regular contact. The Holidays are “early” this year and that also will affect us. Let’s try to be in touch with our mentees at least to take the pulse of where everyone is.
4. Once again I saw an interesting dynamic of the JCC group. Working on practical “programming” matters like the projects is very exciting for the participants. They are terrific program resources and really can dream up interesting ideas. We do need to try to find a way via the mentoring to also reach for the more philosophical aspects of our work. For example, to have people reading articles that *dafka* are not practical, but that will contextualize or elevate their work. (*Agav*: I, of course, very much have my dear late colleague Edy Rauch in mind a lot in these days of his *shiva* and I think in this regard about the way that he challenged our “pragmatic” JTS students to read philosophy and poetry and not just stay in the realm of practice. In fact, I had said to a few of you back at the beginning of the project that he was my “ideal” kind of mentor for the project.) So how can we do this? We ought to talk about this in Jerusalem.

5. We have a small practical matter to resolve. With the change in participants we are now somewhat imbalanced in the division of mentors and mentees. The current list is the following:

<i>Mentor</i>	<i>Participants</i>
Holtz	Aliza, Eddie, Paul, Eve
Pekarsky	Jeff, Nina Cardin, Jody
Marom	Debbie, David Nelson
Gordis	Nina Mizrachi, Jonathan Fass
Juran	Robin, Melanie
Ariel	<del>Larry, Hal</del> , Jonathan Perlman

Larry and Hal are crossed out. I have four mentees and think that one of mine should be moved out. I like them all, but we should probably switch one to Jonny. I'm thinking that either Eddie or Paul should move to him, though both are in NY and that may be silly. I think Aliza specifically wants to be with me, so I should probably keep her. Let's resolve this quickly, and any other practical matters of this sort.

**PLANNING MEETING FOR THE JCC EDUCATORS INITIATIVE**  
**Jerusalem, June/July 2002**

**INTRODUCTION**

Our task during our upcoming meetings is to develop the next stages of the JCC Educators initiative with attention to the following:

- The aims of the program.
- What we have done and accomplished to date.
- What remains to be accomplished.
- Considerations that may lead us to reshape our aims and/or our sense of what needs emphasizing as we move forward.

A recent statement of the program's aims is included below. Other background materials that will inform our deliberations (and that should be reviewed prior to our meetings) include:

1. A document that summarizes issues/concerns/insights/concepts that were discussed at our June seminar.
2. A document that summarizes the movement of the June seminar and that offers both evaluations of what we have been doing and suggestions for future work that have been proposed by various people.

**THE INITIATIVE'S AIMS**

The JCC Educator's initiative is designed with the following general outcomes in mind:

1. **A community of support and discourse.** A community of JCC educators who feel a sense of collegiality and who share a language of discourse in which both the substantive questions and issues the group takes up, and especially the ideas of vision and implementation, are at the center.
2. **An informed, reflective guiding vision.** With attention to possible ideals, social realities, and communal challenges, and with the benefit of significant inputs from out of Jewish thought, sociology, history, philosophy educational theory, the arts, and other arenas, participants will have encountered and given thought to more than one powerful ways of understanding the aims of education in the JCC setting and the educational role of the JCC in the larger Jewish community, and they will have developed an articulated perspective of their own concerning these matters.
3. **The capacity to translate a big idea.** Participants should have some understanding of the programmatic implications of their larger purposes (e.g., in the core-businesses, in the general environment, and in other arenas). Equally important, they should have

had practice moving from idea to practice -- enough to enable them to imaginatively carry new ideas into practice in their own work.

4. **Individual project.** Each participant will have completed a project which is informed by the idea of vision-driven practice and that has the potential to make a contribution to the local JCC and, in some cases, to the movement as a whole.
5. **Group-products.** While the individual projects may well make a contribution beyond the local JCC, a hope has been expressed by any number of people that through this program, the group as a whole (or else sub-groups within it) can create products that will enrich the way the movement as a whole approaches its work.
6. **Executive support.** It is important that executives feel that their agencies have benefited significantly from the participation of their Jewish educators in this initiative.

#### **SOME KEY AGENDA ITEMS FOR OUR UPCOMING MEETINGS**

1. Developing an approach to evaluating JCC Educators Initiative.
2. Evaluate where we now are in relation to program's aims: achievements, concerns, challenges, desiderata.
3. Conceptualizing the rest of the program, with special attention to aims of , as well as intellectual/cultural inputs into, the upcoming October and January seminars.
4. Projects: status-report *and* strategies for helping them along.
5. Ways of keeping participants meaningfully engaged in-between seminars.
6. Follow-up to the 18-month program.
7. Next steps (in aftermath of this planning meeting, including the identification of JCC Fellows to be involved in the next stage of planning)

The evaluation of the initiative as a whole is being suggested as the first item of the agenda not just because we have kept deferring it in favor of 'more pressing' matters, but also because it may suggest critical programmatic aspirations that will guide our planning efforts during the upcoming year.

**SOME MAJOR THEMES/QUESTIONS/CONCEPTS IN OUR SEMINAR  
June, 2002, Baltimore Maryland**

**VISION-DRIVEN (AND OTHER APPROACHES TO) PRACTICE**

**Kinds of vision.** Existential or institutional

**Characteristics of Vision.** Inspirational; thin (slogans like 'brotherhood', 'Tikun Olam' or Menschlichkeit) or thick (specificity)

**Dimensions of existential vision.**

- Beliefs/attitudes/conduct (mind/heart/hand)
- Essential/important/missible/beyond the pale

**Actualizing a vision.** Programmatic and/or suffusion approaches

**Magic wand exercise.** If you had a magic wand and could create the JCC of your dreams and the outcomes of your dreams, what would these look like? Do we have answers to these questions?

**Translation and implementation.** Establishing vision-driven practice requires two different kinds of activities.

- *Translation* is the attempt to take commitments at the level of vision and to figure out what an institution dedicated to them would look like in matters ranging from architecture, interior design, and art, to programming, hiring and budgeting.. Translation requires not just an understanding of the vision but also ideas (hopefully, reliable) concerning many other matters, including the background, age, outlook, etc. of the clientele and the cultural milieu.
- *Implementation* is the attempt to bring the institution into line with this vision-inspired design, a process that requires, among other things, working with various constituencies, including, for example, staff.
- [This is not to say that translation and implementation are necessarily separable. If, for example, staff are involved in the effort to translate, this could make for greater ease in implementation.]

**Three approaches to practice.**

- 1) I change things in response to problems that arise.
- 2) I try to actualize a vision (existential and/or institutional).
- 3) A halfway house between the first two approaches is: I change things in response to problems that arise, but I do so *guided by my existential vision*.

**Social work and educational perspectives on vision and on the role of JCCs: How are they different? How can they be brought into meaningful conversation?**

**What's the role of leadership and community-process in the development of vision?**

**The risks and benefits of a consensus-building approach**

## **AMERICAN JEWISH IDENTITY**

- **Who are American Jews? How do they live? How do they see things? How do they understand their Jewishness in relation to the rest of their lives?**
- How might answers to these questions be relevant to the work of JCCs?
- What windows are available to us (other than research) into these questions? For example, magazines like *The New Yorker* or *Heeb*?
- Do we know much enough, for purposes of our work, about Generation X and Generation Y? How can we learn more?

### **Outsider-ness.**

- What does it mean to be an outsider or an insider?
- Jews as traditionally outsiders, and achieving Jewish identity as reclaiming 'outsider-status'
- Just like Gopnick's son is bewildered by the cartoon-conventions and therefore can't read through the text to the meaning, American Jews (like Gopnick) who are so far outside Jewish culture that they don't have the background knowledge (facts, conventions, etc.) that enable them to understand and participate in the culture when they encounter it. *How much and what do you need to know in order to participate in the culture? And what is the way to help people don't have this knowledge to acquire it?*
- "Outsider-ness" also makes possible interpretations of texts and experiences – sometimes very exciting ones - that are unlikely to surface for those who have been grown up within the tradition. (Two examples: Neusner coming to the study of Mishna as an adult; Michael Brooks commenting to a group of students who had never encountered the Akeda before, "I envy you, because you can read the beginning of this story, without knowing the ending.").

1) Recognizing that novices to a tradition are capable of coming up with unorthodox, novel exciting readings makes it possible for educators to affirm the novice-status of newcomers as an opportunity to contribute rather than to

convey to them that they are inadequate vessels to be filled with received wisdom.

2) One person noted that there is a risk that, unguided, novices might come up with 'inappropriate' interpretations. This led us into a discussion of whether such interpretations are to be feared or to be viewed as opportunities for education. The question of what would count as an inappropriate interpretation wasn't explored.

### **Ways of thinking about American Jews.**

- *From "What acts are Jewish?" to "How do Jews act?" and "What acts have Jewish meaning to American Jews?"* [for example, Jon's jello, and Shaul's lamb] in research on American Jewish identity.
- *Descriptive and normative perspectives on Jewish identity.* What definition of 'meaningful Jewish life' do we tend to use, do researchers on American Jewish identity use, and do we think ought to be used in judging the vitality of Jewish life?
- *Some key dimensions of Jewish identity research.*
  - 1) JewishBehaviors (ritual, or otherwise defined by the researcher, according to his/her understanding of Jewishness).
  - 2) Behaviors people themselves regard as expressions of their Jewishness.
  - 3) Subjective sense of centrality/importance/commitment
- *Processes of identity development: **Imprinting, reflecting, imagining***
- *Three types found in American Jewish life. **High activity/high centrality; low activity/low centrality; mixed.***
- *What's going on with 'low activity/high centrality' people? Who are they? What makes them tick? What's their trajectory? And how is this relevant to the work of JCC educators?*
- *How account for people with strong adult sense of 'meaningful Jewish identity'?* Recent research suggests, says Bethamie, that imprinting is a significant explanatory concept for understanding those who come from Orthodox backgrounds. For the non-Orthodox, voluntary educational experiences (like camp, Hillel, Israel trips) are pivotal, with 'significant relationships' playing a critical role.
- *Conflicts that gnaw at American Jews.* What window into the conflicts that American Jews struggle with are we offered by looking at the three versions of

*The Jazz Singer?* What conflict would gnaw at the protagonists in a contemporary remake?

## THE WORK OF JCC EDUCATORS

**Leaders or managers – and what's the difference between them?**

**How foster institutional change when you're not the one in charge of the agency?** Do you educate your leadership? Do you nudge? Do you otherwise seek to move the leadership (say, your Board) to recognize the need to move in the direction you think desirable?

**Is it possible to bring the diversity of JCC professional leaders, lay leaders, staff leaders, and other interested community parties to a shared understanding of the JCC's Jewish mission? If so, how?**

**JCC educators and the Meraglim/spies:** How do we perceive ourselves, and how are we perceived by others? Grasshoppers? Giants? Others?

**Who are the core-clients of JCC educators?** Members? Decision-makers? Staff?

**The nature of the educators' work.**

- To what extent, if at all, is the educator's work *subversive*? *What does it mean for it to be subversive?* Is it part of the educator's job to influence those he/she is educating? In what sense? In what ways?
- What is the difference between imposing, influencing, educating, manipulating, and shaping? Which of these reflect – or what other terms – describe what JCC educators do or should be doing? How do we distinguish between ethical and unethical methods of influencing people?
- Parents – said one person – have the right and responsibility to shape their youngsters' outlook and dispositions in ways that bypass the youngsters' awareness and rationality? Is this true – and if so, in what domains? And if it is true, is this also true of JCC educators?
- What role do caring/authentic relationships with Jewish human beings play in the Jewish journeys of those who achieve 'a meaningful Jewish identity'? Does it matter what kind of Jewishness these people embody, or just that the caring/authentic relationship arises in a Jewish setting? How important to the work of JCCs are such relationships? What do we mean, though, when we characterize relationships as authentic or caring?
- *Imprinting.*

1. What is it? Is it a useful concept that points to an important phenomenon?
  2. Is it a concept for describing something that happens to human beings that we're comfortable with?
  3. Is adult-imprinting possible? Our conversation began with the hypothesis that it wasn't, but the hypothesis was later introduced that perhaps it is possible, especially when a person is entering into a completely unfamiliar domain.
  4. Do, can, and/or should '*imprinting* experiences' go on in JCCs? Is this an important concept for JCC work?
- What is/might be the place of *nature* in the work of JCC Jewish educators? In what ways might be a resource/vehicle for Jewish education? Guided by what possible understanding of its place in Judaism?
  - What role could *the arts* (e.g., movies like *The Jazz Singer*, magazines like *Heeb*, or the Gopnick article) play in Jewish education in JCC settings?
  - What role can **jarring experiences or experiences with shock-value** have in educational settings like JCCs? Might they get our attention, and engage us, and thus open the door for learning and growth? Should JCCs always be completely comfortable, *haimish* environments?

## **CONCERNS TO KEEP IN MIND WHEN PLANNING**

### **Some of the key concerns that surfaced in the January conversation:**

1. Though our program is supposed to be built around "vision", there was a concern that it wasn't heavily enough represented in our Israel seminar. Participants need not only inputs that will help them clarify their guiding visions, but structured opportunities and supports that will enable them to develop these visions.
2. Equally important, there need to be rich opportunities to explore how the exciting ideas we encounter or come up with in a seminar can help participants think about their challenges in JCCs and/or how these ideas might play out in practice in the life of JCCs. Also, what is the process through which a person might meaningfully translate an exciting idea into practice? We can't assume that people now how to make this translation.
3. There appeared to be a shared sense among members of the group that the theme of "American Jewish identity" might be a very appropriate one for our upcoming seminar.

### **A theme that seemed to resonate powerfully for participants towards the end of the seminar:**

Steve Cohen succeeded in energizing the group around the idea that JCCs should become morally serious places -- places enable their participants to feel that they are engaged in struggling with important issues and/or engaged in morally important matters. He suggested that JCCs should stand for something more than (just) 'fun'. As we continued to think together about what JCCs could/might actually stand for, the following challenge was thrown out to the group: if, like Synagogues, JCCs were to put some kind of a text over their front door, a text announcing what they are most fundamentally about, what would that text be?

### **Some recurrent general concerns:**

1. There need to be meaningful opportunities for the participants to contribute to the unfolding of the program (through planning and/or teaching/session-leading, etc.)
2. Don't forget the executives. Their concerns need to be honored, and it may be desirable to actively engage them in one or more of our upcoming conferences.
3. Don't forget about 'product': it is important that this initiative culminate in 'product' both at the local and the movement levels.
4. Continuity: we need to be careful that across the 18 months our programs build on one another in a meaningful way.
5. While many of the participants recognize the value of traditional formal presentations and discussions, there is also a general sense among those concerned with this program that there need to be opportunities for the participants to engage with one another and with the program in more informal, non-frontal ways.
6. Text-study is a valued part of the program, but we should remember that to use a broad definition of 'texts'.

## ***SUNDAY***

### **12 – 1 pm: LUNCH**

Over an informal lunch, participants have the chance to chat informally.

### **1 - 2:00 pm: INTRODUCTORY SESSION**

This session begins with words of welcome that include a brief overview of the seminar that emphasizes aims, priorities, and activities. It is important to connect what is upcoming to larger seminar aims, to what has gone before, and to concerns voiced by participants in their feedback.

This is followed by a text-study experience organized around a rabbinic text that discusses the problematics of Jewish identity in an alien or cosmopolitan cultural environment.<sup>1</sup>

### **2:00 – 3 pm: BRINGING THE PAST INTO THE PRESENT: A BRIDGE-EXERCISE BUILT ON THE PRESEMINAR ASSIGNMENT**

In this session participants have a chance to discuss their responses to the preseminar questions that concern "neighborhood" and "collective memory". Though loosely structured, the participants are provided with guide-questions that encourage identifying and perhaps problematizing deep assumptions concerning the mission of JCCs and their own roles.

### **3- 3:10 pm: BREAK**

### **3:10 – 5:30 AMERICAN-JEWISH IDENTITY (#1): PORTRAITS OF OURSELVES AND TRENDS**

First of two sessions with Bethamie Horowitz: a mix of presentation and discussion.

### **5:30 – 6:30 pm: BREAK**

### **6:30 – 7:15 pm: INFORMAL GATHERING OVER DRINKS AND MUSICAL INTERLUDE (drawing on musical talent of a participant)**

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<sup>1</sup> An alternative to this introductory text-study experience would be a facilitated spiritual experience - something along the lines of what Nina M. did in Jerusalem, though perhaps organized by someone else. In this draft, that spiritual experience is scheduled for Tuesday evening; but perhaps that's too late into the seminar, and perhaps it would be wiser to flip these two experiences, moving the text-study session to Tuesday night. I inserted the text-study experience in that first session 1) because I thought it might serve as a good centering-experience, and that people might enjoy starting with Torah-learning in Chevruta, and 2) because most of the texts they will be studying in the Beit Midrash sessions beginning on Monday will probably be more contemporary ones that grow out of American Jewish life.

**7:15 – 8 pm: DINNER (with some informal after-dinner singing perhaps)**

**8 – 10 pm: AMERICAN-JEWISH IDENTITY (#2)**  
Second of two sessions with Bethamie Horowitz

***MONDAY***

**8:30 – 8:50 a.m.: BRIDGES (Responding to yesterday; getting ready for today)**

**8:50 – 10:15: BEIT MIDRASH (1)**

**10:30 – 12:30 pm: AMERICAN-JEWISH IDENTITY #3: A DEVELOPMENTAL PERSPECTIVE ON IDENTITY-FORMATION**

**12:30 – 1:30 pm: LUNCH**

**1:30 – 3:30 pm: PROJECTS #1**

Led by Barry Holtz, this is one of two sessions that offer participants a chance to learn about one another's projects and to engage in thoughtful evaluation of the conception, guided by critical questions and by mentors who are present. Both the pedagogy and the specific aims need to be worked out in consultation with Barry Holtz.

**3:30- 6:30 pm: A TRIP TO THE FIELD (to be specified and developed in consultation with Nina Cardin)**

The content and aims of this activity need to be specified (and it's conceivable that Sunday afternoon or Monday morning will prove a better occasion for this activity). Most likely, this will be a trip to one of the local JCCs, with an assignment that's designed to encourage participants to do some kind of content-analysis of this institution and to reflect on the way it reflects and responds to the problematics of American Jewish life. How, in ethos, culture, scheduling, clientele, etc., it resembles and differs from participants' own JCCs could provide a vehicle for reflection on more basic questions.

Another possibility might be to visit a different kind of Jewish site in Baltimore or environs, using this as an occasion to reflect on sites of memory in American-Jewish life.

**6:30 – 8:00 pm: DINNER AT LOCAL KOSHER RESTAURANT**

**8:30 – 10:30 pm: A CULTURAL EVENT THAT ILLUMINATES AMERICAN JEWISH IDENTITY**

The group views (and afterwards discusses) clips of a number of films (e.g., AVALON, CRIMES AND MISDEMEANORS) that illuminate or provoke interesting questions concerning American Jewish identity.

**TUESDAY**

**8:30 – 8:50 am: BRIDGES**

**8:50 – 10:15 am: BEIT MIDRASH #2**

**10:30 – 12:30 pm: PROJECTS #2**

**12:30 – 1:30 pm: LUNCH (and opportunity for small group discussions)**

**1:30 – 4 pm: AMERICAN JEWISH IDENTITY #3: IF *THIS*, THEN *WHAT*?**

Based on the earlier discussions of American Jewish identity, this session asks participants to take as a given certain assumptions concerning the needs, aspirations and desires of American Jews and will invite participants to reflect on the implications of these assumptions for the work of JCCs and their educators – both for aims and, more concretely, for practice. The session should be designed to guide participants into reflection and conversation concerning the question: Is it sufficient to think of JCCs as satisfying the consumers' expressed (or unexpressed) desires and needs – or should JCCs have an educational agenda that goes beyond this? If so, how should we be thinking about this agenda and how do we justify it? Here are the session's components:

1. Given the designated set of assumptions concerning the needs and aspirations of American Jews, what would you identify as your institution's principal challenges?
2. In view of what you said in #1, what implications might this have for JCC programming in the Early Childhood Program or in....?
3. Does the mission of JCCs go beyond meeting the expressed needs of their clientele? Do they, should they, have a Jewish agenda of their own?

This session (perhaps in conjunction with the main Wednesday morning session, which has not yet been specified) should offer the participants had a chance to engage with vision *and* implementation. If the activities identified don't accomplish this, perhaps we should re-think the content

**4:15 – 5:15 pm: MID-COURSE RESPONSES TO THE SEMINAR**

**5:15 – 6:30 pm: FREE TIME**

**6:30 – 8:00 pm: DRINKS, INFORMAL DISCUSSIONS, DINNER**

**8 – 8:30 pm: SECOND 'SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCE'**

Like the first spiritual experience the participants undergo, this one will serve as background to the theme of spirituality in Judaism and in American Jewish life that will be explored in our upcoming October seminar.

**8:30- 9:30: A PLAYFUL SOCIAL ACTIVITY (for example, one involving role-playing/improvisational drama) THAT ILLUMINATES THE CHALLENGES OF IDENTIFYING AND MEETING THE NEEDS OF AMERICAN JEWS.**

**[ALTERNATIVELY: PERHAPS BRING IN SOME REPRESENTATIVE 'TYPES' (E.G., ADOLESCENTS, YOUNG PARENTS, HEALTH CLUB ENTHUSIASTS) AND INTERVIEW THEM CONCERNING PERTINENT MATTERS.]**

***WEDNESDAY***

**8:30 – 8:50 am: BRIDGES**

**8:50 – 10:15 am: BEIT MIDRASH #3**

**10:30 – 12:30 pm: CONCLUDING SESSION**

We may want to have a tentative plan for this session, with the understanding that on Tuesday night we may want to develop something new.

**12:30 – 1 pm: EVALUATION SESSION/NEXT STEPS**

***OCTOBER: THE JCC AND THE SACRED***

**Preseminar assignment: "Text over your portals exercise"**

- 1. Spirituality, American Judaism and the JCC (possible speaker: Art Green)**
- 2. The JCC as a sacred space (Jeff Falick as input)**
- 3. Sacred times and spaces for American Jews (David Nelson as guide)<sup>2</sup>**

**IDEAS ALLUDED TO AT ONE OR ANOTHER POINT BUT NOT INCORPORATED**

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<sup>2</sup> Since this may be intimately connected to the theme of American Jewish identity and is also a bridge back to the theme of the Jerusalem seminar, we may want to reconsider including this in June.

1. One or more sessions dealing with the Holocaust in American Jewish identity via trip to Holocaust Museum and/or Alan Mintz session.
2. Session around the Adam Gopnik article in the *New Yorker*.
3. Possible resources: Misha Galpin, Zvi Beckerman; get advice from Bethamie H.

### **SOME BIG CHALLENGES**

1. Filling in the Beit Midrash Sessions -- texts and leaders.
2. Filling in the Project-related sessions.
3. Determining content and aims of June field-trips to the JCC and/or elsewhere.
4. Identifying a speaker for the "Developmental perspectives" session or determining another relevant theme for that session.
5. Is there enough time and/or scaffolding to wrestle with questions of vision and implementation in a meaningful way?
6. **OTHER: please fill in, in preparation for our next meeting**

## IMAGINING THE INITIATIVE AS A WHOLE

Dan Pekarsky

The general idea for the program is something like this. It is designed with the following general outcomes in mind:

1. **A community of support and discourse.** A community of JCC educators who feel a sense of collegiality and who share a language of discourse in which both the substantive questions and issues the group takes up, and especially the ideas of vision and implementation, are at the center.
2. **An informed, reflective guiding vision.** With attention to possible ideals, social realities, and communal challenges, and with the benefit of significant inputs from out of Jewish thought, sociology, history, philosophy educational theory, the arts, and other arenas, participants will have encountered and given thought to more than one powerful ways of understanding the aims of education in the JCC setting and the educational role of the JCC in the larger Jewish community, and they will have developed an articulated perspective of their own concerning these matters.
3. **The capacity to translate a big idea.** Participants should have some understanding of the programmatic implications of their larger purposes (e.g., in the core-businesses, in the general environment, and in other arenas). Equally important, they should have had practice moving from idea to practice -- enough to enable them to imaginatively carry new ideas into practice in their own work.
4. **Individual project.** Each participant will have completed a project which is informed by the idea of vision-driven practice and that has the potential to make a contribution to the local JCC and, in some cases, to the movement as a whole.
5. **Group-products.** While the individual projects may well make a contribution beyond the local JCC, a hope has been expressed by any number of people that through this program, the group as a whole (or else sub-groups within it) can create products that will enrich the way the movement as a whole approaches its work.
6. **Executive support.** It is important that executives feel that their agencies have benefited significantly from the participation of their Jewish educators in this initiative.

