MS-603: Rabbi Marc H. Tanenbaum Collection, 1945-1992.

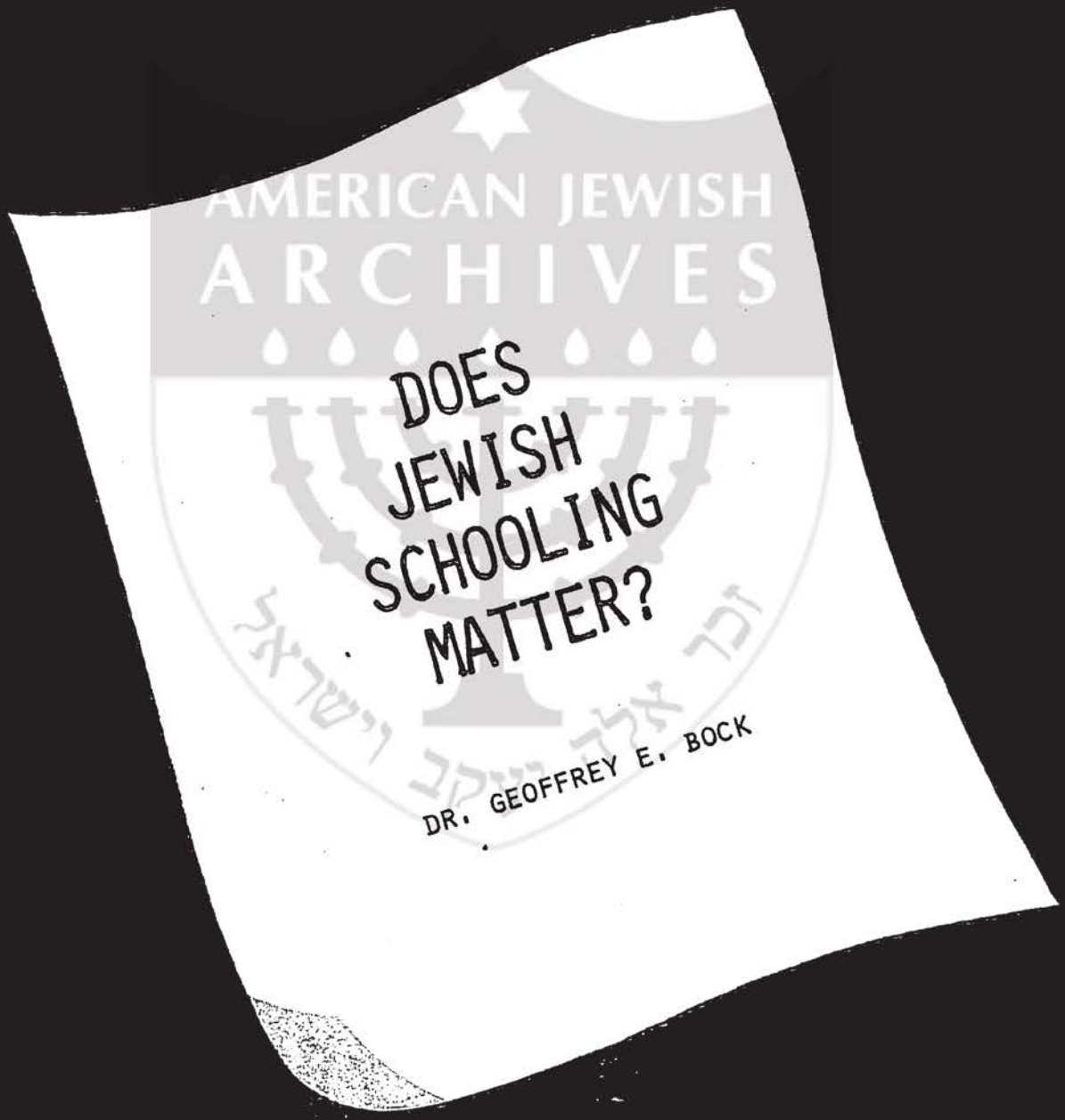
Series E: General Alphabetical Files. 1960-1992

Box 82, Folder 1, Education, 1974-1979.

3101 Clifton Ave, Cincinnati, Ohio 45220
(513) 221-1875 phone, (513) 221-7812 fax
americanjewisharchives.org

Jewish Education and Jewish Identity

Colloquium Papers



THE AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE

DOES JEWISH SCHOOLING MATTER?

Dr. Geoffrey E. Bock

INDEX

PREFACE

In 1972 the American Jewish Committee created the Colloquium on Jewish Education and Jewish Identity in response to the recommendations and findings of the AJC Task Force on the Future of the Jewish Community in America. The Task Force, which met during 1970 and 1971, dealt with trends and needs in various areas of Jewish communal life. The analysis of the state of Jewish education produced a nearly unanimous opinion that it was in need of fundamental reform.

The perception of the Task Force derived from its observations that most Jewish schools produce graduates who are functionally illiterate in Judaism and not clearly positive in their attitudinal identification, that most graduates look back without joy on their educational experience, and that the relatively low status of Jewish education and educators make it difficult to recruit talented, creative personnel. Nevertheless, it was felt that the Jewish community's ongoing loyalty to Jewish education combined with a growing impetus for reform gave grounds for optimism and a basis for communal planning.

To investigate the implementation of Task Force recommendations and its call for new educational directions and priorities, the American Jewish Committee convened the Colloquium on Jewish Education and Jewish Identity. The Colloquium was an interdisciplinary group which included recognized figures in the fields of psychology and sociology, educational leaders in the Jewish community, and young academics engaged in Jewish educational research. Between 1972 and 1976 the participants met five times for two-day conferences based upon specially commissioned papers on a wide variety of matters touching on the relationship between Jewish education and Jewish identity. The aim of this process was to develop and publish a series of recommendations for Jewish education based upon the research and deliberations of the Colloquium which could serve as a charge and a guide to those in the Jewish community responsible for educational policy and practice.

With this as our goal, we are pleased to publish the commissioned papers presented at the Colloquium Conferences in the following series of pamphlets:

This pamphlet, Does Jewish Schooling Matter? was prepared by Dr. Geoffrey E. Bock. It contains a summary of the findings as well as conclusions and recommendations emerging from his doctoral dissertation, "The Jewish Schooling of American Jew," submitted to the Graduate School of Education, Harvard University. Dr. Bock's research, which utilized relevant data culled from the National Jewish Population Study of the Council of Jewish Federations and Welfare Funds, was funded in part by the John Slawson Fund for Research, Training and Education of the American Jewish Committee.

The conclusions and recommendations in Dr. Bock's paper are based on his research and observations. Thus, while not all of them reflect the concensus of the Colloquium, they do offer additional educational alternatives.

The Colloquium was chaired by Yehuda Rosenman and David Sidorsky. A summary report and recommendations, representing a convergence and consensus among the members of the Colloquium, is available upon request from the American Jewish Committee.

The purposes of Jewish schooling in America have always reflected a compromise between secular and sectarian goals. "The functions of the complementary schools (or supplemental schools)," Isaac Berkson remarked in his foresighted book Theories of Americanization, "is to transmit the culture of the ethnic group and thus enrich the life of the individual Jew and through him that of the total group."[1] Certainly individuals vary in their attachment to the Jewish group. Some are primarily Jewish and secondarily American, while others are primarily American and only marginally Jewish. But, in Berkson's analysis, the Jewish school defines the salient aspects of the American-Jewish experience. Through the cultural enrichment of the individual the entire group gains.