**Programmatic desiderata.** Programmatically, each program needs to include: discernible connections to what has come before in the program; opportunities for the participants to take some responsibility for guiding the learning of the group; opportunities for text-study, where the concept of 'text' is broadly understood; opportunities to engage in forms of learning that are not classroom-based; opportunities

to engage with one another in playful and/or informal modes; and opportunities to think seriously about the practical implications of encountered 'big ideas' for practice in JCCs.

**Intellectual foci.** The themes of *Vision and implementation* and *projects* represent two continuing foci of the program. Each seminar is also organized around a particular substantive theme, and each theme is to be explored with the help of inputs from Jewish and general culture, and with attention to issues of vision and implementation. Substantive themes are selected based on their capacity to enrich participants' thinking about the aims and the practice of education in JCC settings. Thus far, we have begun exploring the following substantive themes: social capital and the idea of the JCC as a 'neighborhood'; the theme of collective memory and its relationship to community and identity.

**Looking ahead:** Here's a proposal for how to envision the unfolding of the initiative beyond the January seminar:

**The June seminar.** This seminar should proceed along three major fronts: 1) pursue the theme of **vision and implementation**, building on and adding depth to, some ideas suggested by Steve Cohen concerning the **craving for moral purpose** that generated a lot of enthusiasm; 2) the theme of **American Jewish identity**; c) establish the **centrality of the projects** by offering meaningful opportunities to address them. It is important that this seminar offer participants the opportunity to practice moving in a systematic way from vision, or big ideas, to practice/programs.

**October 2002 seminar:** This seminar would continue the emphasis on vision/implementation (along lines to be determined) and would, like the June seminar, offer opportunities to continue **exploring and sharing the projects**. The main new substantive theme that would be introduced into the October seminar is that of **spirituality**, an important theme in contemporary American and Jewish life. The challenges here might include: a) thinking about competing understandings of spirituality, based on different understandings of human nature and Judaism; b) thinking about which, if any, kind of spirituality has a place in the world of JCCs. Note that the theme of spirituality, like that of social capital, deepens the discussion of American Jewish identity. Note also that the theme of spirituality can be a vehicle of struggling with issues of vision/implementation. Art Green might be an interesting speaker for this kind of a program.. **Perhaps we should consider inviting the Executives to participate in this seminar.**

**January 2003, Second Ten Day Israel Seminar:** With the seminar moving into its last stages, and with the proviso that this gathering needs to be organized in a way that takes strong advantage of being in Israel, this seminar needs to include:

1. meaningful opportunities to deep the development of the **projects**.
2. The identification and initial work on possible **group products** designed for the movement as a whole to emerge from the participants.

3. A sustained focus on the **overarching substantive theme of community**, a theme that picks up on our discussions of neighborhood and social capital in October of 2001, as well as our initial discussions of pluralism in the very opening of the seminar (in May of 2001). This could include:
  - encountering competing visions of a thriving Jewish community (e.g., Rosenak and Brinker) and reflecting on the implications of these different conceptions for JCC practice and on which of these conceptions, if either, ought to guide participants' thinking about the JCC as a community;
  - examining and assessing the role of the JCC in the American Jewish community;
  - examining Israel as a community made up of various sub-communities.
4. Building on #3, as well as on inputs and discussions across the program to date, the participants will be given real time and the scaffolding needed to **articulate and examine, both alone and in groups, their own guiding visions/conceptions, along with structured opportunities to think about their implications for practice.**

**June 2003: Concluding Seminar.** This seminar is largely **organized around the projects and ideas developed by participants across the 18 months**, as well as around group-products that have been or are in process of being developed. This seminar should include **powerful new intellectual inputs** (as a way of underscoring that there's a lot more work to be done), as well as agreement on mechanisms for keeping participants meaningfully in touch with one another in relation to challenges identified in the course of the program.

## VISION-DRIVEN PRACTICE: SOME CORE-ASSUMPTIONS

A number of interweaving assumptions enter into a vision-guided approach to education. Review these assumptions and jot down your reactions. Do they make sense to you? What questions do they raise? Do other critical assumptions deserve mention?

### **Assumption 1: Vision at the heart**

In a vision-guided educating institution, practice (e.g., programs, activities) is usefully viewed as a vehicle of achieving educational outcomes, and these outcomes are grounded in, or derived from, 'an existential vision' – that is, a conception of the kind of person and community one aspires to cultivate through the educational process. (Here 'kind of person' refers to such things as sensibilities, attitudes, values, skills, interests, understandings, behaviors, etc.) In this sense, vision guides practice, providing a basis for decision-making and evaluation. Far from being a frill, having a powerful vision is an enormously practical planning tool, offering the potential for a coherent sense of direction.

### **Assumption 2: The need for an *educated* vision.**

Precisely because of the central role that a vision of the kind of person that one hopes to cultivate plays in a vision-guided institution, it is not a good idea to ride with a vision that has not been subjected to careful examination. An educated vision is one that arises out of a careful process of thoughtful reflection informed by powerful ideas. This involves sustained opportunities to examine, test, and develop one's own initial beliefs about what an adequate guiding vision would look like by looking carefully at the rationales for, the deep presuppositions and the implications of these beliefs, through a process that includes serious encounters with pertinent ideas from out of Jewish and general worlds, dialogue with one's colleagues, and seriously considering alternatives to one's views..

### **Assumption 3: The genius of translation**

As important as coming up with an educated vision may be, it is at best only half the work. Equally important and equally difficult is figuring out what it means to translate the vision meaningfully into practice so that it suffuses an institution's culture and lives in its varied domains and activities (from hiring to architecture, from curriculum and pedagogy to the sports program, from budgeting to the lunchroom). The effort to determine what a commitment to the vision entails in the institution's varied settings and activities is hard work, requiring imagination, disciplined thinking, and knowledge of various kinds. To the extent that an institution succeeds in identifying the implications of its guiding vision for practice and actually organizing itself around this vision, it has become a vision-driven institution.

### **Assumption 4: It's hard work but it's worth it.**

Though clarifying one's guiding vision, figuring out its implications for practice, and actually organizing the institution's life around the vision are hard (and never-ending!) work, it's worth it. There is credible evidence that educating institutions that organize themselves around powerful visions are much more effective than most others.

## JCC JEWISH EDUCATORS SEMINAR SOME ISSUES OUT OUR THURSDAY AND FRIDAY SESSIONS

### THURSDAY

This day featured a visit to sites of Jewish memory in Israel: Har Hertzl, Kikar Rabin, and Haychal Ha-Atzma-ut. It offered an opportunity to think about the way Israel has attempted to commemorate critical events in ways that would connect Israelis and others to these events in ways that would evoke or affirm particular understandings, values, sentiments, etc. Each site offered an opportunity to think about three things: 1) what is being commemorated? 2) what ideas, appreciations, beliefs, values, ideals, etc. are the commemorators trying to communicate to those who visit the site? 3) What have those who designed the site done to communicate what they want to communicate in a powerful way? If the site 'works', why is this?

Our thinking about these matters were enriched by the suggestion, offered by Dave during our visit to Har Hertzl, that we think about attempts to memorialize events along three dimensions:

**Architecture:** to organize the physical space in such a way as to convey and evoke particular ideas, values, and commitments.

**Calendar/time:** locating the memorial in a temporal sequence that, in conjunction with what comes before and after, conveys a message judged appropriate and important in a powerful way (e.g., where Yom HaShoah and Yom HaZikaron are located between Pesach and Yom Ha-Atzmaut).

**Ceremonies:** The rituals employed in the time/place to evoke the memories and the messages thought appropriate by those who designed the memorial.

Using these categories as well as some other guiding questions (e.g., who/what is, and who/what isn't, included in a site like Har Hertzl? why was a site like Heychal Ha-Atzma-ut established as late as it was? why was the experience of visiting the site moving for some of us?, etc. ), we attempted to analyze the various sites we encountered.

Towards the end of the day we gathered in the Cinema Hotel for a session that allowed us, both together and in small groups, to reflect on and think about the implications for our work of what we had seen. At the heart of this session was an assignment, to be completed in small groups, that invited the group to think about what it might mean to construct/rekindle a memory in the minds and hearts of JCC members back home. Some groups interpreted this as an attempt to facilitate experiences that would themselves enter into the memory of those that underwent that (for example, at Maccabiah games) and other groups saw their challenge as that of connecting JCC members to events/places in Jewish life that they may never have experienced before.

## BARRY CHAZAN

Barry Chazan's session began with an attempt to identify the circumstances that gave rise to the emerging profession of Jewish Community Center Educator, as well as some of the guiding assumptions that inform the work. His presentation was informed by comparisons to the dawning of other professions, notably psychoanalysis. At the heart of his presentation was an attempt to identify 'the essence of the work'. Though he identified some interesting reasons for avoiding an inquiry into this essence, he went on to suggest that clarity concerning the essence of this work could have powerful implications for training, would establish a basis for evaluation, would contribute to the sense that we are a profession, and might help to guarantee the continuity of this profession at a time when it is still establishing itself.

Against this background, Barry identified 8 significant dimensions of the work, some of them identified by pointing to the literature associated with that dimension:

1. Serious Jewish learning/knowledge – not just textual knowledge but also the capacity to translate Jewish ideas in such a way that they speak to our boards and clients. Along with this there is a quasi-rabbinic dimension to the job that requires ritual knowledge and the capacity to address spiritual matters. In addition, the Jewish educator ought to exemplify a Jewish life-style.
2. Adult learning theory is critical
3. Familiarity with the literatures associated with the Helping Professions, literatures which can illuminate what people are like and how they can be helped to grow.
4. The perspectives and ideas associated with the literature of values-education, and sophistication concerning the nature of values-development.
5. The humanities – the role of art, literature, drama, etc. in catalyzing powerful Jewish experiences for our clients. The arts should not be viewed as a gimmick but as central.
6. The literatures dealing with leisure – and the educational potential of play, sport, and recreation.
7. Cultural psychology: Education as the shaping of environments that enable education to happen – a theme explored in Bruner's THE CULTURE OF EDUCATION.
8. Management skills.

Barry emphasized that all 8 are needed, if not by every individual in the profession than by the profession as a whole. Later, he accepted the suggestion that there is a 9<sup>th</sup> dimension – the capacity to engage others in meaningful conversation and the capacity to enter into meaningful personal relationships. Barry added that for the profession of Jewish educator to become more fully established, it will be critical to develop a professional literature and perhaps a journal, to establish an appropriate training institution, and to establish meaningful opportunities for continuing professional collegiality.

A very rich discussion followed which, the hour being late, I can't summarize right now, except to point to a couple of interesting issues:

One of the questions that arose during this session concerned what it is that those entering into a site of memory need to bring with them in the way of background (experience, commitments, personal memories) if the site is to be effective in evoking what it is designed to evoke. For whom would the Haychal Atzma-ut experience be powerful, and for whom might it not be, and why? – and how might the memorial be differently designed so as to reach these others? In this connection, someone reminded us of the biblical phrase “Atem R’eetem...!”, suggesting that our challenge as educators is to develop programs/curricula/sites of memory that will make it possible for those we work with to establish this kind of personal connection to events/places that they may not have personally experienced.

The day culminated with a visit to the YEKEV, which was, at least for some of those who participated and perhaps for all, a lot of fun!

## FRIDAY

In Jen Glaser’s session dealing with identity and personal memory, we began by examining in small groups the story of Jose/Harry. Our assignment was to explore how memory surfaces in the story and in what ways it shapes Jose’s identity and life. The rich discussion that followed the small groups brought out a host of interesting insights, questions, and distinctions concerning the nature of memory and how it fits into our lives. Distinctions were, for example, drawn between short and long-term memories, between foundational and trivial memories, etc. A particularly powerful point (for at least one member of the group) was the suggestion that just as a collectivity may have certain foundational memories that define its identity, so, too, at the individual level, each of us may have powerful grounding memories that inform our interpretations of who we are.

The session with Jen also focused our attention on shared memories of a particular kind: memories of experiences whose power and meaning depends (in part) on the fact that at the very moment we undergo them we are aware that other people are undergoing these experiences as well, just as they are aware that we are undergoing them. That is, the awareness that we are all undergoing the experience and that all of us are aware of this is itself central to the experience.

At one point in the discussion, Yael Tamir’s understanding of the quest for identity was examined, and some people felt that her account reflected the Israeli reality but may not apply as well to the quest for identity as it manifests itself in North American settings.

Among the questions raised during this session were the following:

1. How, if at all, is the fact that JCCs serve non-Jews relevant to institutional language and behavior and to the way it should approach its Jewish educational agenda?
2. Does it matter whether ‘it really happened’, whether events that are part of the presumed history of the Jewish people actually took place?

Quote of the session, from a statement by a secular Israeli in the Knesset: “I too was present at Sinai, even if it never happened!”

*JCC EDUCATORS INITIATIVE, JANUARY 2002*  
**A FEW THEMES BASED ON OUR TRIP UP NORTH**

**I. SOME NEW TAKES ON THE THEME OF MEMORY**

We have been talking a lot about the role of memory in shaping our personal and collective identities and orienting us towards the future, as well as about the ways in which contemporary needs, interests, and struggles affect which pieces of our history are emphasized and de-emphasized and how they are interpreted. We have also been talking a lot about the fact that alongside politically powerful "official" narratives of the past that paint our history in simple, unnuanced ways that are designed to encourage unambivalent patriotism, there are other versions of the past: versions of the past that challenge and critique the official narratives, as well as versions that include other, sometimes silenced narratives belonging to marginalized sub-groups (North Africans, Arabs, women, Ethiopians, etc.); and we have also asked ourselves (in our conversation with Yuli Tamir) what the effect might be of communicating the more complex, nuanced version of the past, especially to young children. In the last couple of days, we had a chance to encounter other ideas that relate memory to our present situation:

**A. Sometimes Memory can blind you to the demands of the present; living in the world of the past by immersing in the texts it produced can make us too comfortable and indifferent to the present. On the other hand, memory (via the encounter with a powerful text) can awaken your sensitivities to engage the present in an ethically serious way.** This theme was explored in our conversation with the Rabbi at the Midrasha. He emphasized the Midrasha's interest in cultivating ethical sensitivities that encourage its graduates to engage the world in ethically meaningful ways, and he suggested that this interest is reflected in the way it encourages students to engage with the Jewish past (as embodied in classical texts). This point was exemplified in our study of a rabbinic passage in which a rabbi from Pumbedita entered into a dialogue with a rabbi from Sura. With the help of our teacher, we emerged with the idea that sometimes our engagement with Tradition (the past) can blind us to the needs of the present (a hungry, homeless man on Erev Yom Kippur), a blindness that we perhaps re-enacted in failing to recognize this dimension of the story. The point was reinforced by the story of Ruchami, whose deep engagement with study led him to forget his responsibilities to his wife on Erev Yom Kippur, which in turn led to death. The suggestion: memory, i.e., the encounter with the past as embodied in rabbinic and other texts, is to be encouraged and cherished to the extent that it enables us to deal more sensitively with the present; when it draws us away from the demands of the

present, when preoccupation with the past distorts our priorities (as in the Ruhami story), it is destructive.

**B. Remembering the past/identifying with the past.** This was a distinction drawn by Hillel Halkin in discussing the visits to Eastern Europe and to the Camps by Israeli adolescents. Remembering this chapter in Jewish history is desirable; transforming it into an object of veneration by turning the Shoah in to a quasi-religious event that is central to our identity as Jews is, in his opinion, offensive. Although it may be easy, Halkin suggests, to encourage a powerful identification with the Shoah, he would strongly discourage the tendency to try to build identification with Judaism via the Shoah-experience. That is, the creation of collective memory by creating a powerful identification with the Shoah may be possible, but this may be – Halkin thinks it is - the wrong kind of identity to encourage.

**C. Though memory can enrich and guide the present, sometimes it can be oppressive. There are times when breaking away from memory can be empowering and exciting.** One example of this that we have encountered is to be found in early Zionism which tried to break free of the 2000 or so years of history that came after the fall of the Jewish State. Dada, as interpreted by our own J.H., can also be viewed as an attempt to break free of the conventional ways of thinking encouraged by memory so that we can awaken fresh perceptions that are untrammelled by traditional modes of seeing and interpretation. It was suggested by someone in this context that the delight of seeing things in radically new ways is most appreciated by those who have first had the chance to be schooled in more conventional ways of seeing things.

**4th. In the long run, Halkin suggests, a nation like Israel cannot rely on ideology (and the collective memory that supports it) to survive.** Though in the difficult circumstances in which it finds itself there may well be a need for ideology-based enthusiasm for the Zionist project, in the long run, people have to find life good here in non-ideological terms (the way that people do in, say, France or the United States).

## **II. VISION AND PRACTICE: TRANSLATION OF IDEAS INTO PRACTICE**

Monday and Tuesday afforded us opportunities to witness two very different examples of (something that approximates) vision-driven practice: the Midrasha at Ein HaNatziv and the Janco-Dada Museum.

**The Midrasha at Ein HaNatziv.** The Midrasha, as described and exemplified by Rachel Keren, the two students, and rabbi Eli Kahan, is vision-driven in that it is informed by a few very powerful ideas that find themselves richly embodied in practice. The Midrasha's vision is intimated by some of the comments that we heard -- Rachel Keren's comment that we aspire to become a Volozhin for women in which women have access to and knowledge of the same texts that men study, by the Eli's emphasis on the importance of cultivating the ethical sensibilities of their students, by the asserted emphasis on dialoguing and reflecting on critical issues like whether women should read the Torah based on an encounter with pertinent texts, and by a vision of a society in which women play a different role and have a different status in the life of the religious Jewish community.

This vision appears to be not just talked but also walked. Not just Rachel Keren and Rabbi Kahan but also the two young women students spoke in ways that suggested strong identification with the vision; and the rabbi's teaching powerfully exhibited the vision at work: 1) **Admission process:** Recall his story about affirming and enthusiastically admitting the applicant who challenged him for criticizing her and other students for 'failing' what he had described as a Rorschach test; 2) **Curriculum:** recall the emphasis, in our examination of a Talmudic text with Eli Kahan, on the importance of attending to one's ethical responsibilities in the present, 3) **Teacher-presence:** Recall the way in which this rabbi seemed to embody the kind of simple decency that was being encouraged by the curriculum.

**The Janco-Dada-museum.** Though light-years away from the Midrasha in numerous ways, this museum resembles the Midrasha in being an attempt to translate an idea into practice in a systematic way. The idea in this case is "Dadaism" -- what it is and why it is important. The embodiment: 1) personnel that can articulately explain the idea; 2) movie that reinforces the idea both in its content and design; 3) exhibits that exemplify the idea; 4) opportunities to be "Dada-istic" by having the chance to play at and experiment with Dada-like happenings and creations.

### **III. A FEW OTHER POWERFUL IDEAS ENCOUNTERED ON MONDAY AND TUESDAY**

1st. Israel and the Diaspora (especially the USA) are growing apart from one another, e.g., around issues of feminism and the use of power for self-defense. Given the differences in the challenges they face this is understandable; but it isn't to be passively accepted. The Jewish People, Halkin thinks, need to develop a sense of 'We-ness' that bridges Israel and the Diaspora. He has come to believe that the only dependable ally of Israel is the world-wide Jewish People. There is therefore a strong

need to discover a common denominator that unites the diverse sub-groups in the Jewish People, both within Israel and between Israel and the diaspora. One way of achieving a sense of we-ness is to become engaged in reading the same Jewish Texts – from the Bible to Ozick. The other, Hillel thinks, is for the various groups that make up the Jewish people to develop a deeper awareness of the other's perspectives, circumstances, and challenges; the other is This means familiarizing ourselves with a multiplicity of narratives, some of which may challenge our own – or to develop a complex narrative that incorporates elements of these different narratives and gives us all the sense that we are part of one people.

2nd. Zionism is the psychoanalytic couch for the Jewish people, Halkin suggests. The Zionist experiment – Statehood in the land of Israel – has served to puncture fantasies and myths, e.g. concerning our moral superiority, our non-violent nature, how effective we might be as governors of our own land. In this sense, it has made us more honest with ourselves about who we are.

3rd. Do we tell a single unnuanced narrative of who we are or do we offer a history that offers a multiplicity of narratives? One solution to this problem for Jews may be grounded in the idea that one of the defining characteristics of the Jewish people – an essential part of its Master Narrative -- is that it is a people that tolerates and encourages a multiplicity of competing views, all of which are preserved.

4th. Yuli Tamir commented that history cannot tell us what kind of a community we should become, what se should stand for. We need to decide this ourselves through careful deliberation and then paint an historical narrative that is at one with this philosophically defensible interpretation of what we are about. But this raises the difficult question: **who is the 'we' that is responsible for defining a community's vision (or the vision that should inform the work of a JCC)?**

**E. KEY IDEAS THAT EMERGED FOR YOU THAT AREN'T REFERRED TO HERE:**

## SOME KEY THEMES AND ISSUES

January 2002

1. Foundational stories/historical narratives play a powerful role in shaping our identity as human beings and Jews, as well as our sense of who we are and what our purposes are as a Jewish community.
2. There is a complex interplay between historical narratives and the present. These narratives shape our understandings of the present in which we find ourselves; but at the same time, the needs, interests, and conflicts at work in the present strongly influence which foundational/historical narratives we choose to emphasize and how we interpret them.
3. A community's (or a JCC's) sense of purpose, of what it stands for, is not something dictated by history. Rather, our sense of purpose, of what we stand for as a community, needs to be grounded in serious moral/philosophical reflection. Once clarified, this conception of what we are about can give us guidance in deciding how and what to present of our history. **But: who is the "we" who can and should legitimately develop this vision of community? An elite of leaders? "The people"? Who? And what might the process of developing it look like?**
4. Historical narratives can be unidimensional, simple, and designed to elicit patriotism and a sense of moral superiority that unequivocally justifies the community's aspirations. But historical narratives can also be subtle, nuanced, and complex, exhibiting a self-critical attitude toward the community's traditional myths and narratives (that is, a willingness to call into question the accuracy or historicity of the community's traditional myths and narratives). Which kind of a narrative to tell to whom (especially to young children!) is a difficult question requiring much thought.
5. Engaging with the past (through the study of ancient texts) has the potential to render us relatively indifferent or blind to the moral demands of the present, to blunt our moral sensibilities; but, as Eli Kahan exhibited, it may also have the power to heighten our moral sensitivities to the world around us. Whether or not it does so, may depend not just on what texts are taught but on how they are taught.
6. Complete liberation from the past in the form of complete forgetfulness can empty the present of all meaning; but sometimes throwing off the weight of the past can free us up to try new things and to see things afresh. In very different ways, Dada and early Zionism exhibit this principle (although in each case the past, or certain aspects of the past, continued to inform and guide these movements).
7. We have been speaking of the way foundational and historical narratives can powerfully affect our sense of who we are and what we should be doing as a community. Isn't there a danger of manipulating the past – of deliberately misrepresenting it – in order to nurture a particular identity?
8. What is the effect on us, and is it desirable, to listen to conflicting narratives of our nation's or people's history? What are the potential risks and gains?
9. Imaginative literature – novels, plays, and poems – is interwoven with the theme of memory. Oftentimes, its capacity to evoke a rich response depends on the presence of memory, on our knowledge of past events and works of literature, as in the Amichai poems and the Grossman novel. At the same time, imaginative literature helps us develop a living connection to a past that

otherwise might feel remote and not ours. Literature may thus be a vehicle of creating a kind of memory of events and situations which we didn't immediately experience.