For Berkson and for all other Jewish educators of the early twentieth century, cultural adjustment was the central problem of American-Jewish life--how to adapt Jewish values to meet the norms of the larger American society. Their solution of this problem became the basic rationale of Jewish school in America. Jewish children would learn about the American mainstream through the public schools. Then, after their secular schooling, they would attend supplemental schools to learn Jewish subjects.

In the early twentieth century, the majority of American Jews accepted this compromise. Most sent their children to public schools. Those parents that also cared about their cultural and religious heritage believed that supplemental schooling would teach their children about Jewish values, norms and behaviors. However, a minority of American Jews have always found this compromise unsatisfying. Even sixty years ago, some of the most religious parents sent their children to all-day religious schools.

Within the last two decades, as successive generations of American born Jews have become more 'American' and less 'Jewish' in identifying outlook, the basic compromise has been seriously challenged. For instance, Charles E. Silberman in his colloquium paper observes that when he and other members of the second generation "were rebelling we asked, 'Should we be Jewish?', not 'Why should we be Jewish?' Being Jewish was a fact. One either observed or didn't observe; one either accepted or rejected. One was not indifferent; one could not be indifferent. My children, their friends, their generation are not rebelling in that sense. They are not rejecting their parents because they are too Jewish; ...The question <u>they</u> ask is, 'Why should I be Jewish?'"

Cultural continuity rather than cultural adjustment is now the central problem of American Jewish life. That is, American Jewish parents now expect Jewish schools and other educational efforts to teach their children about a cultural heritage which is no longer primarily reinforced by the home and the community. Sixty years ago, Jewish educators and parents alike assumed that Jewish schooling simply enriched an indigenous cultural heritage. Jewish educators never claimed that their efforts would insure cultural continuity and this task has only recently been thrust upon them.

Thus the change in the structure of American Jewish life from a largely immigrant to a primarily second and third generation community raises serious questions about the present purposes and future goals of Jewish schooling. Can Jewish schools be a force for the continuity of Jewishness? If so, what type of Jewish schooling is best? Is the compromise between secular and sectarian schooling still valid? These issues, in turn, are part of a more general sociological problem: can schools (i.e. formal educational institutions) have an impact on non-cognitive outcomes such as values, behaviors and beliefs? Or compared to family background, generational changes and other factors, are schools weak social institutions that have little or no impact on non-cognitive outcomes?

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

In this study I have sought to analyze the role of Jewish schooling in terms of the overall process of Jewish identification in American society based on a random sample of <u>all</u> American Jews, aged 18 and above. (93.1 percent of the sample are aged 25 and above. Assuming that the average Jewish child has left Jewish schools by age 15, all respondents were enrolled in Jewish schools prior to 1968. 93.1 percent were enrolled prior to 1961.) I have found that Jewish schooling is <u>an important factor</u> in this process, but I have also found that it is never <u>the most important factor</u>.

'Diversity' is the central axiom of Jewish identification. Not only do American Jews vary in the extent of their 'Jewishness' but they are 'more' or 'less' identified in a number of different ways. Some are 'more religious' than others: they are more observant in their personal life and are more involved in public religious activities. Some are more 'socially Jewish' than others: they are more involved in non-religious social activities with other Jews. Some are more 'ethnically Jewish' than others: they feel more identified with different aspects of the Jewish cultural heritage. Consequently, I have investigated a range of specific Jewish behaviors and attitudes and measured different dimensions of Jewish identification by ten separate scales.

This strategy has led to one basic insight. I have found that Jewish schooling and other social background factors (such as Jewish home background, generation of American birth, sex, chronological age, and present community of residence) have different kinds of influences on different dimensions of Jewish identification. There is no simple causal relationship between being raised in a Jewish home, having had a 'good' Jewish school experience (which might be defined in a number of different ways) and being Jewishly identified in later life.

Part of the problem concerns patterns of Jewish school attendance. Jewish educators have consistently claimed that the observed growth in Jewish school enrollments during the first half of the twentieth century indicated a growth in the demand of educational services. Since more people were receiving a Jewish education, they concluded that Jewish schooling was fulfilling an increasingly important role in group life. By examining who has gone to Jewish schools, I have found that in one important respect, educators' inferences of 'success' have been illusory. There has been little change in the types of people who have enrolled in Jewish schools over the years: generally they have been raised in more Jewish home environments and are men. The major difference has been in the length of time individuals have spent in Jewish schools. Later generation Jews have spent 'more years' attending Jewish schools and nevertheless have received 'fewer hours' of classroom instruction. This means that the later generations have had more years of contact with formal educational institutions but have probably learned less.

Different types of Jewish schools have attracted different kinds of Jews. 'Intensive Jewish schools' (day schools and Yeshivot) have generally attracted first generation men and women from all kinds of home backgrounds. Chedarim generally enrolled only first generation men, again from all kinds of home backgrounds. Supplemental schools have attracted second, third and fourth generation men and women, especially those raised in 'more Jewish' home environments. Three-day to five-

day supplemental schools have been most attractive to Jewish men, regardless of their family background or generation. One-day and two-day supplemental schools have been most popular among later generation Jews, especially women. In general, sex and generation are the principal factors affecting the type of school individuals have attended.

But the larger issue concerns whether attending a Jewish school as compared to not attending, or going to one type of Jewish school as compared to another, or spending more time in Jewish classrooms as compared to less time, has made a difference. After controlling for the effects of Jewish home background, generation of American birth, chronological age, sex and community of residence, I have found that better Jewishly schooled Jews are more identified. However, the relative importance of Jewish schooling, compared to the relative importance of other factors depends on (a) the definition (and measurement) of Jewish school experiences and (b) the conception of Jewish identification in question.

Generally, 'hours of Jewish instruction' is the best predicting measure of most conceptions of Jewish identification. All other factors being equal, those people who have spent 'more hours' in Jewish classrooms are more religious, more involved in informal social networks with other Jews, feel more knowledgeable about Jewish culture and are stronger supporters of Israel. They have either 'learned more' or have been 'better socialized' by their classroom experiences. There are, however, important exceptions. 'Years of Jewish schooling' is the best predictor of involvement in secular Jewish organizational activities. Those people who have been 'better socialized' by the repetitiveness of attending Jewish schools are more likely to become the Jewish organizational activists. 'Simply attending' a Jewish school is the best predictor of attitudes about Jewish self-esteem and attitudes about American political issues. By simply having been inside the Jewish school-house door, individuals are 'more Jewish' in their outlook about these issues.

How important are the effects of Jewish schooling? I find that the best predicting measure of Jewish schooling is an important factor accounting for variations in different conceptions of Jewish identification. But the influence of Jewish schooling, compared to the influence of Jewish family background, generation and other factors depends on the <u>particular</u> conception of Jewish identification in question. Moreover, the relative influence of these different factors suggest two general modes of Jewish identification. In some cases Jewish identification seems to be a reflection of personal values and beliefs; in other cases it basically involves public behaviors and commitments.

Personal Jewishness (such as personal religious observances, Jewish self-esteem, participation in informal social networks and cultural perceptions) is mainly influenced by Jewishness of home background. To the extent that Jewish schooling is important, home background is 1.3 to 2.4 times more important. In addition, generation of American birth has a considerable effect on various conceptions of personal Jewishness. The second and third generations are progressively less identified than the first. There is some evidence of a 'return' in the fourth generation in that it is more personally identified than the third. Furthermore, the effect of generation is roughly as important as the effect of Jewish schooling. This means that the decline in personal Jewishness due to generation is roughly offset by the effects of Jewish schooling. Consequently, with each generation of American-born Jews, Jewish schooling became progressively a more important factor affecting personal Jewishness. But this also means that the effects of Jewish schooling cannot compensate for the effects of home background.

Public Jewishness (such behaviors and activities as attendance at services, participation in secular synagogue affairs, participation in secular organizational activities, support for Israel and attitudes about American political issues) are a different matter. Jewish schooling is often as important as Jewish home background, but both of these factors are only part of more complicated social processes. Public Jewishness in part is a product of communal necessity. Those people who live in 'less intensive' Jewish communities (which in this analysis means residing outside the New York City metropolitan area) have greater incentives to be involved in formal Jewish activities. In part, supporting Israel is the result of personal memories; regardless of their family background or Jewish schooling, immigrants have been much stronger in their support for Israel than their progeny. Political attitudes, by comparison, are indicative of acculturation: later generation Jews, especially men and those individuals raised in less identified homes are more tolerant in their outlook about American political issues.

I have tested for a number of kinds of interactions. In general I find that the effects of Jewish family background, Jewish schooling, generation of American birth and sex are independent of one another. In the more detailed analysis of specific identification scales, there is evidence of a significant interaction between Jewish family background and Jewish schooling. But this interaction is complicated and is not always in the expected direction. That is, those individuals who were raised in more identified homes and have spent more hours in Jewish classrooms are slightly more publicly identified (especially in terms of synagogue attendance and synagogue activities). Thus, schooling supports the public values

initially fostered by the home environment. In practical terms, the time spent in Jewish classrooms has the greatest impact on those individuals least likely to attend Jewish schools.

Findings about the importance of Jewish schooling lead to another question: are some kinds of Jewish schools more effective than others? I find that supplemental schools are not automatically less effective than intensive schools, Yeshivot and days schools; they are simply less efficient.

All other factors being equal, roughly 1,000 hours of Jewish instruction are necessary before schooling begins to substantially affect Jewish identification. Further, the effectiveness of Jewish schooling for positive Jewish identification continues to increase reaching a high degree of effectiveness after roughly 4,000 classroom hours.

Intensive school-attenders attain the critical threshhold of 1,000 hours more quickly than supplemental school-attenders. Those individuals who have spent more than 3,200 hours in Jewish classrooms are likely to have attended intensive schools at some point during their childhood. Side effects of intensive schooling are obviously greater than those of supplemental schooling. Yet, the essential factor is the total number of hours spent in Jewish classrooms, rather than specifically the type of schooling. This finding has important implications for Jewish schooling policies.

Finally, I find that Jewish schooling fulfills a specific role in the identification process. Certainly, Jewish self-esteem affects behaviors; those people who feel more Jewish -- those who are more Jewishly self-identified -- are also more likely to act in identifiably Jewish ways. However, the factors involved in Jewish self-esteem differ from those which result in specific Jewish behaviors. Individuals raised in 'more Jewish' home environments are more likely to have greater Jewish self-esteem. Their personal attitudes lead them to behave Jewishly and either to attend synagogue services more frequently, or to practice more religious rituals in their homes or to be stronger supporters of Israel. By comparison, Jewish schooling has little direct effect on Jewish self-esteem. Individuals who have spent more hours in Jewish classrooms are more likely to behave Jewishly, regardless of their Jewish self-esteem. In other words, to the extent that Jewish schooling is important, it affects specific behaviors rather than feelings about Jewish self-esteem. Perhaps those people who have spent more time in Jewish classrooms have learned more; since they are more knowledgeable, they are more likely to behave in identifiably Jewish ways. Alternatively, perhaps better Jewishly schooled Jews have simply been better socialized to follow the accepted norms of group life. Perhaps those people who have spent more time in Jewish classrooms have learned more;

since they are more knowledgeable, they are more likely to behave in identifiably Jewish ways. Alternatively, perhaps better Jewishly schooled Jews have simply been better socialized to follow the accepted norms of group life.

IMPLICATIONS

My findings show that within certain bounds, Jewish schooling does affect various conceptions of Jewish identification. In particular, they lead to added insights about how schools affect non-cognitive outcomes, why the traditional compromise of Jewish educators worked to some extent, and what some of the future social policies about Jewish schooling should be.

The Theoretical Implications

American Jewry has been one of the most successful ethnic groups in American society. Jewish traditions have always emphasized education and learning. American Jews have been able to translate their traditional heritage into secular school achievements, occupational mobility and economic prosperity. Because education and learning are so highly valued in group life, my analysis serves as an 'ideal' case study about more general educational and sociological issues. Consequently, my findings have important theoretical implications.

My findings support some of the previous research about the noncognitive effects of schooling and indicate that value-oriented schooling is one of a number of social factors that affect ethnic identification. The ethnic orientation of the home environment is a second factor; the changes in attitudes and behaviors from generation to generation is a third factor. Moreover, the impact of value-oriented schooling is due to the notion of critical threshholds. Usually, there is a minimal 'floor' and a maximal 'ceiling' between which value-oriented schooling independently affects ethnic identification. All in all, more schooling does not always lead people to be more identified; rather, school experiences must fall within the critical range.

Contrary to previous investigations of non-cognitive educational outcomes, I find slight evidence of 'interaction effects' between family background and schooling and then not always in the expected directions. I find no evidence of interactions between family background and generation and between schooling and generation. My findings tend to contradict the conventional wisdom that schools are only able to reinforce the values and norms that originate in the home, or in the social experiences of a particular generation. Certainly my conclusions about 'interaction effects' are most tentative: there may be methodological problems with my present analytic strategy. More research on interaction effects is necessary

to resolve these methodological issues.

The absence of significant interactions is a striking finding. If it does hold up under more detailed scrutiny, this finding implies that discrete factors affect the persistence of ethnic identification in American society. Value-oriented schooling is an expression of the normative standards of group life. Yet the absence of interactions may be due to the special role of Jewish schooling in Jewish life. In particular, Jews traditionally believed that learning about their history, traditions, religion and rituals was essential for their continuity as an identifiable group. Jewish education always has been a fundamental Jewish value. In contemporary American society, Jewish schooling continues to fulfill this essential social function, independent of the effects of home background or generation.

I have also shown that the impact of schooling depends on the nature of the non-cognitive outcomes in question, which in this study are the public and private conceptions of Jewish identification. In particular, Jewish school experiences are more likely to affect public behaviors rather than personal beliefs. By comparison, family background has a much more substantial influence on personal beliefs. For example, all other factors being equal, Jewish schooling is much more likely to influence involvement with the synagogue than participation in informal social networks or attitudes about Jewish self-esteem. Because schooling has a greater affect on public behaviors it is easier for educators to teach people to identify with the formal institutions of group life than to accept the intrinsic, personal ethnic group values. As an ethnic group comes to rely on its formal educational institutions for the continuity of group life, it stresses identification with specific ethno-religious institutions, rather than with personal values and beliefs. For instance, to the extent that future generations of American Jews are intensively educated in Jewish schools and raised in relatively unidentified homes, they will express their Jewishness in terms of identification with the synagogue, with other formal ethnic institutions, and with public, group-oriented activities. But they will not be especially Jewish in personal outlook. To the extent that personal ethnic values and beliefs are maintained, they depend largely on the value-orientation of the family and on generation of American birth.