10. The work of historians is not to be confused with the development of collective memory. Historians are not the source of the community's collective memory, but their work may, in conjunction with other forces, function to call its contents into question. Far from being the work of historians, collective memory grows out of and is sustained through the totality of a community's institutional life.
11. We remember not with our minds but with our whole bodies. Collective memory is not an affair of the mind alone; it remains vivid through being enacted through songs, rituals, and other activities.
12. Sites of memory have at least three dimensions: the place/event/person that is remembered; the idea/emotional response/question that we want to convey or elicit through the experience; the design of the memorial in such a way as to actually convey this idea/emotional response/question. The effort to design memorials so as to convey or elicit some new understanding or emotional response involves three inter-related components: architecture of the place; sequencing the memorial in time; and the design of an appropriate ritual. Recall in this connection our visit to Har Hertzl.
13. Embedded in our practices and in our intuitive ideas are a host of often unrecognized assumptions of various kinds. The price of keeping these ideas implicit is that they control us and escape being seriously evaluated.
14. Though we often think of evaluation as coming after practice, evaluation is possible and desirable long before an idea is actually tried out. We could save ourselves many headaches if we subject our ideas to careful scrutiny at the hands of tough critics long before we consider implementation. Such scrutiny might consider questions like the following: What is our conception of success, what assumptions does it embody, and are these assumptions defensible? How will the world be better off if we are successful in this sense? What is the likelihood that the proposed strategy will really be successful in the designated sense? What is the likelihood the sheer mortals will be capable of actually implementing this strategy?
15. The core-businesses of JCCs should not be confused with their core-mission. What makes the core-businesses core is their contribution to economic viability. The mission of JCCs is a separate matter, requiring careful reflection; but how this matter is addressed will have implications for the core-businesses (if we are think in terms of encouraging institutions which, like Canp Ramah , are animated by a vision that lives even in the details.
16. What might it mean, and would it be desirable – for JCCs to go beyond the ethos of social capital and associationalism and to adopt an identity as a 'morally serious institution' which engages their members in addressing serious Jewish issues that are on their minds and in acting in the service of some larger moral good that carries them beyond themselves? What might conceptions of moral goodness might be considered as guides? What does Judaism have to say about this? And, in the end, what might it mean for any such conception to guide practice, say, in the sports program?
17. Can the JCC "stand for something serious" and yet still be a pluralistic, inclusive institution? Are there tradeoffs that need to be considered?

## Notes from Daniel Pekarsky – January 14<sup>th</sup>, 2002

### Particularly Effective

1. Ways in which evaluation can and should precede practice
  - a. If I'm successful, so what?
  - b. Will the idea, if implemented as planned, be achieved
  - c. Can the idea be meaningfully implemented?
  - d. Need for tough critics of my idea
2. Intellectual / attitudinal readiness of learner as key consideration in deciding whether a particular program is appropriate (the Norm Town example; reference was made here to the Jordash principle and to the attempt to teach loyalty through the Book of Ruth in Australia)<sup>1</sup>
3. The inevitability of trade-off, e.g. trade-off between efficiency and humaneness (the cook / felafel example). Between concern for the individual and the viability of the enterprise as a whole.

### Not fully-enough developed (but not in all cases necessarily worth following-up on)

1. The point of the Melton story in relation to David's comment that he didn't think his project-idea would be immediately implementable
2. The distinction between prophetic and educational vision was identified but not fully developed. Relative to this, it might have been worth further developing the 2 dangers you pointed to (being too disconnected, on the one hand, and selling out on the other)
3. You said but did not develop the idea that vision was necessary but not sufficient.
4. Importance of existence/demonstration proof and why it might be important to invest a lot of resources in constructing such proof

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<sup>1</sup> When you first put the term "student" on the board, I thought you were going to talk about the commonplaces but this was not the direction you went.

rather than spreading a lot of resources over many mediocre institutions.

5. At what point should one give up on an idea? It wasn't fully clear where you were going with this point and how a practitioner should approach this question.
6. In response to a question from Jonny Ariel, you briefly discussed why in the excerpt from the book the reference was to seeds of a future rather than to a defined future. He asked why you said "Nothing has ever turned out as I expected," but you did not further develop that point. Related to this, what does it mean for a vision to be flexible?

### **Possibly Fruitful Direction**

For what its worth here are a few thoughts about what might prove useful directions to explore with them, based in part on a couple of informal conversations.

1. We have been talking about the need for vision, whose job is it to articulate and decide on the vision? Through what kind of a process.
2. The importance of demonstration / existence proofs, especially since this may be a way for them to think about their project.
3. The distinction between prophetic and educational vision.
4. In at least one person, I sensed anxiety about how clarity at the level of vision will help her in designing her program. She felt the need for help in this area.

### **Other matters that arose during the session**

1. Aren't we better off building mediocre day schools than excellent afternoon schools? You indicated that this might be an interesting perspective to examine, and that it may be irresponsible for us to write off supplementary schools, but this matter was not more fully explored.

2. Alan Finkelstein reminded you that you had said that whether we recognize it or not, we are always working with a vision. Then he said – is this true of those we call “mere managers”? You responded that perhaps the term “vision” in the full sense doesn’t capture what they have. What they do have, however, are values which, whether or not they recognize it, inform what they do.
3. The important role that personnel like janitors and administrative staff play in supporting or sabotaging the attempt to develop to maintain a vision-driven institution. They also need to be committed to the vision or it will fail. Here there was a reference to Bettelheim’s comment on the janitor.

**From:** Dan Pekarsky  
**To:** gordis@mandelschool.org.il,pcharte@jcca.org,bholtz@nyc.rr.com,pekarsky@education.wisc.edu,rochwarger@ujc.org,rube@jcca.org  
**Date:** 2/8/02 7:26AM  
**Subject:** JCC Educators program

Attached is my attempt to sketch out some ideas that try to build on the momentum of the overall program and on the discussions we have had both before and during the Jerusalem seminar. There are three interrelated documents: 1) a document that tries to identify concerns that we have, over these months, identified as important to keep in mind as we plan; 2) an attempt to imagine what the whole of the program could be, beginning with a formulation of outcomes for the overall program; 3) some ideas about June. I thought it important to include something about Concerns and Outcomes because, if we really believe they're important we should be making sure that, over the program as a whole, if not on every given day, they should inform what we do.

Notice that what I have sent does not include a proposed concrete map of the June program. Though I have some ideas about this, it seemed premature to offer ideas at this level of concreteness before we had had a chance to review the larger conception.

Based on conversations between me and Cipp, my suggestion is that we begin by giving each of us a chance to react to this document individually through next week; conceivably, your comments could go to the whole group of us. Then, a smaller group of us (perhaps Lenny, Cippi, and the two Daniels) could sift through the feedback, do some more thinking, and develop a new draft of some kind to be the subject of a Conference call among us.

In the interests of time, this is being sent out before we have come to closure re: how to include participants who have expressed an interest in sharing in the planning process. Cippi and I have been discussing this and this should get resolved soon.

In any case, I hope this moves us along in fruitful directions. Looking forward to hearing from you.

## **CONCERNS TO KEEP IN MIND WHEN PLANNING**

### **Some of the key concerns that surfaced in the January conversation:**

1. Though our program is supposed to be built around "vision", there was a concern that it wasn't heavily enough represented in our Israel seminar. Participants need not only inputs that will help them clarify their guiding visions, but structured opportunities and supports that will enable them to develop these visions.
2. Equally important, there need to be rich opportunities to explore how the exciting ideas we encounter or come up with in a seminar can help participants think about their challenges in JCCs and/or how these ideas might play out in practice in the life of JCCs . Also, what is the process through which a person might meaningfully translate an exciting idea into practice? We can't assume that people now how to make this translation.
3. There appeared to be a shared sense among members of the group that the theme of "American Jewish identity" might be a very appropriate one for our upcoming seminar.

### **A theme that seemed to resonate powerfully for participants towards the end of the seminar:**

Steve Cohen succeeded in energizing the group around the idea that JCCs should become morally serious places -- places enable their participants to feel that they are engaged in struggling with important issues and/or engaged in morally important matters. He suggested that JCCs should stand for something more than (just) 'fun'. As we continued to think together about what JCCs could/might actually stand for, the following challenge was thrown out to the group: if, like Synagogues, JCCs were to put some kind of a text over their front door, a text announcing what they are most fundamentally about, what would that text be?

### **Some recurrent general concerns:**

1. There need to be meaningful opportunities for the participants to contribute to the unfolding of the program (through planning and/or teaching/session-leading, etc.)
2. Don't forget the executives. Their concerns need to be honored, and it may be desirable to actively engage them in one or more of our upcoming conferences.
3. Don't forget about 'product': it is important that this initiative culminate in 'product' both at the local and the movement levels.
4. Continuity: we need to be careful that across the 18 months our programs build on one another in a meaningful way.
5. While many of the participants recognize the value of traditional formal presentations and discussions, there is also a general sense among those concerned with this program that there need to be opportunities for the participants to engage with one another and with the program in more informal, non-frontal ways.
6. Text-study is a valued part of the program, but we should remember that to use a broad definition of 'texts'.

## IMAGINING THE INITIATIVE AS A WHOLE

Dan Pekarsky

The general idea for the program is something like this. It is designed with the following general outcomes in mind:

1. **A community of support and discourse.** A community of JCC educators who feel a sense of collegiality and who share a language of discourse in which both the substantive questions and issues the group takes up, and especially the ideas of vision and implementation, are at the center.
2. **An informed, reflective guiding vision.** With attention to possible ideals, social realities, and communal challenges, and with the benefit of significant inputs from out of Jewish thought, sociology, history, philosophy educational theory, the arts, and other arenas, participants will have encountered and given thought to more than one powerful ways of understanding the aims of education in the JCC setting and the educational role of the JCC in the larger Jewish community, and they will have developed an articulated perspective of their own concerning these matters.
3. **The capacity to translate a big idea.** Participants should have some understanding of the programmatic implications of their larger purposes (e.g., in the core-businesses, in the general environment, and in other arenas). Equally important, they should have had practice moving from idea to practice -- enough to enable them to imaginatively carry new ideas into practice in their own work.
4. **Individual project.** Each participant will have completed a project which is informed by the idea of vision-driven practice and that has the potential to make a contribution to the local JCC and, in some cases, to the movement as a whole.
5. **Group-products.** While the individual projects may well make a contribution beyond the local JCC, a hope has been expressed by any number of people that through this program, the group as a whole (or else sub-groups within it) can create products that will enrich the way the movement as a whole approaches its work.
6. **Executive support.** It is important that executives feel that their agencies have benefited significantly from the participation of their Jewish educators in this initiative.

**Programmatic desiderata.** Programmatically, each program needs to include: discernible connections to what has come before in the program; opportunities for the participants to take some responsibility for guiding the learning of the group; opportunities for text-study, where the concept of 'text' is broadly understood; opportunities to engage in forms of learning that are not classroom-based; opportunities

to engage with one another in playful and/or informal modes; and opportunities to think seriously about the practical implications of encountered 'big ideas' for practice in JCCs.

**Intellectual foci.** The themes of *Vision and implementation* and *projects* represent two continuing foci of the program. Each seminar is also organized around a particular substantive theme, and each theme is to be explored with the help of inputs from Jewish and general culture, and with attention to issues of vision and implementation. Substantive themes are selected based on their capacity to enrich participants' thinking about the aims and the practice of education in JCC settings. Thus far, we have begun exploring the following substantive themes: social capital and the idea of the JCC as a 'neighborhood'; the theme of collective memory and its relationship to community and identity.

**Looking ahead:** Here's a proposal for how to envision the unfolding of the initiative beyond the January seminar:

**The June seminar.** This seminar should proceed along three major fronts: 1) pursue the theme of **vision and implementation**, building on and adding depth to, some ideas suggested by Steve Cohen concerning the **craving for moral purpose** that generated a lot of enthusiasm; 2) the theme of **American Jewish identity**; c) establish the **centrality of the projects** by offering meaningful opportunities to address them. It is important that this seminar offer participants the opportunity to practice moving in a systematic way from vision, or big ideas, to practice/programs.

**October 2002 seminar:** This seminar would continue the emphasis on vision/implementation (along lines to be determined) and would, like the June seminar, offer opportunities to continue **exploring and sharing the projects**. The main new substantive theme that would be introduced into the October seminar is that of **spirituality**, an important theme in contemporary American and Jewish life. The challenges here might include: a) thinking about competing understandings of spirituality, based on different understandings of human nature and Judaism; b) thinking about which, if any, kind of spirituality has a place in the world of JCCs. Note that the theme of spirituality, like that of social capital, deepens the discussion of American Jewish identity. Note also that the theme of spirituality can be a vehicle of struggling with issues of vision/implementation. Art Green might be an interesting speaker for this kind of a program.. **Perhaps we should consider inviting the Executives to participate in this seminar.**

**January 2003, Second Ten Day Israel Seminar:** With the seminar moving into its last stages, and with the proviso that this gathering needs to be organized in a way that takes strong advantage of being in Israel, this seminar needs to include:

1. meaningful opportunities to deep the development of the **projects**.
2. The identification and initial work on possible **group products** designed for the movement as a whole to emerge from the participants.

3. A sustained focus on the **overarching substantive theme of community**, a theme that picks up on our discussions of neighborhood and social capital in October of 2001, as well as our initial discussions of pluralism in the very opening of the seminar (in May of 2001). This could include:
  - encountering competing visions of a thriving Jewish community (e.g., Rosenak and Brinker) and reflecting on the implications of these different conceptions for JCC practice and on which of these conceptions, if either, ought to guide participants' thinking about the JCC as a community;
  - examining and assessing the role of the JCC in the American Jewish community;
  - examining Israel as a community made up of various sub-communities.
4. Building on #3, as well as on inputs and discussions across the program to date, the participants will be given real time and the scaffolding needed to **articulate and examine, both alone and in groups, their own guiding visions/conceptions, along with structured opportunities to think about their implications for practice.**

**June 2003: Concluding Seminar.** This seminar is largely **organized around the projects and ideas developed by participants across the 18 months**, as well as around group-products that have been or are in process of being developed. This seminar should include **powerful new intellectual inputs** (as a way of underscoring that there's a lot more work to be done), as well as agreement on mechanisms for keeping participants meaningfully in touch with one another in relation to challenges identified in the course of the program.

## THE JUNE CURRICULUM: FIRST ITERATION

Dan Pekarsky

The June program is short (only three days), and the challenge is to develop a program that does not try to do too much, that allows for depth, that builds on what has gone before, and that allows the participants to see the relevance of our explorations for their own work. The basic idea is to develop the June program around the following three themes.

**American Jewish identity:** In our staff meeting (on Friday, January 11) midway through the seminar, there seemed to be unanimous enthusiasm for this idea. Exploring American Jewish identity can be justified based on the necessity of developing as a rich a possible understanding of one's clients as one can -- what their issues are, what they aspire to and seem to need, what they are looking for in general and in their Jewish life, how they understand their predicament as American Jews, how they understand their connection to Judaism, etc. This theme can be viewed as a follow-up to our discussions of Social Capital in the October seminar, which also concerned the character and the needs of the people we are likely to meet up with in JCCs. The difference is that in the upcoming seminar we will focus more narrowly on American Jews. There is more than one meaningful cut we could take into the theme of American Jewish identity, and we need to give thought (quickly!) concerning the right one for us. Appropriate resources might include not just sociological accounts of American Jewish life but also contemporary literature (e.g., the work of Philip Roth) and the arts. Rollie Matalon of Bnai Jeshurun, Arnie Eisen, and Bethamie Horowitz might be particularly useful resources in helping us deepen our understanding of the needs, aspirations, and outlook of contemporary American Jewry.

It will also be important, in planning the seminar, to think about how we will help participants make bridges from this examination to their understanding of their work in the field. In this connection, it may be important to address the following question: granted that understanding the experienced needs and aspirations of the clientele is relevant to the work of the JCC educator, should the educator view his/her role as meeting these needs and thus creating satisfying customers? Or should the educator be aspiring for more?

**Vision and practice: Building on the Steve Cohen session.** There is a need to offer participants the opportunity to continue thinking systematically about the theme of vision and implementation -- especially via a strategy that engages them in struggling with what are presently their own guiding ideas and with their implications for practice. Steve Cohen's session triggered enthusiasm for two different, but inter-related, explorations which could forward this important agenda.

1. The suggestion that the JCC will be more attractive to its clients if they perceive it as a morally serious enterprise, as an arena in which serious issues and challenges get addressed in a compelling way.

2. The suggestion that we should be thinking about the appropriate text (classical or contemporary, verbal or non-verbal) to grace the doorway of a JCC (in the way that synagogues are associated with certain texts).

Both these explorations lend themselves to inquiries into vision and implementation, and one or both of them might prove useful springboards into continuing our discussion of this matter, as well as into exercises that build bridges from ideas to practice. *In this connection, as we noted in our self-critique in January, it is very important that participants be offered the scaffolding they need to move in a systematic way from "big ideas" to actual programs.*

**Diving deeper into the projects.** June should offer a rich opportunity for participants a) to deepen their understanding of what is involved in systematically and critically developing a project idea, b) to learn more about one another's projects; b) to clarify their own projects. The seminar should include meaningful opportunities to participate in and/or witness careful deliberation concerning a project-idea. This requires the help of individuals who, by virtue of their content expertise and/or their ability to elicit and guide the thinking of others, can help participants enter into this kind of critical examination of their ideas.

**Preseminar assignment.** A pre-seminar assignment organized around a) further specifying the projects and b) addressing one of the ideas that excited the attention of participants in Jerusalem (especially the one that involved identifying an appropriate text) might effectively launch the seminar.

**Need for bridges.** In developing this seminar, it will be important: a) to establish bridges between the major themes/concerns of this seminar and those that have gone before; b) to help participants build bridges from "big ideas and insights" to the work of JCCs and their educators, bridges that offer participants scaffolding to move in a systematic way from vision to practice.

**Other considerations:** The need to give participants a) **opportunities for text-study** [where the texts in question may be classical or contemporary written texts, a work of art, or an environment (like the local JCC) which we jointly visit]; b) **opportunities to engage with one another informally.**

Hi, Joy. Building on our conversation (which was built on your write-up of possible dimensions of your role in the project), here's my attempt to describe the role we discussed. It includes the following four elements:

#### **A. Curriculum Development**

You will serve as an intellectual resource in thinking through the curriculum for the program as a whole and for particular seminars. Because of your intimate familiarity with the project as a whole and with the concerns, desiderata (relating to content, to programmatic flow, etc.) and that have emerged as central for the planning team as a whole or for different parties individually (Mandel Foundation, JCCA JCC participants), you are in an excellent position to review curriculum proposals with an eye towards identifying whether they take into account these concerns; in our conversation, I described this as a kind of 'intellectual conscience' role. In addition, we agreed that you would take on what we called research assignments: reviewing relevant books and articles, so that you can summarize their contents and/or make recommendations concerning their suitability for our participants; identifying and collecting information concerning promising speakers/teachers for the program (What is their expertise and position, what pertinent stuff have they written and is it accessible, are they known to be good teachers, are they available, etc.).

#### **B. Project/mentor**

You will work with Barry in the development and implementation of the Project/Mentor dimension of the JCC Educators Initiative. The challenges of this team are important and pretty immediate: for example, there is a need to identify and assign appropriate mentors; to ensure that participants are involved in thinking through, and probably writing up, their most promising ideas in preparation for our June gathering; explaining to the mentors what their assignment actually is and overseeing their work; thinking through, with DP, how to most meaningfully insert sessions dealing with the projects into further gatherings of the group; working on an evaluation-plan for this phase of the work. Though DP will also be involved with this phase of the work, the assumption, as I have discussed with Barry is that that at this point Barry and you will take the initiative to move this part of the project forward. The sooner we could get moving with this, the better. (By the way, since Barry was not present for Annette's session with the participants, you may want to brief him about what, in your recollection, she said to them. I already offered my recollections; but it would be a good idea to add in your own.)

#### **C. In-Between-Seminars Assignments**

There are a host of things that need to happen between seminars. If we have agreed, or think it's a good idea, to send out follow-up notes, bibliographies, articles, updates, or assignments, you play an active role a) in reminding the planning team as a whole of these matters and in making sure that the appropriate materials get gathered/written and disseminated. A specific idea that we discussed concerned

Reading Groups. At various points, we have discussed the possibility of encouraging sub-groups of participants to read a particular book between sessions and to use this as a basis for conversation (in person during gatherings, or else via an internet Chatroom arrangement); this may be an exciting idea to try to implement at this point (though probably on a voluntary basis).

#### **D. Logistical Support**

As you (and Cippi) know much better than the rest of us, there is a ton of logistical work that needs to go on between seminars in order to make our gatherings possible. This includes dealing with matters like travel arrangements, transportation to sites within a seminar, hotel-arrangements and meeting rooms, notebooks, food, communication re: these matters to staff and participants, etc., etc. We agreed that you would continue to play an active role in this area, though we also recognized that the dimensions of this role would depend on what our JCCA colleagues will be taking responsibility for in this domain, and this is not yet entirely clear.

Let me know if this coheres with your recollection of our discussion of this matter, or if you have any further thoughts about this. Thanks.

Hi, Barry. Here's what I think we agreed to concerning the assignment you are taking on for the JCC Educators initiative. Let me know if this coheres with your recollection or if you have any further thoughts about this.

**Project/mentoring.** With Joy serving on your team, you will take the initiative in developing and will coordinate the project/mentoring dimension of the program. Though the nature of this work will probably change at different stages of the project, at this moment in time, this will involve:

- identifying mentors and assigning them to participants, and making sure that mentors and participants understand what we expect of this relationship;<sup>1</sup>
- confirming that participants, mentors, and other staff for the program are on the same page as regards the nature of the projects;
- making sure that the participants get meaningfully launched on a process of developing promising project-conceptions;
- working with DP and others to figure out how to insert this dimension of the program into the curriculum for our seminars (beginning this June);
- developing, with Bethamie an evaluation-plan for this part of the project.

Down the road, the work will involve trying to ensure that the mentors are functioning as we would hope and that the projects are meaningfully unfolding.

Though this may bear further discussion, in our initial conversation it seemed like, in addition to launching the process of identifying mentors, immediate challenges include: a) drafting a brief concept-piece that summarizes our current understanding of what the project-assignment and the role of the mentors are (In framing this, Joy's preliminary work on this will be invaluable.); b) developing an assignment for the participants that will get them actively engaged in developing a promising project-conception over the next few months;<sup>2</sup> c) developing an overall time-line for the Project-dimension of the program, with special attention to the next several months.

**Curriculum development.** You will also continue playing an active role in thinking through the outcomes, the content, and the pedagogy of the curriculum for the program.

**Program participation.** Though we didn't discuss it, I have been assuming, and I am assuming you have, that you will continue to play an active role in the actual seminars (in roles that include facilitating, teaching, etc.).

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<sup>1</sup> Based on our conversations, I am assuming that you and I will take on some of the mentoring-responsibilities; but there is, as we recognized, a definite need to identify other mentors, and I think we made some head-way in identifying some possibilities.

<sup>2</sup> One of the things we mentioned in our conversation was the need, perhaps this spring, to review project-ideas before participants grow too wedded to them or to a particular conception of what they involve.

January 22, 2002

TO: Daniel Gordis and Annette Hochstein

FROM: Daniel Pekarky

RE: Possible new role for me in the JCC Educators initiative

I have been giving a lot of thought to your suggestion that I assume the leadership of the Mandel Foundation team that is working on the education-component for the JCC Educators Initiative. As you know, the whole initiative greatly excites me, and I have developed fondness and respect for our colleagues in the JCCA and for the participants. Since, in addition, I think I am both steeped in the Mandel approach to education and increasingly aware of the concerns of our JCCA and JCC colleagues, I may be in a good position to take on the role you are suggesting.

As you know from our conversation about this, two concerns have given me pause. One of them is very simply time: my obligations at the University of Wisconsin are substantial, and I can't afford to take on more than I can manage. Your assurance that my assignment would be limited to working on the conceptualization of the education-piece and would not include implementation quieted this concern considerably.

My other troubling concern grows out of the fact, acknowledged, I think, by everyone involved in the planning effort to date, that the planning process has been very convoluted and riddled with a kind of ambiguity concerning the role of the different organizations, both North American and Israeli, in the determination of the curriculum. that is both frustrating and demoralizing. I am not at all eager to have my energies sapped, and my relationships with valued colleagues wounded, by these complexities.

On reflection, it seems to me that if we can agree in advance on an acceptable process for the next stages of our educational planning, we may save ourselves a lot of headaches. Here's my suggestion. If it's acceptable to you and to our colleagues and to our colleagues in the JCCA, I would like to take a stab at articulating a first iteration of the next stages of the educational program for this initiative, and then to have the document that results carefully examined and reacted to by teams drawn from the Mandel Foundation, the JCCA, and the participants. Based on this review I will work up another draft, which we can then further develop. If, along the way, we find that this approach isn't working, we could go back to the drawing-board. I am proposing this approach for the following reasons:

1. Though, ultimately, the curriculum for this initiative needs to satisfy the different constituencies who are party to the initiative, attempting to create the initial draft by committee is likely to be cumbersome and inefficient. Better to have one person take a stab at it, and then have others react to and shape the proposal, than to have everyone trying to do the initial draft.
2. For reasons indicated above, I think I am well-situated to write up this first iteration. By now I think I am reasonably conversant with, and respectful of, the concerns of the various parties; I have been accompanying the initiative

from the very beginning; and I have considerable experience in the area of educational planning. Equally important, I tried to listen very carefully during our seminar (and at the staff meeting that we held during the seminar) to emergent ideas concerning how the program might evolve beyond the January program.