Finally, I find that each succeeding generation in the United States is less personally Jewish. However, all other factors being equal, I find some evidence of a slight "reversal" in the fourth generation. Once background factors are taken into account, it is possible that the third generation continues to experience the conflicts of the second; only the fourth generation has the leisure for self-exploration which

would lead to a modest return towards the values and norms of the immigrant generation.

Although ethnic schooling is an important factor affecting the continuity of ethnicity in American society, it can be best understood in terms of its larger social context. "The ethnic group in American society became not a survival from the age of mass immigration but a new social form. . . Ethnic groups . . . are continually recreated by new experiences in American society."[2] For group members, ethnic schooling is an important link with their cultural heritage. It contributes to the transformation of the group and to its adaptations to American social norms--in short, to it's 'continual recreation.' But the transformation and the adaptation are in a specific direction. Ethnic schooling is especially likely to'continually recreate' the group in terms of public identification with formal institutions and public group-oriented behaviors but it has relatively less impact on personalized ethnic identification. Rather, these personalized aspects of group life depend on generation and on family background.

Complex factors affect the development of this 'new /American7 social form.' Reliance on formal institutions leads to a particular kind of group life. One must certainly question the authenticity of public identification without the underlying structure of personalized values and beliefs. For instance, what kind of person is publicly Jewish and yet hardly identified with personal Jewish values and beliefs? What is the authenticity of a group which only emphasizes a public identification, devoid of meaningful, personal values and behaviors for the individual?

All in all, the increasing emphasis on ethnic schooling for group survival is only one type of new experience. The emergence of the later generation, ethnic group oriented family is potentially another factor. But American society experts powerful assimilatory tendencies, especially on the personal level. In an open society, assimilation is a legitimate possibility. Thus the dilemma of ethnic identification in American society is that an ethnic group can more easily construct formal institutions (such as schools) than influence the personal loyalties of its members. From a policy perspective, educational policies are easier to formulate and execute than family policies.

Policy Implications

From one perspective, the policy implications of this analysis are relatively straightforward. Even after controlling for the effects of Jewishness of home background, generation and other factors, Jewish schooling is modestly to moderately important. In general, 'more hours' of Jewish

instruction lead to higher scores on different identification measures. Moreover, roughly 1,000 classroom hours form the critical threshhold. All other factors being equal, those people with more than this amount usually find that their school experiences positively affect their identification; those with less than this critical amount usually find that their school experiences have little effect on their identification.

What should the American Jewish community do to insure that future generations receive more than 1,000 hours of Jewish instruction? And looking at the simple question of hours raises a more fundamental matter of principle. What should be the future attitude of American Jewry towards its long-standing position that Jewish schooling should be a supplemental activity, that Jewish children should learn about Jewish beliefs, heritage and traditions only after they have finished their secular schooling? At some point in children's lives, should Jewish learning take priority over secular instruction? It seems to me that there are three basic policy options to consider: expanding supplemental schooling, building day schools and harmonizing the relationships between secular schools and Jewish schools.

1. Expanding Supplemental Schooling: If one assumes that the basic problem is the length of the Jewish school day and the number of instructional hours offered each week, then expanding the length of time spent in supplemental schools is a plausible alternative. This may be accomplished either by expanding the number of class-hours offered each week or by increasing the number of years spent in Jewish schools. Few supplemental schools offer instruction at the pre-school or high school level. In principle, if teenagers remained in supplemental schools through their high school years, they would have the opportunity to learn more.[3]

The logic of this policy option is inescapable. It preserves the traditional compromise between secular and sectarian schooling. Jewish schooling continues to be an extracurricular activity. Nevertheless, this alternative is not without its pitfalls. Simply enrolling children for more years in a part-time program does little to affect their Jewishness. Those veterans of many years of supplemental schooling are more likely to be the Jewish organizational activists, but they are not notably more Jewish along other salient dimensions. An extra year of afternoon supplemental schooling only results in 240 more hours of classroom instruction. For supplemental high school programs to be effective, individuals will have to spend more years in Jewish schools.

Moreover, I suspect that the issue of time is only symptomatic of the conceptual and curricular problems of supplemental schooling in general--what should children learn

in order to become identifying Jewish adults. By simply encouraging post-Bar Mitzvah/post-Bat Mitzvah schooling, Jewish educators have managed to skirt the more substantive pedagogical issues, the problems of educational goals and curricular objectives. In short, this policy option is the least controversial. It also promises to be the least effective.

2. The Day School Option: If one assumes that the only policy objective is for people to spend more than 1,000 hours in Jewish classrooms during their childhood, then the modern day school is the most efficient alternative. It has the virtue of providing children with intensive Jewish school experiences, unencumbered by the conflicting time pressures of other extra-curricular activities. The day school movement is currently the fastest growing sector of Jewish education: between 1970 and 1972, day school enrollments reportedly increased by 12.2 percent.[4] Yet most day schools are Orthodox in ideological orientation and enroll students mainly in the elementary grades.[5] The Conservative movement has also supported serious attempts at day schooling. Its system of Solomon Schechter Day Schools has sought to attract children from less religious homes who would not attend an ideologically Orthodox school. And even the Reform movement has begun to consider day schools, and has already sponsored five or six.[6]

However, the conceptual, political and social consequences of day schooling continue to pose problems for many Jews. The day school is 'private' and 'religiously oriented' in its philosophical outlook. Consequently, from one perspective it represents a "heroic accomplishment because it rejects the assumption of the American Jew (and of many Jewish educators as well) that Jewish culture is secondary to American culture."[7] From another perspective, it represents an assertion of Jewish separatism, that identifying Jews are different from Americans in general. And this assertion goes against the prevailing communal notions about Jewish survival in American society.

If policy statements of the organized Jewish community are in any way a reflection of the sentiments of the majority of American Jews, the commitment to the traditional compromise of Jewish educators (and to the traditional communal support of public schooling) remains strong.[8] Thus, while day schools will probably have a larger appeal in the future than they have had in the past, they will probably never attract the majority of American Jewish children. One way or another, less efficient methods of Jewish schooling will continue to be more popular.

3. Harmonizing Jewish Instruction with Secular Schooling: If one assumes that the policy objective is not only having people spend more than 1,000 hours in Jewish classrooms but also maintaining some commitment to secular education, then

the educational alternatives are more complicated. New forums for Jewish learning are needed to modify the present organization of supplemental schools--ones that provide intensive instruction but maintain the traditional compromise between secular and sectarian schooling. New kinds of Jewish learning environments must try to create a new kind of balance between the secular and sectarian impulses of contemporary Jewish life in America.

Jewish studies on the college level are one alternative. College level courses at least can offer intensive instruction within a relatively short period of time. For example, individuals certainly learn more Hebrew in a year of intensive study in college than in any number of years of intermittent supplemental schooling. And since almost all Jewish children now go to college, college level courses may be an efficient way to reach the next generation of Jewish adults.

But there are two problems with this alternative. First, enrolling in Jewish studies courses is a matter of choice, leading one to suspect that those students who were raised in more identified homes in the first place will be the chief beneficiaries. Second, compared to the socialization function of primary and secondary schooling, college courses emphasize the norms of universalism and secular achievement and are not geared to fostering uncritical identification. Rather, their purposes are to transmit knowledge and there is no guarantee that Jewish college students will become more identified.

Released time programs may be a second alternative. Children would spend part of their school day in public schools learning secular subjects; then, being 'released' from public schools for a specific period of time, they would attend Jewish schools to learn Jewish subjects. These kinds of programs would provide an institutional mechanism for Jewish children to spend a more substantial portion of their school day in a Jewish learning environment. Rather than continuing as a burdensome extra-curricular activity, Jewish schooling would become an integral part of children's everyday lives. Perhaps children from relatively unidentified families would be more likely to attend as little else would compete for the time they would otherwise spend in secular schools.