3. I am eager to be responsive to concerns that might be expressed by the different parties in response to the document that I would propose.

In any case, given that we -- and I personally - don't have all the time in the world, I think that this kind of approach might be an efficient way to move us along at this stage. If this is an approach which the Foundation and our colleagues in the JCCA are feel comfortable with, then I am happy to move along with it. If not, it will be important to agree to some alternate process that will move us along.

If the two of you and other pertinent individuals in the Mandel Foundation are comfortable with what I am proposing, I would suggest that you bring this idea to our JCCA colleagues in as timely a way as possible. This will tell us soon enough whether we have a mandate to proceed as just suggested, or whether we need additional conversations regarding process. Either way, we need to move along!

Let me know what you think about this approach. All the best.

D.

**SOME ELEMENTS OF A GUIDING VISION**  
**October 14, 2001**

According to Seymour Fox, author of *Vision at the Heart*, and a number of other thoughtful students of education, effective educating institutions (whether formal or informal) are guided by powerful visions of the kinds of human beings they hope to cultivate. Such a vision identifies the traits – for example, the sensibilities, the beliefs, the attitudes, the dispositions, and/or the skills – that, if the institution is successful, will be found in those who have been immersed in it.

Imagine that, as your JCC's Jewish educator, you have been asked to develop this kind of a Jewish vision for your agency – a vision which identifies the qualities of mind, heart, and conduct that, if you are successful, will be found in your clientele.

1. List the three most important characteristics you would hope to encourage in them through their experience in the JCC.

2. Why *these* characteristics rather than others? That is, what makes these characteristics so important? What assumptions about the nature of Judaism and/or the mission of JCCs, or other matters, are at work in your choice of these particular characteristics?

**JCC EDUCATORS INITIATIVE: CURRICULUM SKETCH**  
**First Iteration/Working Document**  
**7/10/2001**

*Introduction*

Below is an initial sketch of the curriculum conception for the JCC Educators Initiative. It's a working document based on today's (July 10) meeting and designed to jump-start our conversation tomorrow.<sup>1</sup> The sketch assumes that this initiative is designed to help participants develop increasingly thoughtful, informed and powerful educational visions that have the capacity to give real guidance to their work as JCC Jewish educators. This means that the program must be designed with the following in mind:

- To offer the participants meaningful opportunities to reflect on the kinds of educational outcomes JCCs should be striving for, along with careful attention to the implications for practice of a commitment to these outcomes.
- To offer participants meaningful opportunities to experiment with implementing the ideas they are considering.
- To provide ample opportunities for participating educators and their executive directors to deliberate together about the guiding ideas around which practice in their respective agencies will be organized.
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Th JCC initiative is guided by John Dewey's understanding of growth -- in this case, growth in the participants' understanding of what the JCC is after as a Jewish educating institution, of their roles as educators in relation to these aspirations, and of the implications of these ideas for practice. The Deweyan view makes the following assumptions: 1) that participants, like all of us in the endeavors we engage in no matter what our stage in life, start with something rather than with nothing -- that is, they begin with more or less thoughtfully held beliefs about what they are doing, what they are trying to accomplish (and why), and more or less powerful tools for going about the achievement of their purposes; 2) that the job of an educational program is to provide educational experiences that enable the learners to grow from and beyond the understandings and tools with which they begin -- to develop tools and understandings that render them clearer and more informed about what they are trying to accomplish and increasingly effective in achieving it; 3) that, at the end of the program as at the beginning, the understandings and tools that participants will possess will be provisional and revisable in light of future learning and experience -- no more than way-stations on the road to deeper and more powerful ideas and tools down the road. The difference between where the participants are at the end of the program and where they were at the beginning is twofold: 1) at the end, their beliefs and tools have grown in ways that render them more competent than they were at the beginning, and 2) if the program is successful, the participants will leave the program better able to continue this process of growth on their own than they otherwise would be. For Dewey, these ideas apply to all educational programs and to all learners (no matter how sophisticated, competent, and knowledgeable they may be).

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<sup>1</sup> In the Appendix to this document, some of the responses it elicited are summarized.

### *Some guiding principles*

Based on our conversations, here are some guiding principles that need to inform the development of the 18-month program. They are not ordered in any systematic way.

1. Both because of its importance in creating an environment that allows honest, serious, open reflection and discussion **and** because one of the desired outcomes of the program is the emergence of a community of educators that continues to look to each other for stimulation, guidance, and support, it is essential to establish a culture that encourages trust among the participants - a kind of safe-space. It is important to do this while at the same time making it clear that this is a culture that welcomes serious probing of one's own and one another's understandings and assumptions. To effect this balance is hard but critical.

2. Central to the program is the movement from practice to theory and from theory to practice, with inputs drawn from both Jewish and other cultural sources. Especially, but not only, because of the feedback from the JCC Jewish educators, it is critical that special emphasis be given to the movement from practice to theory (which sometimes get less attention than it deserves). That said, it is also essential that participants are offered early on a powerful example of how theory can illuminate, deepen and complicate our understanding of practice.

3. Related to #2, it would be wise to launch this program, in October, by providing the participants with a rich set of opportunities to unearth and articulate the beliefs and commitments that implicitly or explicitly guide their present approach to their work. To prevent the kind of superficiality that sometimes characterizes our efforts to articulate our guiding assumptions, carefully developed activities and exercises should be identified that will accomplish this purpose.

4. Rather than predesignate the basic categories/themes around which the dialectic of practice/theory/practice is played out on the road to more vision-driven practice, we should in the early stages of the program leave this open, paying careful attention to themes, questions, issues, uncertainties, and disagreements that emerge from the group. Our early organizing ideas (e.g., community, ideal JCC Jew, Klal Yisrael, informal education, Israel) may prove helpful, and we can always introduce them down the road, but let's first see what themes -- perhaps very different ones - are central to the participants.

5. One dimension of the program's efforts to emphasize the movement from practice to theory is to make substantial use of JCC educators themselves as resources to the program with responsibility for sharing in both curriculum development and teaching. Just as the theoreticians who teach in the program need to think seriously about how their ideas relate to problems of educational practice, so too, the master practitioners who make up our clientele and that will be asked to teach their colleagues should be encouraged to reflect on, and to draw the attention of the group to, the assumptions and

tools at work in their practice. The integrated conception of the program that we imagine does not view the contributions of theoreticians and practitioners as two disparate parts of the program, but as inter-related. The conversation between theoretician and practitioner is integral both to curriculum development and to implementation. (Participants have expressed an interest in the arts, in outdoors education, in sports; all of these are fertile arenas in which to develop an approach to curriculum that takes advantage of the expertise of theoreticians and practitioners.)

6. If the program is to develop habits of mind that make possible educational deliberations that put vision and implementation at the center, it is important that it include significant **opportunities to practice content-analysis** (i.e., unearthing critical assumptions at work in our own and others' practice), **opportunities to think through the practical implications of commitments at the level of vision** for the work of the JCC, and **opportunities to implement proposed ideas**.
7. . The project that each participant undertakes should occupy a central place in the life of the program. At its best, the project is where the whole program - theory and practice - come together in relation to the educators' practical challenges in the field. It is an important opportunity, within the life of the program, to plan for and enter into implementation. Projects should not be thought of as solely individual affairs, isolated from the life of the community. Ways need to be found to use the projects as a vehicle of enriching the group's thinking and of using the group as a way of helping individuals more effectively carry out their projects.
8. The program may be enriched by opportunities for the participants to gather in Reading Groups, organized around books that illuminate the challenges and aspirations of the JCC and its Jewish educator. These groups would be self-directed to an extent, but would also receive guidance from the faculty to ensure that the activity feeds the larger purposes of the program.
9. There should be opportunities to examine what is (or what passes for) 'Best Practice' in areas germane to Jewish education in JCCs. In selecting Best Practice examples, we should avoid insularity; it's important to draw on pertinent examples from beyond the Jewish world, e.g. of Early Childhood Education or Adult Education. Best Practice examples are not to be approached for their inspirational value (alone) but as opportunities to engage in serious content-analysis and critique. As with other aspects of the program, it offers the opportunity to test out and enlarge one's ways of thinking about what one is doing.
10. Informal learning (a term in need of exploration) being central to JCCs, it is important that the program offer participants the opportunity to examine this idea and phenomenon -- in part, by undergoing and then analyzing experiences of informal learning.

Although these ten guiding ideas have emerged from our conversations over the last few days, their formulation in this document may well be imperfect and will probably warrant further discussion; discussion may also bring out additional important considerations that need attending to in developing the program; but this is a start.

There is reason to think that our program will be significantly better off if it tries to honor these guiding principles. That said, it is naïve to think that if we succeed in planning a program that honors these principles, this will suffice to create a worthy program. *How* they are integrated, and whether the overall journey has a sense of direction that yields the sense (on the part of both faculty and participants) that they are moving along in a way that is fruitful -- these are the critical matters.

### *Imagining the first stages of the program*

Based on ideas discussed above and our recent conversations, here are some initial thoughts about how to approach the first stages of the program -- especially the October gathering in the United States and the January gathering in Jerusalem.

## **OCTOBER**

*Major emphases.* The movement from Practice to Theory is at the heart of the proposed October gathering that launches the group's journey. The challenge is to offer the participants varied and engaging opportunities (through pre-seminar assignments and through activities of different kinds during the gathering) to surface and clarify the basic assumptions that currently define their understanding of their work, including:

- Beliefs about the aims of Jewish education in the JCC setting, including the role of the JCC in the community.
- Beliefs about the nature of Judaism.
- Beliefs about the kinds of clientele they should (and shouldn't) be trying to serve.
- Beliefs about the outlook, needs, and aspirations of their clientele.
- Beliefs about the outstanding challenges that face the American Jewish community today.
- Beliefs about how people learn.

It will also be important to organize the conference so as to help participants highlight the issues that worry and perplex them.

*Possible activities.* The following is a list of the kinds of conference-activities that have the potential to get at the participants' guiding beliefs and to stimulate discussion of them:

- A pre-seminar assignment that invites participants to write up and explain 3 examples of work they are proud of, which texts will be carefully analyzed during the program;

- A symposium that offers three participants (picked because they are especially thoughtful and because we know they represent very different approaches) the opportunity to articulate the basic beliefs that guide their understanding of their work) and to respond to questions that push their own thinking further.
- An opportunity to carefully examine an instance of practice drawn from a setting in which none of them have a personal stake, but which can help participants better understand the potentialities of content-analysis and how one might approach it. Conceivably, the instance of learning will be one that they undergo in our conference, or it might come from a movie, or from literature.
- A live interview with a very thoughtful participant conducted by a very talented facilitator (I saw Daniel Marom do this beautifully with Daniel Lehmann at the Goals Seminar, and I'm told that Seymour did this effectively with Daniel Gordis at the same seminar) designed to show that person and everyone else present how, under appropriate questioning and prodding, deep assumptions can be exposed and their limitations exhibited.
- An encounter with a powerful theoretical conception, Jewish or general, that is applied to a practical context or challenge. The theoretician's job will be to raise critical questions about assumptions embedded in an instance of practice that might not have occurred to the participants spontaneously. **This may be very important as a way of signaling to participants that although this program may sometimes begin with values-clarification it will go beyond it. It will encourage participants to clarify their views not through introspection alone but also through the encounter with powerful intellectual inputs that offer alternative, sometimes richer ways of thinking about what they are doing.**

*Anticipated achievements.* Thus understood, October accomplishes a number of purposes:

1. It gives us a rich sense of the commitments - intellectual and moral - of the participants. In a related vein, it gives us a much stronger understanding of what are for them critical themes and issues. It thus offers us a powerful foundation for further planning.
2. It offers the participants a wonderful opportunity to begin moving beyond where they started by getting them to develop a deeper awareness of the complex web of beliefs and assumptions that are at work in their every day practice. If we are successful, they will recognize this growth and will begin to identify arenas where their beliefs are lacking in clarity or appropriate evidence.
3. It offers participants some initial opportunities to acquire the ability to do content-analysis -- to analyze educational environments and/or practices with an eye to surfacing fundamental assumptions (about learning, about the clients, about aims, etc.) that are embodied therein.
4. It is responsive to the strong desire expressed by participants to learn about the way their colleagues understand their work.

The October Conference should also include the following:

- a general orientation to the program that identifies its guiding intellectual and educational commitments, and that makes clear how these few days fit into the program as a whole.
- an opportunity to begin thinking and talking about the projects and their place in the program.

## BETWEEN OCTOBER AND JANUARY

A. The program's staff and faculty very carefully analyzes the rich data which ideally have been elicited during the October conference in search of critical concepts, values, questions, debates, assumptions that were at work in what we have witnessed. These will inform the final design of the next segment of the program (which will take place in Israel in January).

Once key themes/questions have been identified, we will need to decide how to sequence them and to identify intellectual inputs (ideas, perspectives, debates etc.) individuals, and pedagogies that have the capacity to illuminate them. The identification of thoughtful practitioners and theoreticians who will begin thinking together about critical issues and questions, both substantive and pedagogical, that pertain to a particular theme will be a critical step in this process.

B. Participants should be given meaningful assignments between the October and January gatherings. The following possibilities come to mind:

- Guided by appropriate questions, participants begin trying to identify possible project-topics.
- Participants complete an assignment that asks them to use lenses acquired in October to analyze their own settings. As an example, they might be asked to pick an arena or program within their JCC and to do the kind of content-analysis which they have begun to practice during the October conference.
- They should be given a meaningful reading. A selection that exhibits powerful content-analysis -- perhaps from the work of Philip Jackson, as in LIFE IN CLASSROOMS or THE MORAL LIFE OF SCHOOLS -- might be an interesting possibility.

## JANUARY

Though it's hard to fully imagine the January conference in advance of what we learn in October, it is for a number of reasons necessary to do some preliminary work in this area. Here are some ways of thinking about January:.

A. Launch the "Educated JCC Jew inquiry": "whatever the differences in the people who walk through your doors, are there certain beliefs and values, lore, or vocabulary that you want all of them to share?" **Rationale:** not only is this theme likely to emerge in October, it also elicited a lot of interest on the Tuesday night of the May seminar, with

more than one person saying that this inquiry should be central to our work. Jerusalem is wonderfully well equipped to help us launch this conversation. As an example, Professors Rosenak and Brinker offer rich, but very different views on this question, and their work could provide a good foundation for the participants' discussions. Given that we will be in Israel, the place of Israel in the way JCC's think about 'an educated JCC Jew' may also be appropriate. (If we go this route, it will be important to be prepared for the question of whether JCC education should be organized around *any* conception of core-Jewish beliefs, values, understandings, etc. Is this desirable and/or necessary?)

- A. Note that while October emphasized Practice to Theory, in dealing with thinkers like Rosenak and Brinker we could begin challenging participants to move in the other direction - from theory to practice.
- B. Given the setting, this could be a good occasion for thinking about Israel as a tool for Jewish education.
- C. The Israel setting is also conducive to undergoing and beginning to examine learning experiences that are informal in character, including the ways in which settings educate. Here, a useful reading might be drawn from Seymour Sarason's book on the culture of schools. (This could be an opportunity to launch the conversations about the way nature fits into Jewish education.)
- D. In January, opportunities should be offered for the participants to make serious headway in clarifying their projects.

## **BEYOND JANUARY**

At the end of the intensive January learning experience, we need to step back and see where we are. But, in principle, we continue doing what we have begun - to build on critical questions and themes identified in October and January, and to use them as vehicles of encouraging participants, with the help of appropriate inputs from theory and practice, to continue clarifying their guiding beliefs, thinking through their implications for practice, and engaging in thoughtful and self-reflective implementation activities. In addition, future gatherings of the group should include meaningful opportunities for the group to engage with one another around their projects.

The following possibilities are also exciting:

- organizing reading groups that will, between the major conferences that make up the program, take on the challenge of reading key texts (e.g., books that illuminate the situation of Americans and American Jews). Guided by questions that emerge from both the participants and the staff, these sub-groups would meet during gatherings to explore what the book is suggesting, whether it's plausible, and what, if true, it has to offer JCC Jewish educators as they think about their work.

- It may be that an ongoing dimension of our conferences should be an opportunity to think in rich ways about Americans and American Jews, with attention to pertinent implications for JCCs.

#### **ADDENDUM (written in the aftermath of the July Jerusalem meetings)**

Predictably, the July conversation that was based on the foregoing document elicited many valuable comments which need to be taken into account in designing the program. At some point, these comments should be incorporated into the main body of this document; but in the meantime, some of the major points will be preserved in this addendum.

1. In its current form, this sketch under-emphasizes *implementation*. Opportunities to plan *and implement* programmatic ideas, as well as to reflect on these efforts, need to be central to the overall program. The individual projects that participants will undertake should be designed to offer these opportunities. A related point is this: since this is an in-service program aimed at working educators, we should exploit the fact that these individuals have continuing opportunities to practice ideas encountered in the program.
2. The sketch emphasizes the development of content-analysis skills. But since we can't do everything in a short program, we need to ask ourselves whether it is really important for the participants to become adept at content-analysis. Perhaps it is sufficient for them to see powerful examples of such analysis -- enough to realize that ordinary practice is saturated with (often unrecognized) assumptions and beliefs about the nature and aims of what is being done.
3. Dewey's concept of collateral learning (learnings that arise out of participation in an environment that is organized in a particular way) is enormously important in relation to the work of JCCs. It should be emphasized in the program.
4. If we are serious about 'life-long learning' that extends beyond the life of our program, we need to give careful thought to ways of curricularizing this aspiration.
5. Missing from this sketch is any emphasis on the need to provide the participants with opportunities for personal reflection on the process they are undergoing. Such opportunities are to be provided, and they will be enriched if those planning the program disclose their basic curricular and pedagogical assumptions to the participants and invite their reflections on these assumptions.
6. In working to create a culture that is designed to be 'a safe space', we need to be very careful not to create a community that avoids serious intellectual disagreement and critique and ends up being too comfortable and liable to group-think.
7. We should be careful not to think of limiting 'best practices' to concrete programs. Equally important are encounters with 'state-of-the-art' thinking -- for example, Sam Weinberg's recent writings on 'learning communities.'
8. In developing this program, there is a pressing need to do a serious literature review that will uncover significant writings that deal with North American Jewish life.

9. There is no reference in the document to journaling - to tracking the intellectual journeys of individuals or of the group as a whole. There should, it was suggested, be opportunities for individuals to keep a record of their own intellectual journey in the program, and it may also be important to keep and together review an ongoing account of the group's journey (possibly through daily summaries).
10. It is not enough to unearth participants' views in October; this may also be the time to raise things - at least some things - to the level of confusion!
11. If, as the sketch suggests, participants are going to be asked to speak to their peers about the vision that underlies the work that they do, it will be important to do preliminary work with them prior to the conferences at which they discuss their work.

# Meaningful Jewish Community

Steven M. Cohen  
Sherry Israel  
Leonard Fein

*A project of the JCCs of Greater Boston  
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## Acknowledgments

This project, as do all creative endeavors, owes its origins and execution to several valuable contributors.

The JCC movement has historically sought ways to build community in and around Jewish Community Centers. This concern emerged clearly in the **JCCA** strategic document, *Beyond 2000*, that resulted from a process chaired by now-President Jerome Makowsky. The strategic thinking of JCCs' continental leadership, guided by Executive Vice-President Allan Finkelstein, placed community-building high on the agenda of Centers.

The **JCCs of Greater Boston** boldly took up the challenge to become the JCC movement's first significant social laboratory to systematically investigate Jewish community-building and to devise new approaches to apply the lessons of the policy-oriented research.

**Edwin Sidman**, and the senior volunteer leadership from Greater Boston that he gathered around him in the "**Advisory Board**," first recognized the value for the Greater Boston JCCs in focusing on community-building. Throughout the research process, the Advisory Board played an active and creative role in shaping the research, and focusing upon concrete, action-oriented results.

**Alan Mann**, Executive Vice President of the JCCs of Greater Boston, led his staff and agency in housing the project. He and his colleagues provided critical input and guidance, informed by their years of experience as highly regarded communal professionals.

The **Combined Jewish Philanthropies of Greater Boston** contributed not only its expertise and institutional support, but also shaped the project through its own strategic planning. Not coincidentally, the strategic thinking of the CJP has, for years, also emphasized the centrality of Jewish community building, and of the need to think in creative ways about the new challenges to Jewish community and peoplehood.

**Eric Elbott** served as Project Director from start to finish

Most critical is the work and achievements that have already resulted from this project. Edwin Sidman and his colleagues have initiated several new endeavors to concretize the recommendations in this report. The JCCs of Greater Boston, under the leadership of Alan Mann and its incoming professional leader, **Mark Sokoll**, have instituted several experiments in program and practice. Significantly, the JCCA has adopted the Meaningful Jewish Community notion as a centerpiece to its thinking. The JCCA Biennial convention in Boston (May 2000), under the leadership of **Paula Sidman**, made "Meaningful Jewish Community," the central issue of discussion and deliberation. It is altogether fitting that this final report of the first stage of research on Building Meaningful Jewish Community be released at this conclave taking place in the very region where this research was conducted.

Prof. Steven M. Cohen  
The Hebrew University

## Executive Summary

This initiative calls for the JCCs to measurably increase its historic emphasis upon the building of "*Meaningful Jewish Community*." Thousands of JCC leaders, member and users already find community in and around the JCC. Yet, Jewish community-building can become intentional, more planned, and, as a result, more widespread and more meaningful.

The successful delivery of specific services (e.g., early childhood education, camping, Jewish cultural arts, etc.) has been the historic hallmark of JCCs in North America. The key innovation being called for here is to view these services and the work of the boards and committees who plan them not only as ends in themselves. Rather, we need to see them as means to generating the numerous relationships and feelings of attachment that are at the heart of well-functioning, intimate communities of Jews. On another plane, we ought to seek to *turn the thousands of satisfied customers of JCC services into involved members of Jewish communities*.

This project elucidated the importance of Jewish community-building for the JCC, for members and users, and for the Jewish life in Boston and, indeed, in North America as well. It sought and identified specific ways, well-suited to the particular assets of the JCC, in which to realize the objective of furthering the creation of meaningful Jewish communities in and around the JCCs of Greater Boston.

This initiative sees itself as explicitly integrated within the effort to maintain, enrich, expand and enhance the Jewish communal infrastructure throughout metropolitan Boston. Indeed, the synergistic relations are clear and paramount. The JCC will succeed only in a rich and successful communal environment. What's more, we believe that that environment can be enhanced by a JCC that substantially contributes to the building of Meaningful Jewish Communities, both within the JCC, and in concert with other leading institutions of Jewish life in Greater Boston.

Our research methods included structured and unstructured conversations with lay leadership, JCC professional staff, and most critically, with JCC members and non-member users (e.g., parents of pre-schoolers, parents of campers, users of cultural services). We conducted individual in-depth interviews, a half dozen focus groups, and a

telephone social science survey of 733 leaders, members and users of the JCCs of Greater Boston.

### **"Community" – A Working Definition**

For the purpose of this project, we defined community — any community — as a group characterized as follows:

Members of communities frequently interact with one another.

They share some common purposes. For Jews this has historically meant some combination of mutual assistance and caring (tzedeck and hesed), learning and education (Talmud Torah), as well as worship (avodah) and ritual practice.

They share some common physical spaces.

They share a sense of group identity, nurtured by shared experiences and memories, as embodied in the stories they tell one another.

They comfort one another, in both good times and bad, particularly at times that mark important transitions.

They share common cultural symbols and experiences.

### **Modern and Post-Modern Community in America**

Community has taken on a particular character in America, as demonstrated in our conversations with Jewish adults in the Boston area.

1. People dwell in multiple communities simultaneously, as well as over the course of their lives.
2. Communities are individualized. Each individual maintains unique constellations of communities. Even husbands and wives often have overlapping, but not identical, sets of communities.
3. Communities are time-bound. They arise and dissipate over time, enduring, in some cases, for a few months or a few years.
4. Contemporary communities are more compelling than mere associations of individuals who share common activities, but no sense of joint identity or mutual obligation.
5. At the same time, contemporary communities are less demanding and comprehensive than their traditional predecessors in Europe or even mid-twentieth century America.
6. Communities in America range considerably along a variety of dimensions. They may be more or less demanding, significant, comprehensive and all-embracing. We found no sharp division between so-called lifestyle enclaves

and genuine communities, but rather a range of communities and associations over an entire spectrum.

### **American Jews and Their Need for Community**

1. The decline of community is a major theme and a major problem in American society, one of concern to political and religious leaders, as well as thinkers and social scientists.
2. The decline of Jewish community, is arguably, the major challenge to what has been called "Jewish continuity" in the United States. All indices of community ties among American Jews are in decline, and all related to intermarriage and other forms of assimilation. A recent JCCA study pointed to declines in the occurrence of several aspects of Jewish community:
  - Jewish friendship
  - Organization affiliation
  - Attachment to Israel
  - Commitment to collective action in the political and societal spheres
  - The sense of world Jewish kinship and peoplehood.

All these models of Jewish expression are related. Declines in one are linked to declines in the other. Presumably, improvement in one (or more) will also lead to strengthening on the others.

3. At the same time, even though or maybe because they have lost aspects of community, Jews still want community, Jews still want community, especially with other Jews. What's more, affiliated Jews of all sorts, including those affiliated with the JCCs of Boston, desire community even more frequently and passionately than do Jews generally.

### **The JCC is Well-Situated to Provide Meaningful Jewish Community**

1. Members and users regard the JCC as inviting, friendly, warm, and accessible.
2. The JCC constituency, in terms of demographic and Jewish characteristics, is relatively diverse and inclusive.
3. At the same time, the Jewish population of Greater Boston and of JCC members, is relatively upscale, highly educated, highly professionalized, and often quite affluent. As a result much of the constituency is highly sophisticated and demanding as consumers, often with the means and the access to avail themselves of high quality services outside of Jewish auspices.
4. The JCC provides sought-after services that are widely appreciated for their high quality.
5. JCC services appeal to individuals and families in particular life-stages, bringing together people sharing common backgrounds and concerns.

6. The sense of community in and around the JCC grows with:
  - a. Frequent use of the JCC.
  - b. Use of many services, of various sorts.
  - c. Better design of physical space to promote community.
  - d. Extended duration of membership in the JCC — moreover, those with a sense of community at the JCC are far more likely to remain members.
7. Enduring JCC membership is associated with rises in Jewish involvement, as demonstrated in ritual practice, synagogue affiliation, philanthropic activities, and organizational affiliation.
8. Memberships in JCCs and synagogues both reflect and promote increased Jewish involvement. Far from being in competition, objectively, the two institutions are mutually supportive and can become even more so.
9. Several JCC arenas hold out promise as prime grounds to further build Meaningful Jewish Community. These include:
  - a. The pre-school and its community of parents (particularly the mothers).
  - b. The camps
  - c. The cultural arts programs
  - d. The boards and committees.

In all these areas, members and users are generally seeking further community experiences. They are particularly interested in the JCC facilitating community, rather than programming community.

### **Implications and Recommendations to Enhance Meaningful Jewish Community at the JCCs**

1. Expand programming and facilities for Jewish cultural arts. Expansion would:
  - Create many more opportunities for interaction, producing a synergistic impact on feelings of community among Boston Jewry
  - Enrich the Jewish cultural environment of Greater Boston Jewry, providing greater and more widespread sharing of cultural symbols and experiences
  - Capitalize on the high levels of cultural engagement of current and potential JCC members and users
2. Enrich opportunities for community-building among parents of pre-schoolers and campers. We need to regard the relations among the parents and their ties to Judaism not as a fortuitous by-product, but as a primary objective of the child care programs. Such an approach would capitalize on their interest in closer ties with each other, and in experiences related to their roles as functioning Jewish parents.

3. Transform board and committee service into an experience in Jewish community and Jewish learning. Board service is not only an opportunity to lead, but an opportunity to learn and build lasting relationships with the community of Jewish leaders. At present, we give insufficient attention to these seemingly ancillary effects of board service.
4. Train and motivate the staff, at all levels, to view community-building as central to their professional practice. Attend to community-building among staff members themselves.
5. Actively promote engagement of JCC members and users with synagogues, Jewish schools, philanthropic activities, and volunteer opportunities. Convert the existing ideological commitment to promoting affiliation with Jewish institutions outside the JCC into more effective practice and programming.
6. Modernize and facilitate communication with and among JCC members and users. Capitalize on their growing and extensive computer-literacy and comfort with the Internet.
7. Attend to matters of physical space, both its current limited dimensions (the facilities are now relatively over-utilized) and its configuration for purposes of enhancing community-building.
8. Engage around matters of Jewish content and purpose. Attempts to build Jewish community for the sole "purpose" of building Jewish community fail to appreciate the importance of meaning-seeking among contemporary Americans, or of higher purpose in all successful Jewish communities. Accordingly, policy makers and practitioners need to further articulate the relationship of the JCCs to a variety of Jewish issues and purposes. These include Jewish learning, prayer, spirituality, Jewish peoplehood, Israel, engagement in the larger society, social justice, philanthropy and other such matters that lay at the heart of historic Judaism in all its beauty, complexity, and diversity

## **From Service-Delivery to Community-Building**

This initiative calls for the JCCs of Greater Boston — and by extension, JCCs elsewhere-- to measurably increase their historic emphasis upon the building of “Meaningful Jewish Community” (MJC). We recognize that thousands of JCC leaders, members and users already find community — to varying extents – in and around JCCs. Yet, Jewish community-building can become more intentional, more planned, and, as a result, more widespread and more meaningful.

The successful delivery of specific services (e.g., early childhood education, camping, Jewish cultural arts, etc.) has been the historic hallmark of the JCCs in Boston and, indeed, throughout North America. The key innovation being called for here is to view these services not only as ends in themselves, but rather, as effective means to generate the numerous relationships and feelings of attachment that are at the heart of well-functioning, intimate communities of Jews. In short, the JCCs can explicitly seek to turn the thousands of satisfied consumers of JCC services into involved members of Jewish communities.

The rationale for the emphasis on community-building is straightforward:

1. Jews (and other Americans) have experienced a decline in community.
2. Jews, especially those who already connect to the JCC, say they want community, even more than others.
3. The JCCs enjoy a distinctive collection of assets to facilitate the building of community, both within the JCC, and in conjunction with the synagogue and other Jewish institutions.

This report details the conclusions of nearly a year of research. Our methods included structured and unstructured conversations with lay leadership, JCC professional staff, and, most critically, with JCC members and non-member users (e.g., parents of pre-schoolers, parents of campers, users of cultural services). We conducted individual in-depth interviews, a half dozen formal focus groups, and a telephone social science survey of 733 leaders, members and users of the JCCs of Greater Boston (see Appendix A for details).

## **America's Jews and the Loss of Community**

Ever since their arrival to the "New World," America's Jews have participated in a familiar American saga – the evaporation of organic community and its replacement by associational networks. We have witnessed the decline of the Jewish neighborhood, the decline of the extended family, and the near-disappearance of a distinctive Jewish language.

America's assault on the traditional organic Jewish community was only in small part explicit. To be sure, there was a heavy emphasis at one point on "Americanization." Nevertheless, the American pot would have melted even without such formal efforts. The dazzling geographic and economic mobility this nation offered even its newest citizens hastened the defeat of the organic community. So, too, did the almost sacred status accorded the autonomous individual as embodied in a bias towards individual rights.

Jews, of course, have alternately embraced and rejected these patterns and opportunities. In recent times, a near-universal consensus has emerged that our efforts must be concentrated on the encouragement of meaningful Jewish communities. It is no accident that the merged United Jewish Appeal and Council of Jewish Federations took the name "United Jewish Communities." It is surely no accident – to the contrary – that the heart of Boston's Combined Jewish Philanthropies' recent strategic plan asserts explicitly that CJP's purpose is to foster the development of "vibrant" Jewish communities.

## **Defining Community in Our Times**

We must be clear from the outset about what we mean by "community" in the contemporary environment.

For this project, we came to define community – any community – as a group characterized by the following traits:

1. Members of communities frequently interact with one another.
2. They share some common purposes. For Jews this has historically meant some combination of mutual assistance and caring (tzedek and hesed), learning and education (Talmud Torah), as well as worship (avodah) and ritual practice.
3. They share some common physical spaces.

4. They share a sense of group identity, nurtured by shared experiences and memories, as embodied in the stories they tell one another.
5. They comfort one another, in both good times and bad, particularly at times that mark important transitions.
6. They share common cultural symbols and experiences.

Clearly, this working definition differs from others that are current in Jewish communal environs. Obviously, it does not correspond to the organized Jewish community, and it is a far cry from what we may call the “comprehensive community.”

The comprehensive community, the community that essentially serves all purposes, is very much a thing of the past. That all-encompassing community was always a mixed blessing, offering its members an extraordinary level of security along with an often terrifying insularity; much fraternity, sometimes equality, too, but very little freedom. People may wistfully wax nostalgic regarding the virtues of the shtetl, or small town, or the old urban Jewish neighborhood. But most Jews today are clear that they are unwilling to embed themselves in a stable all-purpose community, the kind that urges at least emotional and often physical exclusivity on its members.

People today are engaged in an array of communities simultaneously, often with very little overlap among them. The communities of husbands and wives are often divergent, in sharp contrast with those of their parents who often shared highly overlapping circles of lifelong friends. Geographic neighborhood is no longer a common focus of community, as it surely was just two generations ago, or less. People pass in and out of the communities to which they belong, and only rarely regard these transitions as major disruptions to their lives or their sense of self. Time-bound communities (summer camps, for example) can emerge as the source of the most poignant community-related memories (as many of our respondents, in fact, reported).

The question before us, then, is not whether we can mount a revolution that will restore to us the fraternity we have lost – and thereby deny us the freedom we have gained. The question is, instead, whether we can enrich our communal life in ways appropriate to the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This object may mean selectively strengthening and deepening some aspects of our associational life, and it may also mean inventing new

structures and opportunities that will be more sustaining than what we now have available.

We take this to be an important question – for the individual, for the Jewish community, and, indeed, for America.

From the standpoint of the individual, the deficiency of a sense of stable location in an increasingly complex and even chaotic world, and, more poignantly still, the lack of a sense of meaning, of purpose in life, are persistent complaints. They are regarded by social psychologists who explore such matters as evidence of a major societal failure.

Note the language: a *societal* failure rather than a personal failure. America presents itself as a celebration of the individual, and in important respects, its celebration of the self is warranted. But, when the person who is put at the center of things comes there alone, bereft of stabilizing bonds and nurturing relationships, the celebration sours. For the price of such lonely autonomy is more, much more, than most people can afford – and more than most will confess paying. We make do with what we have, with what we are given, we root for the home team and shop and know the names of this quarter hour's celebrities, and we try to ignore what's missing in our lives.

And the Jewish community? The Jews were never only a confessional faith, an aggregation of people with similar theological beliefs and convictions. We were, we are, the Jewish *people*, as mysterious and often confusing as the notion of a non-landed people has been. At the heart of the Jewish experience – at least until recently – is the phenomenon of *reunion*, of encountering another Jew of whatever ideological and theological disposition, and knowing that Jew to be family.

Once, the Jewish connection included language, included the experience of oppression, included an array of cultural dispositions (ranging from antipathy to hunting to left-wing politics). Jews, then, could and did recognize one another. But all these attributes presuppose socialization into a tight community; they assume a common cultural background. Obviously, that assumption is no longer warranted. The once-active connection has become, for most Jews, residual.

Indeed, as recent FGH/JCCA-sponsored research (Steven M. Cohen's *Religious Stability and Ethnic Decline*) demonstrates, processes of fraying connections and weakening community have taken place among American Jews. The well-known rise in

intermarriage is but one aspect of a much larger phenomenon of the attenuation of many sorts of ties between Jews and Jews. As compared with their elders, younger Jewish adults report not only fewer Jewish spouses (that is, a higher rate of intermarriage), they also report fewer Jewish close friends and neighbors. Fewer young Jewish adults than elderly ones belong to Jewish institutions. Fewer value Jewish community as a desirable end in itself. Fewer feel attached to Israel, and consistent with all of this, fewer express a deep sense of belonging to the Jewish people.

Moreover, all these trends statistically relate to one another, so weaker ties of one sort predict weaker ties elsewhere. The mixed married belong to fewer Jewish institutions, the institutionally unaffiliated score lower on attachment to Jewish peoplehood, and those with few Jewish friends express less support for Israel. These features are, in part, alternate expressions of a lessening of Jewish ethnicity, of the Jewish collective experience, and most simply, of Jewish community.

### **The Jewish Community Center as a Locus of Community Building**

As Steven M. Cohen and Arnold Eisen demonstrate in their research on *The Jew Within*, (Indiana University Press 2000) contemporary American Jews have drawn the passions of their group identity inward. When they do find Jewish meaning, it is in the self, the family, and the institutions that serve, in effect, as extensions of the family. These include the synagogue, the school, and the Jewish Community Center. In contrast, American Jews have become less invested in large fraternal organizations, centralized communal philanthropy, and local or world Jewish politics, including those that relate to Israel. In short, the relative balance of investment in what may be called the Jewish public and private spheres has shifted in favor of the latter.

With respect to the synagogue, anthropologist Riv Ellen Prell describes congregations as “scripted communities,” offering their members normative conceptions of Judaism, often expressed in choreographed rites and ceremonies. For some Jews – and their numbers have grown of late – such structured environments work well. But it is plain, given the extravagant diversity of American Jews and the concomitant variety of motives they bring to being and doing Jewish, that no single institution, no matter how magically transformed, can be “right” for everyone.

Indeed, in our many conversations with JCC users, members, and leaders, we learned in some detail of the considerably diversity in community experiences that people seek and find. Some communities are more compelling and others less so, and not all individuals saw the most compelling, cohesive, and meaningful communities as always the most desirable. As one of our focus group respondents remarked, "We also want meaning-LESS communities." Alternatively, some may find meaning outside of structured communities altogether. A JCC board member commented, "A lot of people who are not involved are looking for meaning in other ways like in meditation or in non-institutional kinds of settings...they are somewhat distrustful of institutions."

It in no way derogates from the central status of the synagogue to suggest that in seeking to expand opportunities for the experience of community, we will need to mobilize a variety of institutions. In particular, we will need to focus especially on those that have direct contact with large numbers of Jewish individuals.

Next to the synagogue, no other Jewish agency has such direct contact with the Jewish population to a greater degree than does the Jewish Community Center, itself a dramatically "unscripted" institution. At any one moment, 17% of American Jews (or nearly a million of them) officially belong to JCCs, to say nothing of nearly as many who use JCC services on a non-member basis. The JCCs' broad range of activities, and their tradition of community organization, with their classic assertion of non-judgmental facilitation, renders the Centers particularly able to "meet Jews where they are." As one of our focus group participants remarked,

The only reason why we will join [the synagogue] when we do is because my children need to get bar and bat mitzvahed. ... [In contrast,] I find the JCC here has really opened their arms to our family, my children, and myself... I am a culturally Jewish person. I am not a religious Jewish person at all. I don't really do the high holidays, but I'm very proud to be a Jew. I don't think anybody judges me here for that or even cares what I do regardless.

There can be no "one size fits all" approach to building community. Not only are communities numerous and segmented; their significance varies considerably and changes over time and over the life cycle. Individuals leave some communities and join new ones, even as they treasure the memories of the communities they have left. Whole

communities dissolve, and others, with different constellations of members, emerge to take their places. A JCC Board member pointed to some unconventional notions of community when he said:

Something that might not seem meaningful to you [can be] meaningful to them [less active people]. The mere fact of being in a place where a vast majority of the people, walking around, or working out, or doing whatever, are Jewish - giving them a sense of community whether or not they are experiencing it in a way that you and I like to experience a sense of community ...some people get something out of that. Just the fact of working out with ...people that have Jewish surnames, it's important to them, for some reason, that no one seems to be able to articulate.

Even within a particular JCC, the quality and character of sub-communities dramatically vary. One JCC Board member observed,

We know darn well that our Jewish Community Center has a whole bunch of definable communities within the JCC, as well as others that we can't quite put our arms around just yet. What's meaningful is going to differ within each. What's meaningful to a daycare parent is different from what is meaningful to people like ourselves.

If, further, as is clearly the case, we do not yet know nearly enough about what kinds of communities are most likely to "take," to become central to their members lives, then the historic flexibility and adaptiveness of JCCs becomes a valuable resource. In turn, the JCCs themselves become an inviting locus for investment by the larger community in the challenge we here recommend.

Ever-quickenning social and cultural changes challenge the JCCs historic mission of building and housing Jewish community. If JCCs are to continue to build community effectively and successfully, they will need to adjust their policies, programs and practices to the highly dynamic nature of American society generally, and of American Jewry in particular. Rapid social change demands agility and creativity in strategic thinking and in professional practice. This meaningful Jewish community initiative, on the part of the JCCs of Greater Boston, can be seen as part of a larger effort by the Center movement to respond to recent developments in the surrounding society and Jewish population.

The present challenge is to use the Boston Jewish Community Centers as a pilot project for the entire nation, testing whether the Centers can become central to Boston Jewry's commitment to community-building. We believe the Centers can do this directly for a significant number of their members. By working in careful conjunction with synagogues and other local institutions, they can also do so indirectly for many others.

If they move in the direction here proposed, we expect that:

- Centers will become places where significantly more new friendships among members and users are formed;
- the Centers will work more closely and effectively with other agencies and institutions, including the synagogues, as well as cultural, charitable, and social justice-oriented agencies;
- in due course, there will emerge a measurably more cohesive Boston Jewish community, characterized by increased formal affiliation and institutional commitment; and
- of absolutely key importance, Boston Jewry will be characterized by a measurable change, a deepening in the sense of "belonging" to the Boston Jewish community – and to the Jewish people – on the part of Boston's Jews.

### **The Distinctive Assets of the JCC for Community-Building**

The JCCs bring to the challenge of encouraging meaningful Jewish communities a variety of relevant traditions and strengths. Among these:

The JCCs draw upon large and wide populations.

At the same time, the small group that is the key organizational form within the JCC is an especially inviting venue for the formation of intimate community.

The JCCs are distinguished by their sponsorship of a wide variety of sought-after services (e.g., preschool, camping, cultural arts). Accordingly, and as distinguished from many other Jewish institutions, the JCCs have a large "natural" clientele. The conscious effort to generate communities within that clientele is a case of adding value to a desirable product rather than "selling" community per se, and is therefore likely to be seen as less threatening than otherwise it might.

- JCC services are directly keyed to particular family life stage configurations, bringing together people of similar needs and interests – i.e., ripe for more intense and intimate interaction.
- The JCCs continually create time-bound communities of varying degrees of intensity. Notwithstanding their limited duration as communities (perhaps a summer, perhaps four years), they can have an enduring impact on their members.
- The JCCs are historically open to diverse constituencies, including Jews at all stages of the family life cycle, and from all social classes and ideological and cultural backgrounds.
- The JCCs are ideologically open and inherently pluralistic. They accept the many forms of Jewish expression, and welcome Jews of all religious denominations and cultural orientations, valuing the contribution to Jewish life of Orthodoxy, Conservatism, Reform, Reconstructionism, Zionism, and other major Jewish movements.
- While the JCCs are supportive of Jewish religious sensibility and expression, JCCs are not “about” religion per se. Their explicit focus is on Jewish culture, broadly defined, and on the Jewish lifecycle, both especially rich arenas for the development of intimate community.

Drawing upon these assets, the JCCs can offer a venue for experiencing Jewish peoplehood, in all its parts. Jewish “peoplehood” is mediated through living Jewish communities. Building upon the historic JCC mission, our initiative points to a renewed emphasis on building personal connections and relationships as a fundamental element of community building. This approach is particularly appropriate for an age in which highly mobile and socially successful Jews are sensitive to the loss of meaningful community in their lives.

In addition to building community on a grand scale (a traditional JCC function), our approach consciously focuses on building community in naturally occurring small groups at the JCC. The preschool, the camp, the senior citizens programs, the cultural arts workshops, and the physical fitness facilities - to name just a few - are all potential venues for the creation of connections, friendships, and thus communities. . All of these can be seen as potential candidates for increased involvement in Meaningful Jewish Community, be it near and intimate, or more grand and more distant.

The JCC professional staff, volunteers, and lay leaders in these and other settings are all potential community-builders. As such, they face common challenges and must draw on common skills and experiences. This approach, then, is one that allows JCC staff and lay leaders to speak a common language. It promotes working across rather than only within the natural divisions between JCC departments and functional areas. It is an approach that generates, for the JCC, a clear and consistent purpose when working with JCC members and users.

### **The JCC Constituency**

The JCC constituency consists of both members and non-member users of JCC services. In Greater Boston, approximately 26,000 individuals live in JCC member-households, and the adult Jews among them are about 16% of all the adult Jews in the metropolitan area. Beyond this membership core are tens of thousands of other users of JCCs services. Some are intensive service users, such as youngsters who attend camps, or those who participate regularly in ongoing cultural arts classes and workshops. Some are less intensive service users, such as those who attend an occasional lecture, theatre performance, or Jewish book fair. Still others are touched indirectly by the JCCs via their children or other family members who are more direct service users. The large number of those who, in one way or another, experience a connection to the JCCs testifies to the great reach of JCC programs. Those programs take place at two main JCC centers, and at no less than eleven additional physical facilities throughout the metropolitan area.

Taken as a whole, the JCC membership, as might be expected, is demographically, and socio-economically diverse, and embraces, as well, people with very different definitions and expressions of their own Jewish identity. That is, in a sense, as it should be: JCCs nationwide pride themselves on their ability to reach diverse population groups. However, notwithstanding their diversity, JCC members are not a perfectly random, representative cross-section of Jewry at large. Rather they are distinguished from other Jews in several ways, three of which are especially relevant for this discussion.

**More conventional Jewish families:** In Boston (and elsewhere), JCC members are disproportionately found in families headed by married couples with children. In addition, they consist of a larger proportion than the general population of married older

adults. Both groups are also disproportionately in-married. Conversely, the JCC membership somewhat under-represents young adult single people, and falls off as well among the mixed married and couples without children.

• **JCC members are disproportionately found in families headed by married couples with children.**

	<u>Non-members</u>	<u>JCC members</u>
Married	64%	74%
Widowed	5%	6%
Divorced	7%	4%
Never Married	<u>24%</u>	<u>16%</u>
	100%	100%
Children at home	35%	45%

Source: 1995 CJP Jewish population study

These patterns are understandable in light of the most popular services offered by the JCCs, which include preschools, summer camps, and senior adult programs. In these respects, and in others noted below, the membership patterns of Boston's JCCs resemble those found among JCCs around the country, as a recent JCCA national study documents.

Consistent with the large presence of conventional families among the JCC membership population, JCC members report strong interests in socializing with their family members at the JCC. Given a variety of features of programming at the JCC, the one our survey found most attractive by far was: "The activity is designed for both you and your children." (As many as 53% saw this feature as "very important.")

**More Jewishly involved:** JCCs have an image of appealing to Jews from a very wide range of Jewish involvement, including the least involved. Moreover, many members are initially drawn to the JCC not for explicit reasons of Jewish commitment. Rather, they come to avail themselves of child-care or physical fitness services, services that hold no special appeal to the most Jewishly engaged members of the population. Indeed, it has been generally assumed that JCCs, Boston's among them, attract people who are relatively under-involved in Jewish life.

In fact, however, as we learn from the CJP Boston Jewish population survey, JCC members outscore non-members on every conceivable measure of Jewish involvement.

They practice more rituals at home, join congregations with greater frequency, attend religious services more often, belong to more Jewish organizations, sit on more boards and committees, and donate more readily and more generously to the CJP campaign than non-members.

Several factors help explain these tendencies. One is that the JCC attracts a somewhat more affluent population, and affluence bears a direct relationship to many forms of Jewish affiliatory behaviors. Another consideration is the significant representation of seniors; older Jews tend to score higher on many measures of Jewish involvement. Not least is that the JCC appeals to Jews who are attracted to the company of other Jews and to what they see as a compelling Jewish atmosphere.

Accordingly, our survey of members and users finds that three-quarters see themselves as "part of the Boston Jewish community," and about nine of ten agree that "I feel I am part of the Jewish people." A majority report that half or more of their close friends are Jewish. Most belong to synagogues, and about half claim to attend religious services monthly or more (and insofar as they exaggerate, they are testifying to their sense that they believe that they *should* be in shul at least monthly). Almost all survey respondents report attending Passover seders and lighting Chanukah candles, while hardly any "usually" have a Christmas tree in their home. (Almost all who do are among the small number of interfaith families.)