Released time programs are hardly a new idea; they have ample legal, historical, and educational precedents. Constitutionally, they have been judged a legitimate form of 'accommodation' between secular and religious authorities, one where children may be 'released' from their secular studies in public schools to attend religious classes conducted by their respective faiths.[9] Nevertheless, some claim that released time constitutes a recognition of religious education in the public sector and therefore impinges on the strict separation of church and state.[10]

However, from an educational perspective, released time programs potentially are only part of an emerging movement within American education towards nonformal secondary schooling. Many secondary schools now let students out of traditional classes to do a variety of 'creative' or 'vocationally oriented' tasks within their communities. As Americans come to realize that schools are places for cultural enrichment, rather than simply places for occupational, social and economic successes, the tendencies toward de-schooling are likely to grow. Jewish cultural enrichment could be another kind of creative program that interested adolescents could choose. It is altogether possible that existing supplemental schools would expand their programmatic offerings, to provide a released time alternative for those children who would want to study Jewish subjects during secular school hours.

However, released time programs are not without serious problems. One issue concerns implementation. Released time efforts require cooperation and coordination between public school officials and Jewish educators over the basic administrative questions of scheduling and transportation--such as when pupils would be released, whether they would miss important secular classes and how they would be transported from the secular to the Jewish school. Other religious and ethnic groups would have to go along with the proposal. A second problem is philosophical and pedagogical. Released time programs would simply provide the opportunity for Jewish children to spend more hours in Jewish classrooms. They would do little to resolve the ideological and pedagogical disputes about the content and focus of Jewish education--what children should learn and how the material should be presented.

Jewish instruction within secular schools may be another alternative. Since the great majority of Jewish children continue to attend public schools or non-sectarian private schools, efforts might be made to provide Jewish instruction within secular school environments. For example, students might learn Hebrew as a foreign language and Jewish history as part of their social studies curriculum. Hebrew language instruction in the public high schools, in particular, is not a new idea, but it has not been a terribly popular one. In 1973, only about 2,200 pupils in the entire United States were enrolled in public high school Hebrew language classes.[11]

American Jews have been very reluctant to seek Jewish studies within the public school context for a number of reasons. Jewish courses taught in the public sector may not reflect the prevailing norms of the Jewish community. A 'value-free' Jewish curriculum, where discussion of religious beliefs are prohibited (in order to satisfy the separation of church and state requirements) may do little to foster identification. Second, by advocating Jewish courses in the public

sector, the Jewish community again must enter the political arena. Thus, many Jews might fear that if social cohesion diminishes, over the long run the security of the American Jewish community will be threatened. Moreover, even if Jewish children have a greater opportunity to learn about Jewish subjects, they may have few Jewish socialization experiences and learn little about Jewish social norms. When Jewish parents send their children to public schools, they are sending them as Americans, rather than as Jews. Nevertheless, one could increase the minimal efforts made at Hebrew language instruction within public schools without endangering other values.

Jewish instruction in conjunction with secular schools may be a fourth alternative. Rather than seeking to modify the public school experiences of Jewish children (either through shortening their public instruction or introducing them to Jewish courses in public schools) Jewish educators may seek secular recognition for Jewish learning. That is, if Jewish educators offer a substantial program, Jewish students may seek high school credits or other forms of secular recognition for their Jewish studies. However, this alternative probably only applies to the most Jewishly identified students in the first place who are attracted to serious Jewish studies. It is not specifically a strategy for enrolling more students into Jewish classes. Rather it is simply a way to legitimize and perhaps to provide some modest incentives for Jewish studies.

As a policy objective, harmonizing Jewish instruction with secular schooling leads to a number of intriguing alternatives. They are not without their obvious social costs as well as benefits. But, in my opinion, the specific principle of recognizing the similarities between Jewish instruction and secular schooling, rather than emphasizing the differences between the two, is as important as the variety of educational arrangements that might stem from it. The simple fact is that Jewish communities in America differ in complicated ways and require diverse educational programs, appropriate to their individual communal circumstances. By accepting the principle that Jewish instruction need not be secondary to secular schooling, then a number of plausible ways to harmonize one kind of educational objective with the other emerge. American Jewry can begin to develop new kinds of Jewish educational programs, designed to meet the various changing communal circumstances.

Implications for Family Policies

From another perspective, the policy implications of this analysis are less auspicious. Even considering a critical threshhold for Jewish schooling, other factors continue to

affect Jewishness. In particular, Jewish family background has a consistent and considerable impact on Jewish identification, especially on personal Jewishness. And the perceptible changes from generation to generation result in the decline of personal Jewish values, attitudes and behaviors.

Less Jewishly educated individuals will raise their children in less identified families. And regardless of the extensiveness of their Jewish school experiences, individuals raised in less Jewish home environments are likely to be less personally identified. The reliance on schooling for the continuity of identification emphasizes public Jewishness, to the exclusion of personal Jewishness. If one sees personal commitments as essential for the continuity of group life from generation to generation, then formal educational policies are necessary, but not sufficient.

Rather, effective policies require efforts to 're-Judaize' the Jewish family by making a less identified family, more identified. One approach has been efforts at Jewish family life education where trained educators or social workers attempt to teach families about Jewish norms and values, and attempt to use Jewish motifs to resolve family difficulties. Another approach has been family-oriented education. Some Jewish schools offer Jewish studies for parents while the children are attending classes. In this way parents learn how to reinforce the values that their children have been taught in Jewish schools. A third approach has been total family experiences. When the entire family participates in meaningful Jewish experiences, as for instance during a weekend retreat or in a Sabbath meal, they are more likely to accept Jewish values, behaviors and beliefs.

Certainly there are unlimited possibilities for family programming but the more important question concerns their relative effectiveness. Although I have not been able to find any evaluations of any family education programs, it is clear that programming for family education has barely begun. Building the necessary programs is a long range essential which is bound to be time consuming and require new institutions, new organizational efforts, and a great investment of financial resources.

Ultimately, Jewish schooling is only part of a larger social process. Whereas Berkson and other Jewish educators of the early twentieth century had relatively unambiguous educational and social objectives, the present situation is now much more complicated. The central dilemma of American Jewry is no longer cultural adjustment, or the adaptation of traditional Jewish values to American norms. It is now cultural continuity, or how American Jews should organize themselves to insure continuity to the next generation. This is a serious problem. Perhaps for the first time since Jewish life in

the diaspora began, assimilation into the larger society is a legitimate possibility.

Jewish schooling is important, but it is only one factor. It is an act of faith about the possibilities for group life in the future. What is educationally most important is the critical examination of group values and norms. If the next generation of American Jews know about their cultural heritage and their religious traditions, they possibly will be better able to dream and to live authentically Jewish lives.

Footnotes

1. Isaac Berkson, Theories of Americanization (New York: Teachers College Press, 1920), p. 103

2. Nathan Glazer and Daniel P. Moynihan, Beyond the Melting Pot, 2nd edition (Cambridge, Mass.: The M.I.T. Press, 1971), pp. 16-17.

3. Jewish supplemental high schooling has been a growth area of Jewish education. Hillel Hochberg of the American Association for Jewish Education estimates that within the last 15 years, enrollments in Jewish supplemental high schools have increased 76 percent to a record 76,000 students. But within the last few years, there is evidence that the growth has tapered off. See "The Jewish High School in 1972-73: Status and Trends," The American Jewish Yearbook, LXXVI (1975).