**JCC members join congregations with more frequency and practice more rituals.**

	<b><u>Non-members</u></b>	<b><u>JCC members</u></b>
Don't have a Christmas tree	90%	93%
Light Hanukkah candles	83%	92%
Have a Seder	70%	85%
Synagogue Member	46%	65%
Fast on Yom Kippur	42%	52%
Observe Sabbath as special	24%	38%
Attend services monthly	20%	34%
Light Shabbat candles	13%	28%
Follow Jewish dietary laws	10%	16%
Don't drive on Sabbath	3%	7%
Read Jewish media	37%	49%
Participated in Jewish education in the past year	23%	47%
Served in a position in a Jewish organization	18%	30%

Source: 1995 CJP Jewish population study

Our survey respondents and our focus group interviewees, each in their own way, report that they like the Jewish atmosphere of the JCC and the company of other Jews. For example, the users of physical fitness facilities, who might be expected to among those who care the least about such matters, report that the Jewish atmosphere of the JCC is an attractive feature for them. In fact, it partially compensates for the fact that the JCC fitness equipment is not seen as quite the state-of-the-art that is available in local commercial facilities. On the survey, only a few term the atmosphere "too Jewish," while the vast majority say it is "about right" or even "not Jewish enough." As one preschool parent commented, "I want to make sure that my child grows up feeling very proud of being Jewish. That's why I am here in this school. I want to learn as much as I can to teach her as well".

Clearly, the JCC constituency is positively predisposed to the Jewish character of the JCC. Insofar as it is seeking community experiences, both users and members are favorably disposed to doing so with other Jews in a Jewish environment. By and large, its

Jewishness is an appealing feature of the JCC. Note, however, that the Jewishness these people expect and value at the JCC is open, non-judgmental, "unscripted."

**Largely upscale:** Consistent with the JCCA survey of JCC members across the country, Boston JCC members and users are very highly educated. About two-thirds of the families include someone with a post-graduate degree. Commensurate with their high educational profile, Boston area JCC members under the age of 65 are even more affluent than the otherwise affluent Boston area Jewish population.

These circumstances provide both obstacles and assets to community-building. Insofar as the members and users are affluent, they have the financial means to support high-quality services. As one JCC leader remarked about his own family, "You have dual incomes and you want the best for your children." At the same time, if dissatisfied, they are also able to look elsewhere. A JCC Board member told us, "People want to get something for their dollar. If they're not getting something for their dollar, they're going to drop out of the community center." They bring sophistication to the JCC environment, which means they are demanding consumers.

**JCC members under age 65 are more affluent than the general Boston area Jewish population.**

	<u>Non-members</u>	<u>JCC members</u>
\$200,000+	6%	13%
\$100-200,000	20%	16%
\$50-100,000	32%	36%
\$15-50,000	30%	22%
<\$15,000	<u>12%</u>	<u>13%</u>
	100%	100%

Source: 1995 CJP Jewish population study

Indeed, to a small extent, affluent members find the JCC a stronger source of community. Those with the highest income report the firmest ties, both with respect to the JCC as a whole and with respect to the program (preschool or camp) with which they are involved. In contrast, affluence does not promote increased ties to the synagogue.

**Affluence is associated with increased attachment to the JCC, but not to the synagogue.**

	<u>Attached to The JCC</u>	<u>Attached to JCC Program</u>	<u>Attached to Synagogue</u>
Income:			
\$150,000+	56%	65%	73%
\$75,000-149,999	51%	49%	72%
Under \$75,000	48%	40%	71%

Source: 1995 CJP Jewish population study

Their upscale circumstance is accompanied by devotion to careers and achievement – and, concomitantly, high levels of stress. Almost a third say they lead a stressful life "to a great extent," and over two-thirds say they lead such a life to at least "some extent." When asked about how much time they have "to do things other than attend to your work and family responsibilities," over three-quarters answer "a little" or "none at all." A JCC leader commented:

So now I drop my children off, and I go off to work for 14 hours, and I or someone else comes back and picks up my children. I don't have time to work out here. I don't have time to be involved in committees. I don't have time to have this be any more than a place where my children go to school.

Another leader commented:

Many of us around this table have tried to reach out to our community to get them more involved ...I walk away disappointed too often. Maybe it all comes down to our cockamamie lives, the way we live, that they're so busy, that they're so insane. That we're rushing and running so far and so fast, it's so diluted that it's just like 'leave me alone, I don't have any time for that'.

Another consequence of education and affluence is that these upscale Jews are highly computer-oriented. Almost all use a personal computer, use e-mail, and sign on the Internet. This computer literacy, a function of their education and affluence, opens an as yet under-utilized channel for contact and communication.

JCC constituents are heavy users of a wide array of cultural services. As such, they are ideally situated to support expanded cultural services, and largely seem interested in doing so. On balance, the JCC's upscale constituency presents a valuable

resource for community building in many respects, even as it sets a high standard for quality and sophistication.

**Percentage of JCC members who have engaged in selected cultural activities during the past year.**

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Gone to a museum	83%
Attended a musical performance or concert	80%
Saw a play or musical	76%
Gone to an art gallery	57%
Attended a Jewish Book Fair	44%
Attended a dance performance	42%
Pursued a hobby in arts or crafts	38%
Participated in a book discussion group	28%
Attended performance of Jewish Theater of New England	25%

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Source: 1999 MJC Survey of JCC Members and Users

Amidst this affluence, we also take pains to stress that some JCC members and users experience financial barriers to participation in community via the JCC. One preschool parent remarked: "To be perfectly honest, we do have economic realities. [That's] the reason that we didn't join the temple yet. There's X many dollars. But I feel threatened by that, in the sense that I really have grown to enjoy the experience here [at the JCC], and I wonder what happens after...Is there life after the four-year-old classroom?" Another commented, "We'll join a temple in two years when we don't have to pay our JCC membership dues [because the child will be out of the preschool]. We have a little money every month we'll put to it. It's kind of an either-or situation."

Currently, disaffiliating families lose contact with the JCC once they are removed from the members' mailing lists. The departing members pose a challenge for the JCC: How to maintain connection and community with former service users who become former members as well.

Once again, we are reminded of the realities of a diverse constituency. Creating policies and programs attractive to the upscale majority, and also welcoming to those less well-off calls for enormous creativity and sensitivity. This sensitivity is essential if the JCC is to be home to communities that embrace individuals with all levels of affluence.

## Seeking and Finding Community at the Boston JCCs

The Jews who are drawn to JCCs, or other Jewish institutions, are precisely the sort who seek (and experience) community more than others. In our survey, over two-thirds of the members and just under two-thirds of the users answered that feeling they "are part of a community" is "very important" to them. These figures are comparable to those found among the JCC members in the CJP study of Boston area Jewry, and substantially greater than among comparable non-members in the CJP study. In our survey, majorities of synagogue members and of JCC members agree that they join these particular institutions "in order to find community" either "to a great extent" or "to some extent." Most respondents on our survey say they are interested in "making new friends" to at least "some extent."

Within the Boston JCCs, preschool parents are especially prone to seek and find community. More than most (and the mothers more than the fathers), preschool parents seek greater connection with others at the JCC. One parent's story is fairly representative: "I joined for the education for my daughter, for day care. ... She was the one who wanted to go to all the other activities that were here, and I started going and becoming more and more involved, and now I feel it's our whole family." A former preschool father spoke of the mothering group at the JCC preschool as the beginnings of significant community for his wife. He remarked: "In the case of my wife, that started a friendship that actually has continued and [now] it's located in one of the temples. ... It kept going. It was the JCC preschool, but it was a natural stepping stone."

Consistent with this imagery, on our survey, majorities of the respondents say they would be interested in:

- "getting to know more of the other parents in the JCC preschool;"
- "receiving addresses and phone number of the other parents;"
- releasing their own addresses and phone numbers to other parents, and
- "in participating in some programs with the other parents."

Our personal interviews uncovered a refinement of these findings. While we certainly observed reasonable interest in meeting other parents of youngsters in the JCC camps or preschools, we also encountered some hesitancy about participating in formal programs. The parents of preschool youngsters spoke of wanting the JCC to *facilitate*

community (as by providing lists of local parents); they are skittish about a JCC effort to *program* community. This is an important distinction, with implications for both staff training and for inter-institutional initiatives.

In all sectors, we find that members and users relate positively to the JCC. Most are satisfied with, and many are enthusiastic about, the high quality of services offered by the JCC. A preschool parent remarked, "I wanted to do the absolute best for my kids, and I found myself researching preschools, and nothing that I looked at had what I wanted...then I kept seeing JCC, JCC, JCC. This is our third year and we love it." At the same time, they value the opportunity for the association with other Jews that the JCC offers. Both considerations -- quality services and Jewish context -- draw them to the JCC or to specific JCC programs.

Not only do members and users seek community at the JCC. Many seem to find it there. To some extent, then, *the JCC already creates community*. We find evidence of this phenomenon even among those who come to the JCC without a specific prior thought of finding community. For many, the JCC builds friendships. Most of the JCC members on our survey credited the JCC with developing "friendships as a result of your connection with the JCC" to at least some extent. The JCC engenders attachment to the JCC as well as to its particular programs. Most members claim that they feel attached to the JCC, again, to at least "some extent," and a far greater number of preschool parents feel that way about the preschool. This finding confirms an inference gleaned from our focus groups. Certain programs (especially the preschool for mothers, or the cardiac rehabilitation activities, an outside-sponsored activity that takes place at the JCC) breed attachment, friendship, and community more readily than does the JCC as a whole.

**JCC members widely report they have found community at the JCC.**

	<u>Members</u>	<u>Non-members</u>
Belong to community at the JCC	76%	26%
Feel attached to the JCC	76%	24%
The JCC provides community	78%	51%
Made some friends at JCC	64%	24%

Source: 1995 CJP Jewish population study

Affiliation with the JCC accompanies, and may even actually stimulate, growing relationships with other Jewish institutions and with Jewish life more generally. As noted earlier, the JCC certainly attracts those who are institutionally connected elsewhere in Jewish life, or soon will expand their institutional connections. At the same time, the JCC seems to foster Jewish involvement in many ways. Our analysis of the survey respondents shows a healthy relationship between years of JCC membership and several measures of Jewish involvement.

To elaborate, we compared levels of Jewish involvement among three groups of JCC members, according to years of membership (1-2 years, 3-6 years, 7 or more years). All measures move upward with increasing years of JCC membership. For example, comparing the most recently affiliated (1-2 years) with JCC veterans (7 or more years), we find that synagogue membership rates jump from 47% to 77%. At the same time, frequency of donation to the CJP climbs from 40% to 62%; and service as a board or committee member of a Jewish organization nearly doubles, rising from 13% to 25%.

**Measures of Jewish involvement increase with years of JCC membership.**

Duration of JCC Membership:	<u>1-2 years</u>	<u>3-6 years</u>	<u>+7+ years</u>
Being Jewish is important	17%	23%	26%
Observe ritual	59%	68%	69%
Synagogue member	47%	69%	77%
CJP donor	40%	61%	62%
Leader of Jewish Organization	13%	17%	25%

Source: 1999 MJC Survey of JCC Members and Users

These results are even more impressive when contrasted with the comparable relationships with years of synagogue membership. The results are non-uniform, with some measures declining, some holding steady, some fluctuating, and just one (CJP donations) increasing over time. Interestingly, although synagogue membership rises with increasing years of JCC affiliation, JCC membership declines with increasing years of synagogue membership. Apparently, some JCC members drop their JCC affiliation at the time they acquire congregational membership or soon thereafter.

**Measures of Jewish involvement bear mixed relationships with years of synagogue membership.**

Duration of synagogue membership:	<u>1-2 years</u>	<u>3-6 years</u>	<u>7+ years</u>
Being Jewish is important	32%	24%	22%
Observe ritual	70%	72%	76%
JCC member	78%	62%	50%
Active in CJP	42%	51%	63%
Leader of Jewish Organization	16%	16%	17%

Source: 1999 MJC Survey of JCC Members and Users

The point here is that the JCC already builds community, even without a specific emphasis on community-building, as a regular and routine by-product of its standard operation. It builds community internally, that is, within the JCC and its programs. It also builds community externally, as evidenced by increasing rates of involvement in other Jewish institutions.

**Who Finds Community In and Around the JCC?**

Some aspects of the JCC produce community more than others do. The preschools are especially effective in generating a sense of community and attachment. In addition, the JCC boards and committees, which often serve as the primary locus of Jewish community experience for their members, breed substantial amounts of attachment and relationship-building. Like almost all other institutions in American Jewish life, JCCs do not particularly conceive of boards and committees as opportunities for community-building or for Jewish learning. Yet, despite the lack of specific attention to these important functions, we had no doubt that meaningful Jewish communities exist and that Jewish learning experiences, and individual Jewish growth take place in those bodies. This finding suggests that additional opportunities for community building and learning are available if board experiences come to be used this way more deliberately.

Certain socio-demographic characteristics are associated with higher rates of community-building and of experiencing community. For example, women tend to report JCC attachments more than men. Those who live closer to a JCC facility are not only more likely to join. They are also more likely to experience a sense of attachment to the

people and programs of the JCC, in large part because they also attend more often, and use more services.

Attachment to the JCC, community experiences in the JCC, and affiliation with other Jewish institutions, are all related to duration of membership in the JCC. In other words – no great surprise here – JCC members seem to grow in their attachment to the JCC by virtue of remaining members of, and being active in, the JCC.

**JCC members' ties to the JCC grow with increasing years of membership.**

(Entries are percentages highly attached to the JCC)

7+ years	45%
3-6 years	42%
1-2 years	33%

Source: 1999 MJC Survey of JCC Members and Users

Similarly, members and users who avail themselves of a wider array of services in the JCC experience more attachment and community in the JCC. The policy implications here are straightforward: One is to promote repeated and diverse use of JCC services by current members and users; the other is to engineer new ways of affiliation and participation that increase opportunities for repeated interaction.

**Ties to the JCC increase with the use of a wider array of JCC services.**

(Entries are percentages highly attached to JCC).

4 services	42%
3 services	35%
2 services	30%
1 service	16%

Source: 1999 MJC Survey of JCC Members and Users

Those with more frequent contact with the JCC, that is, more actual physical presence in the facility, also report higher levels of attachment and connection. This impact is felt beyond the extent of the array of services they utilize.

Critical as well to JCC community-building is the availability of physical environments where people can meet others to "schmooze," "hang out," and get acquainted. These spatial conditions allow people to establish connections that go beyond

the JCC activities they began with, and even beyond the JCC itself. The interactions range from parents meeting in the hall as they drop off their preschool children and making "play dates," to board members attending each other's life-cycle celebrations.

Independently, numerous interview sessions turned to the issue of space utilization, with concern expressed most frequently for the near-total absence of space for naturally occurring socializing at the Leventhal-Sidman branch, the larger of Boston JCCs' two main facilities. Professionals and members spoke of the far warmer environment at the Striar branch which does indeed contain numerous gathering areas and lounges. A preschool parent noted, "The JCC preschool in Canton is very much a community for my child, but not for me. There's no sitting spot...I mean downstairs, the moms get there early, and they can sit and visit, and catch-up but you're encouraged to just drop off and pick up there. Here [at Striar] it does [work], there's space for that [meeting other moms]." Another preschool mother's complaints about her limited access to appropriate space at Striar further testifies to the importance of such space:

Well, I'll go to the family room [at Striar], and then I looked at the hours and it's like never open. Where can I go that's comfortable and the kids can be happy?... There is a living room down the hallway but it's just chairs... That could be a place for people to sit if there was just something there for the kids to do.

Further evidence for the importance of space and architecture emerged in our survey research. Using comparable measures, JCC members at Striar reported levels of JCC attachment and levels of attachment to the JCC preschool or summer camp that substantially exceed those members at the Leventhal-Sidman facility. On scales of 0.00 to 1.00, Striar members averaged 0.59 versus 0.48 for the Leventhal-Sidman members.

These differences cannot be attributed to the character of the individuals themselves – that is, the Striar members are not, by their nature, more predisposed to forming community. When asked about finding community at their synagogues, members of both branches scored about equally. The availability of suitable space, and its configuration, seems the best logical explanation of the disparities in rates of finding community at the two major JCC facilities. The Striar building contains a number of areas specifically designated as lounges, gathering points, and conversation areas. Its corridors are more spacious and inviting. Its welcome desk is located at the front door,

rather than across a great expanse of space (akin to a hotel lobby with a registration desk) as is the case in Leventhal-Sidman. All these spatial elements and more undoubtedly contribute to the community-enhancing qualities of the Striar building.

**Striar members report higher levels of JCC attachment than Leventhal-Sidman members.**

	<u>JCC</u>	<u>Program</u>
Striar	59%	57%
Leventhal-Sidman	48%	48%
MetroWest	42%	45%

Source: 1999 MJC Survey of JCC Members and Users

In sum, we have identified those with greater likelihood of finding community at the JCC. In particular their characteristics are as follows:

Affiliation with the pre-school, boards, committees, or other activities with demonstrated extraordinary community-building potency.

- Women (rather than men).
- Residential proximity to a major JCC facilities.
- Long-term affiliation with the JCC.
- Members rather than users of JCC services.
- Broad use of JCC services, rather than using few sorts of services
- Frequent appearance in a JCC facility.
- Affiliation with Striar rather than Leventhal-Sidman .

Those with many of these features score high on measures of community and attachment to the JCCs and to their particular programs-as-communities (specifically, preschool and the camps). Those at the other extreme, naturally, score far lower on these measures.

Not only have we learned of the factors influencing the likelihood of finding community in the JCC. Our research also points to some crucial consequences of finding community—or of not finding it. Every year, substantial numbers of JCC members fail to renew their memberships. For the individual, this development means diminished contact with the JCC and its members, and to those other facets of Jewish communal life to which JCC activities lead. For the JCC it means diminished financial support and the loss

of people who are familiar to the JCC community. These consequences are certainly undesirable.

We learn from the analysis of the survey data that the experience of community at the JCC constitutes a moderately powerful predictor of the commitment to renew one's JCC membership. The effect is especially pronounced among parents of preschool children. Among those scoring low on the index of finding community at the JCC, just 63% plan to renew their JCC membership. In contrast, of those with even a moderate score on this index, as many as 95% claim they will renew.

**Finding community in the JCC increases commitment to renew JCC membership among pre-school parents.**

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<u>JCC Community Attachment</u>	<u>Percent Intending to Renew Membership</u>
High	86%
Moderate	95%
Low	63%

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Source: 1999 MJC Survey of JCC Members and Users

The implication from this finding is that the building of friendships and community within the JCC will engender further institutional strength through higher membership renewal rates. Building community at the JCC is not just a matter of good ideals, it is also a good business practice.

**Congregations and JCCs: Complementary Institutions**

As a rule, JCC members who are synagogue members (and a substantial majority do belong to congregations) also report frequent and close community ties to their congregations. Empirically, JCC membership and synagogue membership are statistically related—*those who join one institution are more likely to join the other*. In terms of simple membership then, mutual support occurs more frequently than competition. Joiners join, and Jewish joiners tend to join both JCCs *and* congregations.

Among members of both institutions, joiners par excellence, one might think that JCC involvement (as distinguished from “mere” membership) interferes with synagogue

involvement, or vice versa. After all, the organizational cultures of the two institutions are distinctive, and, more importantly, people have only a fixed amount of time for friends, relationships, and community. In fact, our survey evidence contradicts this assumption. Among those who are members of both institutions, those who are more attached to one are also slightly more attached to the other. In other words, we find that experiencing community at the JCC does not come at the expense of finding community at the synagogue. The correlation between the two measures is low, but it is positive, rather than negative, as the hypothesis of competing community loyalties would predict.

We also find that *members of both institutions score higher on all measures of Jewish involvement than do those who are members of just one of them*. This findings testifies to the synergy of congregational and JCC involvement. Most critically, as noted earlier, synagogue membership grows considerably along with the duration of membership in the JCC. The JCC experience apparently does nothing to limit synagogue involvement; in fact, it may do much to expose individuals to the people and experiences that lead them to opt for membership in congregations. The preschools, in particular, function this way as stepping stones. Here, too, what now happens "by itself" - albeit with staff assistance - could be even more powerful if explicitly supported by agency policy.

Overall, the findings suggest strongly that **JCCs and other congregations work to complement one another rather than compete with one another**. Each serves an overlapping constituency, and each appeals to some who prefer one institution over the other.

### **Culture Users: An Opportunity for Expanded Service**

JCC members and users are major consumers of cultural services; they widely attend cultural events and participate in cultural activities. Substantial majorities of respondents go to museums, concerts or other musical performances, plays, and musicals. About a third pursues hobbies in arts and crafts, and a quarter participates in book discussion groups.

We also note that the JCC has already identified a culture-oriented public. The survey sample segment known as "culture users" consists of those drawn from the users of the variety of cultural services offered by the JCC. Although a hodge-podge of groups,

taken collectively, this sample segment reports even higher rates of cultural activity consumption and participation than do other sample segments. Of course, the finding itself is not at all surprising. But it does substantiate the notion that by virtue of its current activities, the JCC has successfully attracted and can potentially reach thousands of Jews with above-average interest in cultural programs.

Heavy users of cultural services are demographically distinctive. They are somewhat more highly educated, more affluent, and older than those who engage in fewer cultural activities. Not surprisingly, the presence of young children at home seems to constitute an impediment to the use of cultural services. Those with no children at home, so-called "empty nest" couples and older singles, participate in cultural life more actively.

**The more culturally active are more educated, more affluent, and older.**

Cultural Activity:	<u>Low</u>	<u>High</u>
Graduate School	54%	63%
Income \$150,000 +	17%	27%
45+ years old	23%	30%

Source: 1999 MJC Survey of JCC Members and Users

These findings imply that the expansion of cultural services at the JCC, and the additional participation in JCC life by those who are likely to be drawn to those services, would have two salutary effects. It would broaden the demographic character of JCC users and, it would expand the membership base. In addition, expanded cultural services would provide several more opportunities for JCC members and users to use the JCC, to see each other, and to establish a connection with the physical space.

## Policy and Program Inferences

The successful building of meaningful Jewish communities by the JCCs will require not one significant modification, but numerous changes large and small in policy, program, practice, and facilities. Some ideas we outline below have emerged from our work together with lay and professional leaders of the JCC, albeit all must be regarded as preliminary suggestions rather than fully fleshed-out proposals. We present them here (in no particular order) to stimulate the kind of conversation that will, in due course, develop into a crystallized plan.

**First**, most immediately and most obviously, the creation and/or facilitation of genuinely meaningful Jewish communities must become an explicit part of strategic thinking on the policy level, and of professional practice on the program level. To the extent that community-building already occurs at the JCCs, it emerges as a fortuitous by-product of the delivery of high-quality services by committed and talented professionals in partnership with engaged lay leaders. We are plainly here proposing a substantially more direct approach to community-building, an approach that would require of lay and professional leaders alike to think very deliberately about how the programs under their purview relate to the community-building agenda. How can connections among JCC users be multiplied and deepened? How can opportunities for the experience of community be expanded? How can the JCC serve as a concierge for JCC users, suggesting to them activities that respond to their expressed interests, whether those activities take place within the JCC or in other agencies and institutions?

**Second**, we will need both more staff and more staff training. The current JCC staff is fully engaged in managing the current JCC agenda; the addition of specialized part-time personnel – starting in the preschools -- will be required if the community-building agenda is to be successfully launched and pursued. The JCC currently benefits from a Jewish family life educator, as well as senior staff members with rabbinic training, and professionals with advanced training as Jewish educators, and related fields.

Ideally, all members of JCC staff would have professional training on the relationship between Judaism, Jewish family life and community-building, commensurate with their responsibilities. It means sensitizing them to take advantage of what we have identified as "**connecting moments**" (the JCC analog to a rabbi or teacher's "teaching

moments"). These are prime opportunities to connect JCC members and users with one another and with the organized Jewish community, and with Jewish life more generally. More staff members than now should be able to offer comprehensive advice and guidance to JCC users who may have arrived at the JCC with a narrow agenda, such as that focused on a particular service. (Boston's synagogue life has been enriched by the availability of educators trained as experts in Jewish family life. Many synagogue members are surprised – one hopes pleasantly so – to learn that the synagogue cares about them beyond its own institutional needs.) At the least, each JCC department should have one person on staff member so trained.