4. For a discussion of the current trends in Jewish school enrollments see Harold Himmelfarb, "Jewish Education for Naught: Educating the Culturally Deprived Jewish Child," Analysis (The Institute for Jewish Policy Planning and Research of the Synagogue Council of America) No. 51, (September, 1975), pp. 1-2.

5. In 1967, 78 percent of all day school students attended Orthodox-sponsored day schools. 80 percent of all day school students were enrolled in the kindergarten and elementary school level. See American Association for Jewish Education, 1967 National Census of Jewish Schools (New York: Department of Statistical Research, AAJE, December 1967), tables 3 and 5.

6. Martin Rozenberg, "A Perspective on Reform Religious Education," paper presented at the Colloquium on Jewish Education of the American Jewish Committee, June 9, 1975, p.4.

7. Marshall Sklare, "The Social Background of American Jewish Education--A Commentary," paper presented at the Colloquium on Jewish Education of the American Jewish Committee, October 5-8, 1972.

8. For a recent statement about communal attitudes towards sectarian education and public schooling see Reassessment Committee of the National Jewish Community Relations

Advisory Council, The Public Schools and American Democratic Pluralism--The Role of the Jewish Community, Findings, Conclusions and Recommendations of a Conference, May 1-May 3, 1971.

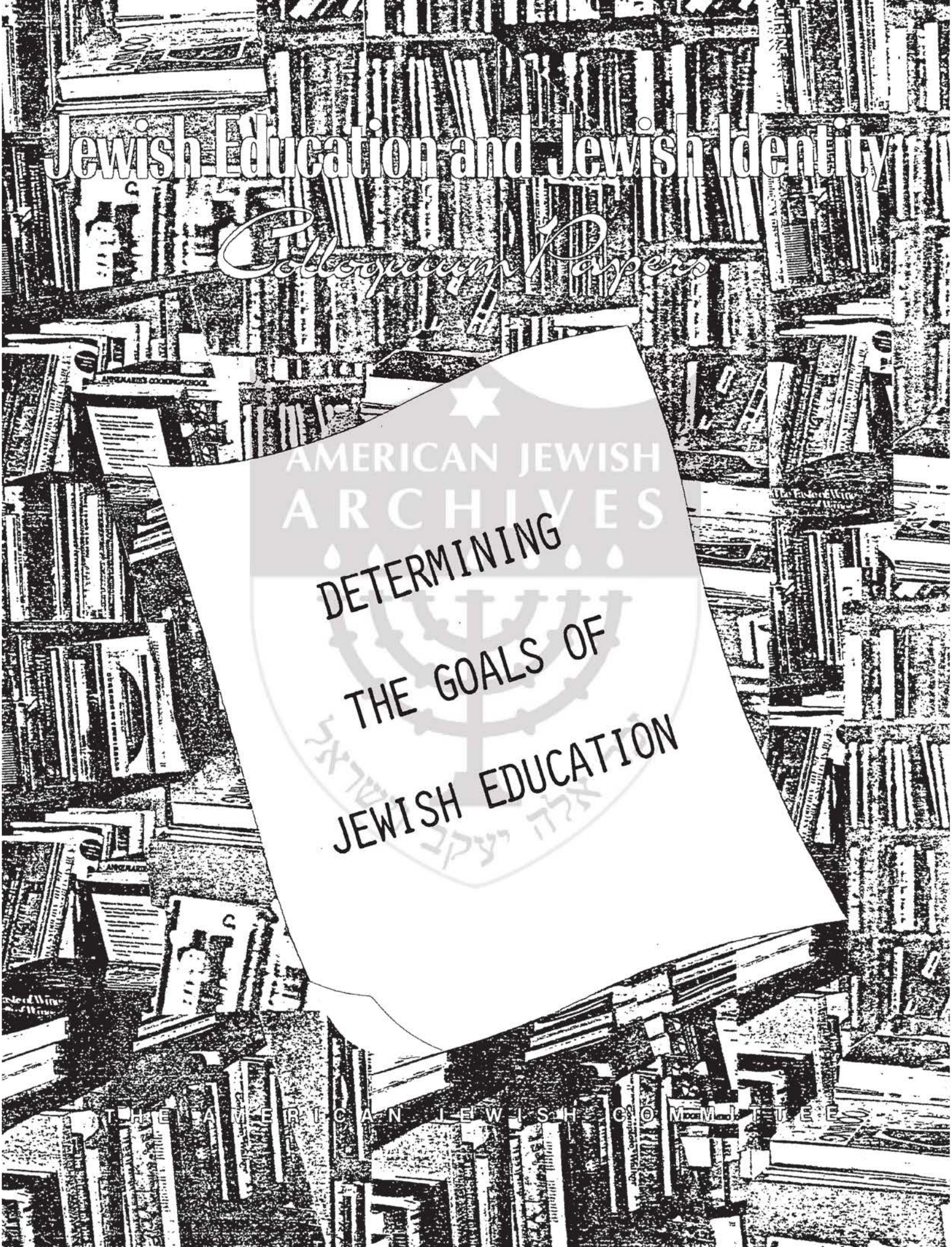
9. However religious instruction must take place outside the public school premises. See Zorach v. Clawson, 343, U.S. 306(1952).

10. David Sanford Cohen, "American Reform Judaism and the Jewish Day School" (M.A. thesis, Department of Contemporary Jewry, Hebrew University, October 1974), pp. 18-31.

11. The National Center for Educational Statistics of the U.S. Office of Education reports in their forthcoming National Inventory of Curricular Offerings and Pupil Enrollments that an estimated 2,177 public high school students in 57 high schools in 10 states across the nation were enrolled in Hebrew language classes during the 1972-73 school year. This estimate includes both half-year and full-year courses. An estimated 971 high school pupils were enrolled in New York State. NCES estimates are based on a large scale national survey.

    The New York City Board of Education reports that in 1974-75, a total of 2,183 pupils (including 1,537 senior high school students) were enrolled in Hebrew language classes. Thus there is a moderate discrepancy between the NCES estimates and the N.Y.C. Board of Education population enrollment figures. But even if the NCES estimates are off by 100 percent (an unlikely occurance, given their sophisticated design) the national enrollment estimates would still be less than 5,000 high school pupils.

For additional copies, write to
THE AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE
Institute of Human Relations
165 East 56th Street
New York, New York 10022



DETERMINING

THE

GOALS OF JEWISH EDUCATION

CONTENTS

PREFACE

In 1972 the American Jewish Committee created the Colloquium on Jewish Education and Jewish Identity in response to the recommendations and findings of the AJC Task Force on the Future of the Jewish Community in America. The Task Force, which met during 1970 and 1971, dealt with trends and needs in various areas of Jewish communal life. The analysis of the state of Jewish education produced a nearly unanimous opinion that it was in need of fundamental reform.

The perception of the Task Force derived from its observations that most Jewish schools produce graduates who are functionally illiterate in Judaism and not clearly positive in their attitudinal identification, that most graduates look back without joy on their educational experience, and that the relatively low status of Jewish education and educators make it difficult to recruit talented, creative personnel. Nevertheless, it was felt that the Jewish community's ongoing loyalty to Jewish education combined with a growing impetus for reform gave grounds for optimism and a basis for communal planning.

To investigate the implementation of Task Force recommendations and its call for new educational directions and priorities, the American Jewish Committee convened the Colloquium on Jewish Education and Jewish Identity. The Colloquium was an interdisciplinary group which included recognized figures in the fields of psychology and sociology, educational leaders in the Jewish community, and young academics engaged in Jewish educational research. Between 1972 and 1976 the participants met five times for two-day conferences based upon specially commissioned papers on a wide variety of matters touching on the relationship between Jewish education and Jewish identity. The aim of this process was to develop and publish a series of recommendations for Jewish education based upon the research and deliberations of the Colloquium which could serve as a charge and a guide to those in the Jewish community responsible for educational policy and practice.

With this as our goal, we are pleased to publish the commissioned papers presented at the Colloquium Conferences in the following series of pamphlets:

This pamphlet, Determining the Goals of Jewish Education, contains two provocative perspectives on the need for goal clarification in Jewish education as well as three brief statements of specific goals as seen by leading rabbis from the Orthodox, Conservative and Reform movements. Professor Fox's paper, Toward a Philosophy of Jewish Education was originally prepared for the AJC Task Force on the Future of the Jewish Community in America, but because of its direct relevance it was also used as a background paper for one of the Colloquium Conferences.

The Colloquium was chaired by Yehuda Rosenman and David Sidorsky. A Summary Report and recommendations, representing a convergence and consensus among the members of the Colloquium, is available upon request from the American Jewish Committee.

TOWARD A PHILOSOPHY OF JEWISH EDUCATION

Seymour Fox

TOWARD A PHILOSOPHY OF JEWISH EDUCATION

One of the great difficulties of dealing with the problems of Jewish Education[1] is the location of the problem. Discussions on the problems of Jewish education are often merely discussions of solutions, which are difficult to justify because the solutions have not been related to a specific problem. From time to time, we are told that what Jewish education needs is large sums of money and that "a war chest" would solve or very much alleviate the "problem". Although it is true that Jewish education is under-financed and that any significant program would probably require more funds than are currently available, it is difficult to understand why funding should precede decisions concerning ideas or programs.

We are all familiar with the claim that Jewish education cannot succeed unless the child attends the school for more hours, but we are not told what will be done with these additional hours. Though it is probably true that a well-thought-out or "new" program of Jewish education would require additional teaching time, the prior problem appears to be the nature of the "new program".

Others have tried to locate the "basic" problem, as lack of or inadequate personnel. And one can hardly deny that Jewish education must recruit new and different personnel.

---

1. In this paper Jewish Education refers essentially to formal educational programs.

However, an appraisal of existing personnel and a determination of the desirable qualities of new personnel would depend on our conception of education.

We are told that no matter what conception or program of Jewish education would guide our recruitment of personnel, the low status and salary of the profession presents an insurmountable obstacle. And, difficult as it is to deny the partial validity of this claim, it is interesting to note how many talented young Jews have been willing to devote a good deal of their lives to a "cause" without thinking of the status that they would thereby acquire.

I could continue to list and elaborate on the various diagnoses that have been offered to explain the sad state of Jewish education in the United States,[2] but all of them, just as those already presented, fail to deal with the prior problem: the nature of the Jewish education we want to develop or preserve. I am not merely presenting the obvious argument that means are somehow related to ends in education. Rather, my point is that none of the solutions offered can possibly succeed if the nature of Jewish education, or the end product of Jewish education, has not been clarified. We cannot hope to recruit proper personnel for Jewish education, unless we can clearly present to young people the cause to which we want them to devote their professional lives. We will not be able to develop radically new or even different curricula for Jewish schools, unless curriculum specialists and those scholars, teachers and educators who can prepare exciting educational materials, are inspired by new conceptions that are authentic. We will not even convince the various funding agencies within the Jewish community to change their priorities and invest substantial sums of money for Jewish education, unless we can argue convincingly that the Jewish education we want to develop has some chance of substantially affecting the parents and children these organizations serve and are responsible to.

In short, my position is that the most urgent problem facing Jewish education today is its aimlessness and, consequently, its blandness. Until serious deliberation is undertaken in this area, we cannot hope to deal with the issues we have already mentioned, or the many others that will arise as we attempt to develop a new and different approach to Jewish education. I claim further that this deliberation cannot be undertaken by the present leadership of Jewish education, though they should and must have a significant role.

To avoid any misunderstanding at this early stage, it is

---

2. Reports of the American Association for Jewish Education contain some of the data generally used to support the diagnosis of the plight of Jewish education.

important to clarify that deliberation as to the ends and content of Jewish education and the discovery of new conceptions of Jewish education would not, by itself, solve the problems of Jewish education. Rather, this deliberation is both a prior and necessary condition that will make it possible subsequently to tackle questions such as curricula, personnel, structure and financing.

It is generally assumed that a base for this kind of deliberation already exists. If we were to study current practice could we not uncover its implicit philosophy. Of course, current practice must be carefully investigated, but I have the distinct feeling that the investigation of most current forms of Jewish education, except for the education of the ultra-Orthodox, would reveal that the curriculum and teacher-training that is being practised has little resemblance to what the leadership of the given movement, school or institution claims to be central in its conception of education.

It is necessary to cite several examples to clarify this point. I believe that all Jewish religious groups in the United States conceive of character development as one of education's central purposes. However, if we were to investigate the existing programs of Jewish education, it would be difficult to discover a significant role for character education. Unless we take the naive position that to know is to do, and that to know is synonymous with "to master information", it would be difficult to see any connection between Jewish education and character education. If it can be shown that there is little or no connection between Jewish education as presently constituted and character education, I am sure most Jewish scholars, rabbis and parents would feel that a basic revision of Jewish educational practice is called for.

The concept of halacha (taken philosophically and psychologically) is basic to practically all schools of Jewish religious thought. The role of religious education would, therefore, be to find ways to commit the young to the concept of halacha and to teach them how to use it as a guide in everyday life. Youngsters, whether Orthodox, Conservative or Reform, would have to develop the ability to apply halachic principles to a variety of practical situations. The ability to recall the appropriate principle at the proper time, and the ability to choose properly among different and sometimes conflicting principles, as well as the skill required to apply principles to complex practical situations, is vital if we are interested in developing a Jew who wants to live by halacha. It may be that the heavy investment in time and energy devoted to mastering the detail and method of the Talmudic dialectic had as its goal the development of precisely such talents. It is questionable whether we can use this method, and we have found no substitute.

There seems to be a good deal of evidence that the State of Israel is very important for Jews in the United States, yet the Jewish school almost entirely ignores the subject.[3]

Professor A.J. Heschel has argued convincingly for emphasis in Jewish education on Jewish thought and theology and his plea has remained unanswered. His approach to the teaching of prayer has been acclaimed in public, but ignored in practice.

In summary, I believe that an investigation of current practice in Jewish education would demonstrate the extent to which Jewish education does not reflect many of the currently held conceptions of what is authentic for Judaism.

Furthermore, I cannot avoid complicating our discussion by indicating that the means and techniques that have been adopted by Jewish education are often imported indiscrimanately from general education. Since the means of education are not neutral, it is quite possible that some of the means being used for Jewish education cancel out whatever there is in Jewish education that is related to "authentic" Judaism.[4]

All this points to the urgent need for a serious discussion on what kind of Jewish education would reflect our various conceptions of Judaism. Such a discussion will result in the development of competing philosophies of Jewish education.[5] This in turn would make it possible for creative educators to develop means appropriate to the basic ideas in each of these philosophies.