**Third**, we need to transform board and committee service into an experience in Jewish community and Jewish learning. Board service is not only an opportunity to lead, but an opportunity to learn and to build lasting relationships with the community of Jewish leaders. At present, we give insufficient attention to these seemingly ancillary effects of board service.

Investing in and nurturing board members' lives as Jews can have dramatic payoffs for them, the JCC, and the rest of organized Jewry. Currently, these leaders grow and learn as Jews on these boards and committees, and they develop lasting relationships. But, no one – not the chairs nor the key professional staff – sees it as their responsibility explicitly to tend to the educational and community aspects of the leadership experience. The current model of board functioning is drawn from the American corporate world; it is highly functional and decision-oriented. But this focus on decision-making efficiency ignores the special character of serving on a non-profit board, particularly one dealing with matters of urgency to a Jewish institution, and the ways in which appropriate adjustment might have an institution-wide impact.

**Fourth**, we should facilitate contacts and communication among current program users. Users of specific programs want contact with one another and they want to be encouraged to interact according to the existing rhythms of their lives. They value opportunities for expanding friendships with people of similar backgrounds and interests. In effect, some have said, "Don't give us more programs, but do let us know who we are and how to find each other." Parents of pre-school and camper children need to learn of other parents who live near them or share their professional or cultural interests. A more

aggressive use of information technology to identify potential clusters of members and users can make the JCC more effective and more central in relationship-building and, thus, in community-building.

**Fifth**, following upon this recommendation, we need to develop up-to-date computer-based communication vehicles that reach members and non-members more systematically, to enable them to know about, and thus come to, individual JCC events. Recently developed technology allows the JCCs to specifically target messages to certain population groups and even to individually tailor communication to specific individuals and families. For example, every family, based on its demographic characteristics and stated interests (whose profile could easily be updated from time to time), can receive regular messages from the JCC citing programs and activities specifically suitable for the particular family. In fact, in an age where family members maintain their own e-mail addresses, JCC messages can be tailored to the individual, as well as to the family. Such messages communicate not only information; they communicate the institution's concern for the recipients. The computer literacy of the JCC's upscale population makes it imperative that the JCC develop marketing and communication techniques that take full (and increasing) advantage of e-mail and the Internet.

**Sixth**, we need to train and motivate the entire staff to make community-building central to its professional functioning. The vast majority of JCC staff members work either part-time or on a temporary basis (notably in the camp and on health-club staffs). Many are unfamiliar with the culture and rhythms of Jewish life. Moreover, many are not particularly motivated to seek opportunities to connect members or users with one another. This circumstance presents an obstacle to locating, recruiting, training, and supervising staff to attend to community-building among JCC members and users. The special difficulties in engendering commitment to community building among part-time or seasonal staff need to be recognized and addressed.

**Seventh**, *it makes eminent sense to expand cultural services, but do so in ways designed to enhance community. Expansion would:*

- *Create many more opportunities for interaction.*
- *Provide greater sharing of cultural symbols and experiences*

- *Capitalize on Jews' high levels of cultural engagement.*

The enrichment of Jewish cultural life is in itself a worthy goal, but here, it is not our primary concern. Rather, we view the expansion of quality cultural services as an especially powerful device for community-building. Our emphasis is less on "building an audience" – although that, too, is a useful goal – than on multiplying the opportunities for interaction, learning and self-expression.

A new Jewish cultural center could be physically designed to provide more spaces for planned and spontaneous or "unplanned" interaction. Thus, its design would put a premium on workshops, discussion groups, classes, lounges, chance encounters, and not just on performance space.

An expanded Jewish cultural presence could invigorate with more extensive and intensive common symbols, myths, stories, and all manner of cultural artifact. As one anthropologist has observed, "A community is a population that shares a common culture." If so, then smart communities attend to the creation, nurture, and dissemination of their shared culture(s).

Additional demands and a broader sense of mission in this area require not just a more broadly trained and motivated staff, but more staff positions. Adequate endowment needs to provide sufficient funds to attract not only the proper staff for the expanded mission. They will also be needed to support additional staff lines to accomplish the dual mission of a new Jewish cultural arts center: the housing of excellence in Jewish culture and the enhancement of genuinely meaningful Jewish community.

**Eighth**, we need to provide better physical settings for informal and chance encounters. The Leventhal-Sidman facility, in particular, lacks sufficient room and places for members and users to congregate and socialize. The building offers few opportunities for re-design or expansion. The lobby and some of the corridors may offer opportunities to create more community-friendly spaces.

**Ninth**, the program and practice must catch up with the stated policy and more explicitly encourage affiliation of JCC members and users with synagogues, Jewish schools, social justice activities, and charitable work. Empirically, JCC membership seems to facilitate participation in these aspects of Jewish life. However, few JCC programs and little JCC staff time intentionally aim at encouraging such participation as

an explicit JCC objective. To many staff members, encouraging JCC members and users to go elsewhere seems at first blush to contradict the institutional interests of the JCC. However, as we have demonstrated, those who find Jewish community elsewhere are actually somewhat more likely to find Jewish community at the JCC. Moreover, encouraging Jews to join synagogues, send their children to Jewish schools, devote time and energy to social justice work, and contribute tzedakah are, unquestionably, important Jewish values in their own right. The serious engagement of the JCC in such efforts, in collaboration with other institutions, will further enrich the Jewish atmosphere in the JCC and enhance its reputation as central to the infrastructure of local Jewish institutions.

We need creative thinking about opening JCC facilities to local synagogue groups for their own programming (e.g., a specific synagogue's night at the JCC gym). Synagogue members with whom we spoke suggested their using the JCC facilities on a private basis in off-hours. Cultural arts specialists at the JCC spoke of the power of their synagogue-based programs to engender community in congregations and schools. Ideas for assisting in creating Jewish community outside the JCC abound. The object here is to help create an area-wide culture of mutual institutional support and collaboration entailing partnerships between the JCC and congregations, schools, social justice agencies, and charitable groups.

**Tenth**, the JCC will need to engage around questions of Jewish content, to in effect answer the question, what are our models of the good Jewish life. Attempts to build Jewish community for the sole "purpose" of building Jewish community fail to appreciate the importance of meaning-seeking among contemporary Americans, or of higher purpose in all successful Jewish communities. Accordingly, policy makers and practitioners need to further articulate the relationship of the JCCs to a variety of Jewish issues and purposes. These include Jewish learning, prayer, spirituality, Jewish peoplehood, Israel, engagement in the larger society, social justice, philanthropy and other such matters that lay at the heart of historic Judaism in all its beauty, complexity, and diversity.

We have until this point been silent on the question of content, implying by that silence that the "meaningful communities" of which we speak derive their meaning from the supportive fraternity they enable. But that formulation begs the question, since we

are not, after all, talking about “meaningful communities” in some abstract sociological sense; our concern is with meaningful *Jewish* communities. It is hardly enough to say that so long as the participants in these communities are Jewish, the definition has been satisfied.

There are, nonetheless, good reasons to avoid issues of content. First, the JCCs are traditionally and purposely inclusive, pluralistic, unwilling and indeed unprepared in principle to be explicitly directive with regard to Jewish content. Second, in so far as JCCs must meet people where they are, they give the people themselves priority with regard to defining the content they desire. Third, discussions of content are potentially divisive.

That said, there are also good and persuasive reasons to set aside the objections and deal directly, if briefly, with matters of content.

First, we would not want our emphasis on community to be dismissed as “all process, no substance.” True, we believe that the benefits of community are in and of themselves substantive. Yet we see those benefits as extending well beyond the therapeutic. We seek, frankly, to advance Jewish learning, Jewish culture, Jewish creativity, and a Jewish identity that goes beyond instinct, that engages the mind as well as the heart.

Second, as it happens, a focus on content provides interesting and even important insights into how communities come to be built. Take, for example, the classic three pillars of Judaism -- learning, social justice, and religious devotion. We have in mind a particular Jewish learning group -- one not part of the JCC network, as it happens -- that in 1969 began a biweekly Torah study process. The group has been going strong for 30 years now. It is, in every important respect, a “meaningful Jewish community,” one that has gone well beyond its initial program of biweekly study. Indeed, it has become the principal support network for its members, seeing them through diverse life cycle celebrations and tragedies.

A community, in other words, can emerge from a friendship network and be about little more than the friendships that gave it birth. But a “meaningful Jewish community” is pointed beyond such origins, takes as its purpose in one way or another the preservation and extension of substantive Jewish experience. Studying Torah together is

one such way. Another is “sharing sweat” in the work of social justice. A well-designed project that begins with the building of a Habitat for Humanity house can – across the nation, it has – served as the basis for a continuing community, often involving a series of similar undertakings.

And religious devotion? We do not mean to suggest that the JCC must double as a synagogue. We do mean, minimally, that Judaism is the common language of the Jews, and that the JCCs – meaning, in this instance, especially JCC staff – must become fluent in that language. The erstwhile battle between religiosity and secularism has long since lost its bite here in America. There remain many Jews who regard themselves as secular, but very few make of their secularity an “ism,” an ideology. The religious sensibility – some call it the quest for spirituality – is an increasingly prominent feature of contemporary Jewry, and the JCCs cannot, nor should they want to, notwithstanding their own history as secular (that is, not avowedly religious) institutions, turn away from that sensibility and that quest.

We specifically reject the notion that Judaism, the religion, “resides” in the synagogue, while the Jews, the peoplehood, and the culture dwell in the JCCs. Our understanding of Judaism and of the Jews does not allow for such specious specialization. So while the JCCs ought never impose a religious agenda on their members and users, they can and should be more than merely respectful of the choices those members and those users make. A serious institutional commitment to Jewish culture must take into rich account the fact that Judaism is a central, quite possibly *the* central, ingredient of that culture.

### **The Centrality of the Staff to Implementation**

All of the foregoing has obvious implications for the JCC staff, which is the most crucial element in implementing the strategy here proposed. The staff can make or break any attempt to refine and redirect the work of the JCC. Insofar as the pursuit of community becomes the heart of that strategy, it is critical that the staff itself comes to experience the community it seeks to foster for JCC users.

Change will not be easy, given the many part-time employees of the JCCs and the very diverse backgrounds and interests they bring to their professional work. But there is no honest or effective way of avoiding the challenge. Community, as it were, begins at

home, with the very people charged with its encouragement. In our numerous conversations with staff members, they themselves repeatedly expressed the desire for a better sense of community within the JCC staff.

And then, as we have noted, those people must be trained in the skills of community-building. Those skills are not intuitive. Here the group work tradition of the JCCs is an important resource.

### **A Realistic Time Frame**

We intend the efforts suggested so far as more than cosmetic. They call for deep-seated and extensive change in the very culture of the JCC system - in its fundamental assumptions about mission, in its language, symbols, and styles of management and interpersonal relations. As the literature on organizational life makes clear, such thoroughgoing change is not easily accomplished. Institutions are fundamentally conservative, deeply inertial. They tend to keep doing things in the ways they always have, and to revert to former patterns after initial change, absent constant attention to maintaining the new ways. Efforts to change must be deliberately maintained at all organizational levels and for much longer than is usually thought to be the case. If the effort is successful, it will remain always a work in progress, defined at any moment by the shifting interests and sentiments of staff members, lay leaders, and consumers alike.

The changes we envision will, at best, take years to effect. They will require substantial change in the organizational cultures of the JCCs of Greater Boston, as also major investments of money and energies, and such investments will necessarily rest, for some time, on faith. But Jews, after all, are not strangers to faith.

### **Concluding Remarks: The Larger Significance of Building Meaningful Jewish Community**

We believe that developing a better understanding of community-building is important on several levels. It goes beyond the immediate needs and responsibilities of the JCCs of Greater Boston to speaking to issues important to American society, American Jews, and the JCC movement in North America.

Community-building is important to American society generally, in that many observers perceive a trend of long-term declines in participation in community-based activities. Mediating institutions, such as churches, civic associations, neighborhood groups and, yes, JCCs, have a critical role to play as builders of community and providers of meaning.

Community-building is important specifically to American Jewry. The decline of connection, relationship, and community is the most critical challenge facing American Jewry. Any strategy for creative survival of American Jewry will need to directly address the phenomenon of weakening and fewer ties among American Jews.

Finally, the building of Meaningful Jewish Communities in and around the JCCs is important to the JCC as an institution of Jewish life. In so doing, the JCC will position itself among other institutions at the heart of the organized Jewish community, which has recently elevated community-building as a priority objective on the Jewish communal agenda. To the extent that the JCC devotes time, thought and resources to this purpose, and develops pioneering approaches to building community, it will organically assume a leadership role in an organizational environment that values successful and creative community-building. By successfully creating Meaningful Jewish Communities, the JCC will make another signal contribution to Jewish life, and deservedly enhance its recognition as a visionary, driving and pioneering force in the Jewish community.

## Appendix A: The Major Elements of the Research

The major elements of the research included:

1. One formal and several informal focus group discussions with the professional staff. The first was conducted in the early stages of the research. The informal groups were conducted by staff members themselves as part of a day-long staff seminar devoted to discussing Meaningful Jewish Community.
2. Six formal focus group discussions with JCC board members, members, and users (both members and non-members). The groups represented were: parents of South Area preschool and Extended Learning Center children, Gan Yeladim (preschool) parents, mostly middle-aged Leventhal-Sidman male health club users, Grossman (day camp) and Kingswood (overnight camp) parents (all non-members), and Leventhal-Sidman and Striar Board members.
3. Individually conducted depth interviews with nearly two dozen professional staff members (see Appendix for list). Lasting about one hour each, these were conducted by telephone from Israel, or face-to-face at the JCC facilities.
4. Individual face-to-face key informant interviews with senior Jewish communal and volunteer professionals in the Boston area.
5. Analysis of additional data from the 1995 CJP demographic study of the Jews of metropolitan Boston. The data from the study, originally directed by Sherry Israel, allowed us to understand critical differences between JCC members and non-members in Greater Boston's Jewish households.
6. A telephone survey of 733 individuals, conducted by Teleforce, Inc. of Fargo, North Dakota. About a third of the sample consisted of parents (all JCC members) of JCC preschool youngsters. About a third were parents of campers (about evenly divided between Grossman, the day camp, and Kingswood, the overnight summer camp). The final third were users of JCC cultural services and volunteer leaders. The latter consisted primarily of JCC board members, but also included selected CJP (Combined Jewish Philanthropies) board members.
7. Intensive discussions between and among the researchers, the JCCGB senior professional staff, and the volunteer Advisory Board chaired by Edwin Sidman.

8. Presentations at meetings of the Boards of the JCCs of Greater Boston and of its two main facilities, the Leventhal-Sidman and the Striar branches.

9. A staff retreat, lasting two days (June 10-11), totally devoted to elaborating on the concept of Meaningful Jewish Community.

10. Consultations with professional leadership of the Jewish Community Centers Association, and with other national experts.

## Appendix B: Frequencies from the Survey

[Entries below for questions 1-134 are for currently Jewish respondents in the preschool parent, camper parent, and cultural services user samples, combined. Entries after q. 134 are for combined samples of JCC and CJP board members.]

Hi. I'm [NAME] of Teleforce, Inc. in Fargo, North Dakota. Did I reach [phone number]? We're conducting a major research study on behalf of the Jewish Community Centers of Greater Boston. This study seeks to help the JCC deliver better services to people like yourself. I would appreciate if you would agree to participate in this important study. I can assure you that your answers will be used for statistical purposes only, and no one will know which individual gave which answers to any of the questions. Moreover, no one will subsequently call you or trouble you in any way as a result of participating in this study. Before we begin, do you have any questions?

### Basic Demographics

1. First ... Are you:

<i>married</i>	<b>87%</b>	<i>widowed</i>	<b>4%</b>
<i>separated/divorced</i>	<b>5%</b>	<i>living with a partner</i>	<b>1%</b>
<i>never married</i>	<b>3%</b>		

2. (IF NECESSARY) What is your sex?      **Male 38%**      **Female 62%**
3. How old were you on your last birthday?      **Median = 41 years old**
4. Do you consider yourself Jewish?      **yes 100%**
5. (IF YES) Were you raised Jewish?      **yes 92%**
6. (IF R MARRIED/WITH PARTNER) Does your (husband/wife/partner) consider (himself/herself) to be Jewish?      **yes 93%**
7. (IF YES) Was he/she raised Jewish?      **yes 93%**

### Residence and Mobility

8. What is your zip code? 02 \_\_\_\_
9. How many years have you lived in your town or city?      **10 years**
10. Did you spend a major part of your childhood in the Boston area?      **yes 41%**

## Schooling/Employment

11. What was the highest educational degree you have received? Is it:
- |  |     |
|--|-----|
| <i>a high school diploma</i>             | 11% |
| <i>a bachelor's degree</i>               | 36% |
| <i>a graduate or professional degree</i> | 53% |
- 12a. (IF R FEMALE AND MARRIED) Are you currently working at a job outside the home:
- |                  |     |                  |     |                   |     |
|------------------|-----|------------------|-----|-------------------|-----|
| <i>full-time</i> | 39% | <i>part-time</i> | 30% | <i>not at all</i> | 31% |
|------------------|-----|------------------|-----|-------------------|-----|
- 12b. (IF R MALE AND MARRIED) Is your wife currently working at a job outside the home:
- |                  |     |                  |     |                   |      |
|------------------|-----|------------------|-----|-------------------|------|
| <i>full-time</i> | 49% | <i>part-time</i> | 30% | <i>not at all</i> | 27%? |
|------------------|-----|------------------|-----|-------------------|------|
13. (IF MARRIED) What was the highest educational degree school your (husband/wife) has received? Is it
- |  |      |
|--|------|
| <i>a high school diploma</i>             | 11%  |
| <i>a bachelor's degree</i>               | 35%  |
| <i>a graduate or professional degree</i> | 55%? |

## Children

14. (IF MARRIED, WIDOWED, SEPARATED, OR DIVORCED) Do you have any children now living at home, all or some of the time? *yes* 85%

15. (IF YES) How old are they?

(IF ANY CHILDREN AGE 8-17, ASK Q. 16-19; OTHERWISE, SKIP TO Q. 20) Now I'd like to ask you about your oldest child under the age of 18.

16. (IF Respondent is Jewish or Spouse is Jewish) What was the major type of Jewish schooling (he/she) (received/is receiving) if any? Was it:

<i>full time day school, or yeshiva</i>	22%
<i>part-time afternoon school, Hebrew School, Talmud Torah, or other Jewish school that met/meets more than once a week</i>	58%
<i>one-day-a-week school or Sunday school</i>	10%
<i>tutoring</i>	1%
<i>none</i>	10%

17. Did he/she ever attend JCC Camp Grossman? *yes* 38%

18. Did he/she ever attend JCC Camp Kingswood? *yes* 9%

19. Did he/she ever attend a JCC pre-school? *yes* 36%

(IF ANY CHILDREN AGE 0-5 and [Respondent is Jewish or Spouse is Jewish])

20. With respect to your oldest child under the age of 6, what will be the major type of Jewish schooling (he/she) will receive, if any? Is it

<i>full time day school, or yeshiva</i>	<b>27%</b>
<i>part-time afternoon school, Hebrew School, Talmud Torah, or other Jewish school that meets more than once a week</i>	<b>55%</b>
<i>One-day-a-week school or Sunday school</i>	<b>11%</b>
<i>Tutoring</i>	<b>2%</b>
<i>None</i>	<b>5%</b>

### **Jewish Education and Related Experiences**

(DO NOT ASK Q. 21-23, IF R RAISED NOT JEWISH = "No" in Q.5 )

21. What was the major type of Jewish schooling you received as a child, if any? Was it:

<i>full time day school, or yeshiva</i>	<b>14%</b>
<i>part-time afternoon school, Hebrew School, Talmud Torah, or other Jewish school that met more than once a week</i>	<b>60%</b>
<i>One-day-a-week school or Sunday school</i>	<b>12%</b>
<i>Tutoring</i>	<b>2%</b>
<i>None</i>	<b>13%</b>

22. As a child or as a teen-ager, did you ever attend or work at a summer camp sponsored by a JCC?

yes **24%**

23. As a child or as a teen-ager, did you ever participate in any other activities at a JCC?

yes **33%**

### **Jewish Continuity**

(ASK THIS SECTION – QUESTIONS 24-34 – ONLY IF R IS JEWISH)

24. How important would you say that being Jewish is in your life - is it:

<i>very important</i>	<b>76%</b>	<i>somewhat important</i>	<b>21%</b>
<i>or not very important</i>	<b>3%</b>		

25. How emotionally attached do you feel to Israel - would you say you feel;

<i>extremely attached</i>	<b>28%</b>	<i>very attached</i>	<b>31%</b>
<i>somewhat attached</i>	<b>34%</b>	<i>or not at all attached</i>	<b>7%</b>

26. How important to you is the spiritual side of your life?
- |                              |            |                           |            |
|------------------------------|------------|---------------------------|------------|
| <i>very important</i>        | <b>55%</b> | <i>somewhat important</i> | <b>38%</b> |
| <i>or not very important</i> | <b>7%?</b> |                           |            |
27. How important to you is feeling that you are part of a community?
- |                              |            |                           |            |
|------------------------------|------------|---------------------------|------------|
| <i>very important</i>        | <b>67%</b> | <i>somewhat important</i> | <b>29%</b> |
| <i>or not very important</i> | <b>4%</b>  |                           |            |

I'm going to read some statements. For each tell me whether you *disagree strongly*, *disagree*, *agree*, *agree strongly*, or *are undecided*.

28. (Pre-School and Camper samples): I feel I belong to a community at the JCC [pre-school/summer camp]
- |                          |            |                       |            |                 |            |
|--------------------------|------------|-----------------------|------------|-----------------|------------|
| <i>disagree strongly</i> | <b>22%</b> | <i>disagree</i>       | <b>17%</b> | <i>not sure</i> | <b>12%</b> |
| <i>agree</i>             | <b>30%</b> | <i>agree strongly</i> | <b>19%</b> |                 |            |
29. I feel I belong to a community at the JCC.
- |                          |            |                       |            |                 |           |
|--------------------------|------------|-----------------------|------------|-----------------|-----------|
| <i>disagree strongly</i> | <b>12%</b> | <i>disagree</i>       | <b>28%</b> | <i>not sure</i> | <b>6%</b> |
| <i>agree</i>             | <b>37%</b> | <i>agree strongly</i> | <b>16%</b> |                 |           |
30. I feel I am a part of the Boston Jewish community.
- |                          |            |                       |            |                 |           |
|--------------------------|------------|-----------------------|------------|-----------------|-----------|
| <i>disagree strongly</i> | <b>5%</b>  | <i>disagree</i>       | <b>16%</b> | <i>not sure</i> | <b>3%</b> |
| <i>agree</i>             | <b>52%</b> | <i>agree strongly</i> | <b>23%</b> |                 |           |
31. I feel I am a part of the Jewish people.
- |                          |            |                       |            |                 |           |
|--------------------------|------------|-----------------------|------------|-----------------|-----------|
| <i>disagree strongly</i> | <b>5%</b>  | <i>disagree</i>       | <b>3%</b>  | <i>not sure</i> | <b>1%</b> |
| <i>agree</i>             | <b>42%</b> | <i>agree strongly</i> | <b>50%</b> |                 |           |
32. Sometimes, people have questions about Jewish matters such as issues with the Jewish community or celebrating holidays and the like. If you had such questions, is there anyone you know who works professionally in Jewish life that you could comfortably turn to, for advice or information?
- |  |            |            |
|--|------------|------------|
|  | <b>yes</b> | <b>83%</b> |
|--|------------|------------|
33. (IF YES) Is one such person a rabbi you know?
- |  |            |            |
|--|------------|------------|
|  | <b>yes</b> | <b>81%</b> |
|--|------------|------------|
34. (IF YES) Is one such person someone you know who works at the JCC, such as a teacher, school director, or the director of a program or activity?
- |  |            |            |
|--|------------|------------|
|  | <b>yes</b> | <b>36%</b> |
|--|------------|------------|

## Jewish Involvement

(ASK QUESTIONS 36-44 ONLY IF R IS JEWISH OR IF SPOUSE IS JEWISH)

36. During Passover, do you usually have at least one Seder in your home or attend one somewhere else? yes **93%**
37. During the Christmas season, do you usually have a Christmas tree in your home? yes **10%**
38. Do you usually fast on Yom Kippur? yes **80%**
39. Does someone in your household usually light Chanukah candles? yes **96%**
40. Do you usually observe or celebrate the Sabbath as a special day in any way? yes **70%**
41. How many times, if at all, have you been to Israel?
42. How often do you attend any type of synagogue, temple, or organized Jewish religious services?
- |                                    |            |
|------------------------------------|------------|
| <i>about once a week or more</i>   | <b>19%</b> |
| <i>about once or twice a month</i> | <b>30%</b> |
| <i>every few months</i>            | <b>19%</b> |
| <i>only on High Holy days</i>      | <b>18%</b> |
| <i>less often</i>                  | <b>7%</b>  |
| <i>never</i>                       | <b>7%</b>  |
43. (IF R IS JEWISH) Do you consider yourself
- |                 |            |                          |            |
|-----------------|------------|--------------------------|------------|
| <i>Orthodox</i> | <b>7%</b>  | <i>Conservative</i>      | <b>47%</b> |
| <i>Reform</i>   | <b>35%</b> | <i>Reconstructionist</i> | <b>3%</b>  |
| <i>secular</i>  | <b>2%</b>  | <i>something else</i>    | <b>6%</b>  |
44. Do you belong to a synagogue, temple, minyan, or havurah? yes **68%**
45. FOR SYNAGOGUE MEMBERS ONLY: How many years have you belonged to your synagogue [or temple or minyan or havurah]? *Median* = **6 years**
- To what extent ...
46. Do you feel attached to your synagogue [or temple or minyan or havurah]?
- |                          |            |                       |            |
|--------------------------|------------|-----------------------|------------|
| <i>to a great extent</i> | <b>58%</b> | <i>to some extent</i> | <b>33%</b> |
| <i>a little</i>          | <b>7%</b>  | <i>not at all</i>     | <b>2%</b>  |
47. Do you feel welcome in your synagogue [or temple or minyan or havurah]?
- |                          |            |                       |            |
|--------------------------|------------|-----------------------|------------|
| <i>to a great extent</i> | <b>80%</b> | <i>to some extent</i> | <b>18%</b> |
| <i>a little</i>          | <b>1%</b>  | <i>not at all</i>     | <b>1%</b>  |

48. Do you feel that Jews of all backgrounds and commitment would feel welcome in your synagogue [or temple or minyan or havurah]?

<i>to a great extent</i>	<b>64%</b>	<i>to some extent</i>	<b>26%</b>
<i>a little</i>	<b>4%</b>	<i>not at all</i>	<b>6%</b>

49. Do you feel that your synagogue [or temple or minyan or havurah] provides you with a sense of community ?

<i>to a great extent</i>	<b>68%</b>	<i>to some extent</i>	<b>27%</b>
<i>a little</i>	<b>3%</b>	<i>not at all</i>	<b>2%</b>

50. Did you join your synagogue in order to find community?

<i>to a great extent</i>	<b>21%</b>	<i>to some extent</i>	<b>36%</b>
<i>a little</i>	<b>14%</b>	<i>not at all</i>	<b>29%</b>

51. Have you developed friendships as a result of your connection with your synagogue [or temple or minyan or havurah]

<i>to a great extent</i>	<b>44%</b>	<i>to some extent</i>	<b>37%</b>
<i>a little</i>	<b>8%</b>	<i>not at all</i>	<b>12%</b>

52. (IF NOT A SYNAGOGUE MEMBER) Are you planning to join a synagogue within the next two years?  
yes **51%**

### The JCC

53. Do you belong to a JCC [Jewish Community Center]? yes **60%**

54. (IF MEMBER) Which one?

*Leventhal-Sidman* **56%**    *Striar* **31%**    *Metro West* **6%**    *Other* **7%**

55. (IF MEMBER) For how many years have you been a member of the JCC?

*Median = 5 years*

53. (IF MEMBER) Do you plan to renew your membership in the JCC next year?

yes **85%**

57. (IF NOT A MEMBER) As an adult, were you ever a member of a JCC in the Boston area?

yes **31%**

58. About how often would you say you go to the JCC? Never, a few times a year, once or twice a month, once or twice a week, or more often

	Never	Few times a year	Once or twice a month	Once or twice week	More often
Member	<b>3%</b>	<b>14%</b>	<b>18%</b>	<b>30%</b>	<b>35%</b>
Non-member	<b>41%</b>	<b>47%</b>	<b>6%</b>	<b>7%</b>	<b>1%</b>

Have you, or any members of your household, participated in any of the following JCC activities in the last year?

	<u>Members</u>	<u>Non-members</u>	
59. The exercise facilities	<b>75%</b>	<b>16%</b>	
60. Sports activities or leagues	<b>44%</b>	<b>12%</b>	
61. (IF CHILDREN 0-5 HOME) The pre-school	<b>41%</b>	<b>32%</b>	
62a. (IF CHILDREN 6-17 HOME) JCC Grossman day camp	<b>43%</b>	<b>55%</b>	
62b. (IF CHILDREN 6-17 HOME) JCC Camp Kingswood	<b>23%</b>	<b>44%</b>	
63. Any arts classes, such as ceramics, painting, etc.	<b>28%</b>	<b>14%</b>	
64. Any performances, such as theater, dance, concerts, etc	<b>48%</b>	<b>32%</b>	
65. Other classes or lectures	<b>45%</b>	<b>14%</b>	
66. About how long does it take you to drive to the JCC from your home?			
<i>under 10 minutes</i>	<b>21%</b>	<i>10-15 minutes</i>	<b>27%</b>
<i>15-20 minutes</i>	<b>18%</b>	<i>20-30 minutes</i>	<b>19%</b>
<i>more than 30 minutes</i>	<b>14%</b>		
67. About how long does it take you to drive to the JCC from your place of work?			
<i>under 10 minutes</i>	<b>17%</b>	<i>10-15 minutes</i>	<b>19%</b>
<i>15-20 minutes</i>	<b>24%</b>	<i>20-30 minutes</i>	<b>22%</b>
<i>more than 30 minutes</i>	<b>18%</b>		

To what extent ...

68. Do you feel attached to the JCC?

	Great extent	Some extent	A little	Not at all
Member	<b>36%</b>	<b>40%</b>	<b>16%</b>	<b>9%</b>
Non-member	<b>3%</b>	<b>22%</b>	<b>27%</b>	<b>47%</b>

69. Do you feel welcome at the JCC?

	Great extent	Some extent	A little	Not at all
Member	<b>61%</b>	<b>31%</b>	<b>6%</b>	<b>2%</b>
Non-member	<b>25%</b>	<b>43%</b>	<b>15%</b>	<b>18%</b>

70. Do you feel that Jews of all backgrounds and commitment would feel welcome in the JCC?

	Great extent	Some extent	A little	Not at all
Non-member	37%	42%	13%	7%
Member	62%	28%	6%	4%

71. Do you feel that the JCC provides you with a sense of community?

	Great extent	Some extent	A little	Not at all
Member	39%	38%	15%	9%
Non-member	14%	37%	14%	35%

72. [JCC Members]: . . . Did you join the JCC in order to find community?

<i>to a great extent</i>	<b>17%</b>	<i>to some extent</i>	<b>26%</b>
<i>a little</i>	<b>18%</b>	<i>not at all</i>	<b>39%</b>

73. Have you developed friendships as a result of your connection with the JCC?

	Great extent	Some extent	A little	Not at all
Member	28%	37%	17%	18%
Non-member	6%	18%	21%	56%

74. Do you feel that the current atmosphere at the JCC is *very Jewish, somewhat Jewish, a little Jewish, or not at all Jewish*?

	Very Jewish	Somewhat Jewish	A little Jewish	Not at all Jewish	Don't know
Member	37%	48%	10%	2%	4%
Non-member	23%	35%	7%	4%	31%

75. In your opinion, is the atmosphere at the JCC *too Jewish, not Jewish enough, or about right*?

	Too Jewish	Not Jewish enough	About right	Don't know
Member	6%	14%	76%	4%
Non-member	5%	11%	53%	32%

76a. [PRE-SCHOOL SAMPLE]: Aside from what's going on at the JCC pre-school, to what extent are you familiar with the activities and programs of the JCC generally? Are you *very familiar*, *somewhat familiar*, or *only a little familiar* with JCC programs and activities?

	Very familiar	Somewhat familiar	A little familiar
Member	39%	42%	20%
Non-member	5%	41%	55%

76b. [CAMPER PARENTS SAMPLE]: Aside from things pertaining to JCC Summer camp], to what extent are you familiar with the activities and programs of the JCC generally? Are you *very familiar*, *somewhat familiar*, or *only a little familiar* with JCC programs and activities?

	Very familiar	Somewhat familiar	A little familiar	Don't Know
Member	41%	45%	12%	1%
Non-member	13%	33%	47%	8%

76c. [CULTURE USERS]: To what extent are you familiar with the activities and programs of the JCC generally? Are you *very familiar*, *somewhat familiar*, or *only a little familiar* with JCC programs and activities?

	Very familiar	Somewhat familiar	A little familiar
Member	70%	26%	5%
Non-member	14%	25%	61%

## FRIENDS

77. Of your close friends, about what proportion live within a 20-minute drive of your home?

<i>none</i>	3%	<i>a few</i>	11%	<i>some</i>	19%
<i>about half</i>	19%	<i>most</i>	35%	<i>almost all</i>	11%

78. About what proportion of your close friends are Jewish? Is it ...

<i>none</i>	1%	<i>a few</i>	7%	<i>some</i>	13%
<i>about half</i>	24%	<i>most</i>	40%	<i>almost all</i>	15%

79. (IF SYNAGOGUE MEMBER IN Q. 44): About how many of your current friends have you made through a synagogue, temple, havurah, or minyan?

<i>none</i>	12%	<i>a few</i>	26%	<i>some</i>	31%
<i>about half</i>	17%	<i>most</i>	13%		

80. (IF JCC MEMBER IN Q. 53): About how many of your current friends have you made through the JCC?

*none*                      **22%**                      *a few*                      **35%**                      *some* **26%**  
*about half*                      **12%**                      *most*                      **5%**

**You and the JCC [PRE-SCHOOL AND CAMP SAMPLES ONLY, ASK QUESTIONS 81-92]**

81. For how many years, altogether, have you had any child of yours enrolled in a JCC [pre-school/JCC Summer camp]?

To what extent ...

82. Do you feel attached to the JCC [pre-school/Summer camp]

	Great extent	Some extent	A little	Not at all
Summer Camp	<b>25%</b>	<b>41%</b>	<b>19%</b>	<b>15%</b>
Pre-school	<b>43%</b>	<b>32%</b>	<b>13%</b>	<b>13%</b>

83. Do you feel that the JCC [pre-school/ Summer camp] provides you with a sense of community

	Great extent	Some extent	A little	Not at all
Summer Camp	<b>22%</b>	<b>37%</b>	<b>21%</b>	<b>21%</b>
Pre-school	<b>38%</b>	<b>39%</b>	<b>14%</b>	<b>10%</b>

84. Have you developed friendships as a result of your connection with the JCC [pre-school/ Summer camp]?

	Great extent	Some extent	A little	Not at all
Summer Camp	<b>9%</b>	<b>26%</b>	<b>21%</b>	<b>43%</b>
Pre-school	<b>27%</b>	<b>36%</b>	<b>19%</b>	<b>18%</b>

85. Of the other parents in the JCC [pre-school/summer camp], about how many would you call your friends?

	None	One	Two	A Few	Many
Summer Camp	<b>33%</b>	<b>13%</b>	<b>17%</b>	<b>37%</b>	<b>0%</b>
Pre-school	<b>21%</b>	<b>12%</b>	<b>13%</b>	<b>54%</b>	<b>0%</b>

86. Would you be interested in getting to know more of the other parents in the JCC [pre-school/Summer camp]?

Pre-School                      *yes* **59%**                      Summer Camp                      *yes* **36%**

87. Would you be interested in receiving lists of addresses and phone numbers of the other parents in the JCC [pre-school/Summer camp]?

Pre-School                      *yes* **53%**                      Summer Camp                      *yes* **32%**

88. Would you allow the JCC [pre-school/summer camp] to give your address and phone number to the other parents of children in the JCC [pre-school/ Summer camp]?

Pre-School                      *yes* **63%**                      Summer Camp                      *yes* **33%**

89. Do you feel that the current atmosphere at the JCC [pre-school/summer camp] is *very Jewish, somewhat Jewish, a little Jewish, or not at all Jewish*?

	Very Jewish	Somewhat Jewish	A little Jewish	Not at all Jewish
Summer camp	<b>41%</b>	<b>52%</b>	<b>7%</b>	<b>0%</b>
Pre-school	<b>45%</b>	<b>48%</b>	<b>7%</b>	<b>0%</b>

90. With regard to the Jewish content in the JCC [pre-school/summer camp], would you like to see . . .

	More of it	Less of it	Satisfied with the way it is now
Summer camp	<b>15%</b>	<b>4%</b>	<b>80%</b>
Pre-school	<b>28%</b>	<b>5%</b>	<b>67%</b>

91a. [Pre-school]: Would you be interested in participating in some programs with the other parents in the JCC pre-school] during the year? *yes* **58%**

91b.[CAMP]: Would you be interested in participating in some programs with the other parents in the JCC Summer camp during the summer? *yes* **37%**

92. [CAMP]: Would you be interested in participating in some programs with the other parents in the JCC Summer camp during the year?

Pre-School                      *yes* **25%**                      Summer Camp                      *yes* **31%**

### Preferences for Programs

Now I'd like to ask you about activities and programs that might be offered at the JCC. These could be lectures, classes, performances, family activities, or whatever. In each case, if you were deciding whether to attend such a program, tell me whether the feature that I'll read is *very important to you, somewhat important, or not important*.

93. (IF MARRIED) The activity is designed for both you and your (husband/ wife).  
*very important* **32%**      *somewhat important* **50%**      *not important* **19%**

94. (IF CHILDREN 0-17 HOME): The activity is designed for both you and your children.  
*very important 51%*      *somewhat important 40%*      *not important 9%*
95. The activity allows you to spend time with your friends  
*very important 19%*      *somewhat important 58%*      *not important 23%*
96. The activity introduces you to new friends.  
*very important 20%*      *somewhat important 51%*      *not important 29%*
97. The activity is designed to give you a sense of belonging to a community.  
*very important 28%*      *somewhat important 53%*      *not important 19%*

### **Jewish Organizations and Activities**

98. Do you belong to any Jewish organizations other than a synagogue, temple or JCC?  
*yes 29%*
99. (IF YES): In the past 2 years, have you served on a committee, a board, or as an officer of a Jewish organization, synagogue, or temple?  
*yes 50%*
100. Would you be interested in serving on a board or a committee of the JCC?  
*yes 20%*
101. Do you regularly read any Jewish periodicals, newspapers, or magazines?  
*yes 64%*
102. During the past year or so, did you attend any adult Jewish education program such as a lecture, a class, or a study circle?  
*yes 47%*
103. Did you happen to make a donation to the Combined Jewish Philanthropies, the CJP, in the last year?  
*yes 50%*

### **Volunteer Work**

104. During the past year, have you done any kind of volunteer work?      *yes 51%*
105. (IF YES) In the past year, about how many hours have you given to any type of charitable or service organization or cause – per week or per month whichever is easier?  
*Median = 4 hours per week      4 hours per month*
106. (IF YES) In the past year, of the volunteer work you've done, about how much of it was with Jewish organizations or causes?  
*all 29%*      *most 24%*      *some 18%*      *a little 13%*      *none at all 16%*
107. How important to you personally are Jewish ideals of social justice? Are they  
*extremely important 32%*      *very important 41%*  
*fairly important 22%*      *or not very important 5%*

108. With respect to your political beliefs, do you consider yourself to be ...

<i>very conservative</i>	<b>3%</b>	<i>conservative</i>	<b>28%</b>
<i>moderate</i>	<b>32%</b>	<i>liberal</i>	<b>30%</b>
<i>very liberal</i>	<b>7%</b>		

To what extent are you interested in ...

109. Undertaking some volunteer work or social justice activity, beyond whatever you may be doing now?

<i>to a great extent</i>	<b>3%</b>	<i>to some extent</i>	<b>22%</b>
<i>a little</i>	<b>29%</b>	<i>not at all</i>	<b>47%</b>

110. Undertaking some regular Jewish educational activity, such as attending a class or study group, beyond whatever you may be doing now?

<i>to a great extent</i>	<b>6%</b>	<i>to some extent</i>	<b>26%</b>
<i>a little</i>	<b>27%</b>	<i>not at all</i>	<b>42%</b>

111. Making new friends?

<i>to a great extent</i>	<b>14%</b>	<i>to some extent</i>	<b>39%</b>
<i>a little</i>	<b>28%</b>	<i>not at all</i>	<b>20%</b>

112. (IF JCC MEMBER): ... Spending more time with the people you see or know at the JCC?

<i>to a great extent</i>	<b>12%</b>	<i>to some extent</i>	<b>39%</b>
<i>a little</i>	<b>33%</b>	<i>not at all</i>	<b>16%</b>

113. (IF SYNAGOGUE MEMBER) ... Spending more time with the people you see or know at your synagogue?

<i>to a great extent</i>	<b>15%</b>	<i>to some extent</i>	<b>40%</b>
<i>a little</i>	<b>33%</b>	<i>not at all</i>	<b>12%</b>

114. How much time do you have to do things other than attend to your work and family responsibilities?

<i>a great deal</i>	<b>4%</b>	<i>to some extent</i>	<b>25%</b>
<i>a little</i>	<b>51%</b>	<i>none at all</i>	<b>20%</b>

115. (IF MARRIED OR WITH PARTNER) How much such time does your (husband/wife/partner) have?

<i>a great deal</i>	<b>4%</b>	<i>some</i>	<b>18%</b>
<i>a little</i>	<b>53%</b>	<i>none at all</i>	<b>25%</b>

116. To what extent do you lead a stressful life?

<i>a great extent</i>	<b>27%</b>	<i>to some extent</i>	<b>41%</b>
<i>a little</i>	<b>27%</b>	<i>not at all</i>	<b>5%</b>

117. (IF MARRIED/PARTNER) To what extent does your (husband/wife/partner) lead a stressful life?

<i>to a great extent</i>	<b>32%</b>	<i>to some extent</i>	<b>42%</b>
<i>a little</i>	<b>24%</b>	<i>not at all</i>	<b>2%</b>

### Computer Use

118. Do you use a computer at home or work? *yes* **83%**

119. (IF USES) Do you use e-mail *regularly* *yes* **59%**

120. (IF USES) Do you sign on the Internet *regularly* *yes* **52%**

121. (IF USES) Have you made a purchase on the Internet during the last year? *yes* **41%**

122. (IF USES) Do you belong to or subscribe to any e-mail lists? *yes* **29%**

### Cultural Activities

123. During the past year, have you participated in each of the following activities?

124. Attended a musical performance or concert *yes* **80%**

125. Attended a dance performance *yes* **42%**

126. Saw a play or musical *yes* **76%**

127. Gone to a museum *yes* **83%**

128. Gone to an art gallery *yes* **57%**

129. Participated in a book discussion group *yes* **28%**

130. Attended a Jewish Book Fair *yes* **44%**

131. Pursued a hobby in arts or crafts *yes* **38%**

132. Attended performance of Jewish Theater of New England *yes* **25%**

133. Some people want to build a Jewish cultural arts center in the Boston area. It would include spaces for theatrical, musical and dance performances, as well as for arts classes, workshops, rehearsals, dance classes, and so forth. If it were to be built, to what extent do you think you and your family would make use of it?

<i>to a great extent</i>	<b>13%</b>	<i>to some extent</i>	<b>46%</b>
<i>a little</i>	<b>31%</b>	<i>not at all</i>	<b>11%</b>

134. (IF CHILDREN HOME) How likely is it that you would bring your children to family activities at this new Jewish cultural center?

*very likely* **31%**                      *somewhat likely* **55%**                      *or not likely* **14%**

**Income**

Knowing income is very important to this project. It is important in understanding the answers people give to other questions. We can assure you of complete confidentiality, and we ask that you answer just as accurately as you can. Before deducting for taxes, what was the total income for you (and your spouse) in 1998 - was it

<i>less than \$15,000</i>	<b>3%</b>	<i>\$15,000 to \$50,000</i>	<b>21%</b>
<i>\$50,000 to \$100,000</i>	<b>36%</b>	<i>\$100,000 to \$200,000</i>	<b>28%</b>
<i>over \$200,000</i>	<b>13%</b>		

**Remaining Questions are for Leaders Only:**

135. To what extent would you be interested in seeing a major Jewish cultural arts center established in the Boston area? Would you be -

*very interested* **33%**                      *somewhat interested* **59%**                      *not interested* **8%**

I'm going to read a list of objectives that might be appropriate for a synagogue. In each case, please tell me the extent to which you believe this objective is **important for a synagogue**.

136. Provide its members with a sense of community.

<i>extremely important</i>	<b>24%</b>	<i>very important</i>	<b>48%</b>
<i>somewhat important</i>	<b>24%</b>	<i>or not important</i>	<b>4%</b>

137. Challenge its members to increase their Jewish commitment & involvement?

<i>extremely important</i>	<b>45%</b>	<i>very important</i>	<b>44%</b>
<i>somewhat important</i>	<b>0%</b>	<i>or not important</i>	<b>2%</b>

138. Help its members' children grow as Jews.

<i>extremely important</i>	<b>63%</b>	<i>very important</i>	<b>36%</b>
<i>somewhat important</i>	<b>1%</b>	<i>or not important</i>	<b>0%</b>

139. Help its adult members grow as Jews.

<i>extremely important</i>	<b>44%</b>	<i>very important</i>	<b>52%</b>
<i>somewhat important</i>	<b>4%</b>	<i>or not important</i>	<b>0%</b>

140. Encourage more and stronger friendships among its members.

<i>extremely important</i>	<b>16%</b>	<i>very important</i>	<b>34%</b>
<i>somewhat important</i>	<b>45%</b>	<i>or not important</i>	<b>5%</b>

141. Make Jews of all backgrounds and commitments feel welcome.			
<i>extremely important</i>	<b>39%</b>	<i>very important</i>	<b>47%</b>
<i>somewhat important</i>	<b>10%</b>	<i>or not important</i>	<b>3%</b>
142. Provide several points of connection to being Jewish.			
<i>extremely important</i>	<b>52%</b>	<i>very important</i>	<b>41%</b>
<i>somewhat important</i>	<b>6%</b>	<i>or not important</i>	<b>1%</b>
143. Encourage its members to affiliate with the JCC.			
<i>extremely important</i>	<b>6%</b>	<i>very important</i>	<b>24%</b>
<i>somewhat important</i>	<b>34%</b>	<i>or not important</i>	<b>37%</b>
Now I'd like to know the extent to which you believe each of these objectives is <b>important for a JCC</b> . I'll read them again.			
144. Provide its members with a sense of community.			
<i>extremely important</i>	<b>33%</b>	<i>very important</i>	<b>55%</b>
<i>somewhat important</i>	<b>10%</b>	<i>or not important</i>	<b>2%</b>
145. Challenge its members to increase their Jewish commitment & involvement?			
<i>extremely important</i>	<b>12%</b>	<i>very important</i>	<b>1%</b>
<i>somewhat important</i>	<b>27%</b>	<i>or not important</i>	<b>0%</b>
146. Help its members' children grow as Jews.			
<i>extremely important</i>	<b>15%</b>	<i>very important</i>	<b>70%</b>
<i>somewhat important</i>	<b>4%</b>	<i>or not important</i>	<b>1%</b>
147. Help its adult members grow as Jews.			
<i>extremely important</i>	<b>11%</b>	<i>very important</i>	<b>59%</b>
<i>somewhat important</i>	<b>30%</b>	<i>or not important</i>	<b>1%</b>
148. Encourage more and stronger friendships among its members.			
<i>extremely important</i>	<b>12%</b>	<i>very important</i>	<b>60%</b>
<i>somewhat important</i>	<b>25%</b>	<i>or not important</i>	<b>3%</b>
149. Make Jews of all backgrounds and commitments feel welcome.			
<i>extremely important</i>	<b>50%</b>	<i>very important</i>	<b>47%</b>
<i>somewhat important</i>	<b>3%</b>	<i>or not important</i>	<b>0%</b>
150. Provide several points of connection to being Jewish.			
<i>extremely important</i>	<b>29</b>	<i>very important</i>	<b>63%</b>
<i>somewhat important</i>	<b>8%</b>	<i>or not important</i>	<b>0%</b>
151. Encourage its members to affiliate with synagogues.			
<i>extremely important</i>	<b>5%</b>	<i>very important</i>	<b>30%</b>
<i>somewhat important</i>	<b>36%</b>	<i>or not important</i>	<b>29%</b>



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