It may appear frivolous to suggest philosophical deliberations when the "house is burning", but I believe it is ultimately the quickest, most effective way to extinguish the fire and rebuild on what is left.

Philosophical deliberation would affect our decisions in several areas. Let us begin by a consideration of the curriculum. The curriculum in use today is by and large based on the

---

3. Professor Walter Ackerman has documented this claim in a paper soon to be published.

4. I have discussed this matter in detail in "A Prolegomenon to a Philosophy of Jewish Education", Kivunim Rabim-Kavana Achat, a volume published on the occasion of the seventieth birthday of Professor Ernst Simon, by the School of Education of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1969, pp. 145-154.

5. I have discussed this matter with Professor Gerson Cohen at great length and he has encouraged me to believe in the practicality of developing a Jewish Paideia.

curriculum that was in use in earlier schools -- the cheder and the yeshiva -- but modified in the light of the reduced time available in the modern Jewish school. To put it mildly, this is not a sound educational approach. What is possible and appropriate for a fifteen to twenty-hour-a-week program is often impossible and inappropriate for a three to six-hour-a-week program. To complicate matters, many subjects were introduced into the Jewish school that did not exist in the very cheder or yeshiva that has been imitated. Prayer and "synagogue skills" and simple Jewish observances were formerly handled within the domain of the family and the community, but the family and the Jewish community are no longer equipped for this task and the formal curriculum of the school has been forced to take on the burden. Overburdened by more subjects than it can possible handle and lacking a guiding philosophy that would enable it to pick and choose among subjects competing for the limited time available, the school finds itself paralyzed.

This lack of clarity and its disastrous results can be seen in almost any subject taught in the Jewish school. Let us examine two of these subjects, Hebrew and Bible. Hebrew is taught in most afternoon and day schools and in many one-day-a-week schools. The time allocated to the study of Hebrew in the afternoon school is usually from one-third to one-half of the total available teaching time during the first three years of schooling. The results in this area have been most disappointing and consequently the study of Hebrew is usually a source of tension in the relationships among parents, rabbis and educators. When we examine the methods and materials of the various programs developed to teach the Hebrew language, we discover that almost all of them are geared to the mastery of modern Hebrew speech. The programs devote only token time to the problem of making a transition from spoken Hebrew to the Hebrew of the Bible and prayer book. There has been even less concern for developing materials and preparing personnel to deal with this transition. And yet the educators directing these very same schools assert that the purpose of the study of Hebrew is to prepare the child to participate in the synagogue service and to understand the prayers, the Bible and classic Jewish texts.[6] There may be those who will assert that the goal of teaching Hebrew is the development of modern spoken language skills. If so, it is difficult to understand how they expect to achieve this goal in the limited time available in the afternoon or one-day-a-week school. We have here

6. Professor Chaim Rabin, the distinguished linguist of the Hebrew University, has asserted that it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to teach spoken Hebrew to children in Jewish schools in the United States as a step toward a mastery of the Hebrew of the Bible and the prayer book.

a very neat example of a major subject in the curriculum, where the purpose for the teaching of the subject is unclear and the result is a series of inappropriate and dated compromises. Methods adopted for the teaching of Hebrew have often been imported from general education, where they were developed for goals quite different from, and therefore, inappropriate to those of the Jewish school.

Bible is taught in Jewish schools with almost no concern for the relevance of the Bible to the life of the child.[7] The Bible, by and large, is not even treated as a religious or ethical text. Often, text, commentary and midrash are used interchangeably, leading to confusion in the mind of the student. The teacher avoids dealing with questions that are of great significance to the child, such as the divinity and historicity of the Bible. The teacher cannot help but avoid these issues as he has not been trained to handle them. Materials have not been prepared to guide him and there is no effort to provide him with inservice training.

Bible study, therefore, often results in a bifurcation in the mind of the child: he sees science as dealing with the truth, philosophy with true opinion, and religion with legends. We are constantly surprised by the student who has studied Bible in the Hebrew school and, after a course in religion, Bible, or literature on the undergraduate or graduate level,[8] reports excitedly that he has learned for the first time that the Bible is great literature, or contains a world view different from that of other Near Eastern nations. This condition will continue as long as we do not commit ourselves to specific goals for Bible teaching. As soon as we do make a commitment, we will be forced to prepare appropriate materials, train and retrain teachers, so that they can handle or at least grapple with the goals we have established.

There are, as we mentioned earlier, subjects of the greatest significance that are either avoided entirely or treated as current events and allocated several minutes time a week. The Holocaust is barely mentioned in the Jewish school and modern Israel is studied neither systematically nor as related

---

7. An important exception is the work of the Melton Research Center, certain materials prepared by the Reform Movement and by the Council for Judaism.

8. In some curricula the selections from the Bible are chosen in terms of how they contribute to the continued study of the Hebrew language.

to the Bible or Jewish History.[9] We cannot continue to avoid this problem even though any solution will exact a heavy price.

I have said almost nothing about the day school. There may be those who have been led to believe that these matters are being dealt with more successfully in the day school. I do not believe this to be the case. It may be too early to judge, but my impressions are that the day school has only enlarged and intensified the current program of Jewish education. In some cases this has made for "success". That is, if you have more hours available for the teaching of Hebrew and Bible, the child will "know" more. Full-time personnel is likely to be better personnel, with less turnover. However, matters such as character education, commitment and Jewish involvement do not seem to receive novel or consistent treatment in the day school. There have been some attempts at the integration of general and Jewish subjects, but there has been little thought given to the preparation of materials that could launch the day school on new paths.

I do not believe that curriculum revision is a theoretical undertaking. It is essentially a practical endeavor,[10] requiring an analysis of the failures in the educational reality (boredom of the students, poorly trained teachers, parent dissatisfaction, lack of achievement), a decision on the nature of our problem, followed by the creation of means, developed in the educational reality, that will meet the problem we have agreed to tackle. However, for the Jewish school, a good deal of theoretical discussion will have to precede the analysis of the reality, for the educational reality has been determined in many cases by implicit and explicit commitments that will continue to paralyze us unless these commitments are disclosed, aired and criticized. We will have to decide why we want to teach Hebrew, for that will determine what kind of Hebrew we teach, where we teach it, and how we teach it. We will have to decide whether the Bible must be studied in the original Hebrew, and if so, when and how we will treat the religious and ethical ideas of the Bible. We will have to decide whether the majority of Jewish children are to leave

---

9. Israel and its relation to Jewish education will not be treated in this paper. This issue deserves a paper unto itself. But it is an important issue for the philosophy of Jewish education, and a basic subject to be introduced into the curriculum of the school and teacher-training institutions. The country itself is a source of personnel and should be exploited as a place for the training and retraining of American Jewish educators. Israel could even affect the structure of the school.

10. For a discussion of curriculum as a practical endeavor see Joseph J. Schwab, The Practical: A Language for Curriculum, National Education Association, 1970.

the Jewish school with the impression that Judaism is the Judaism of the Bible, or whether the Talmud, medieval philosophy and literature, modern Hebrew literature and modern Jewish theology are to be dealt with as well.[11] This phase of the deliberation will end with a call to drastic surgery on the number of subjects taught and the content of these subjects. But it is difficult to understand how we will be able to make reasonable or defensible decisions, unless we arrive at some kind of consensus as to the basic ideas for the curriculum of the Jewish school.[12] This kind of deliberation will make it possible for us to discover, invent and import -- where appropriate -- means that are likely to lead to the goals we have agreed upon. For example, if we identify large portions of Jewish education with character education, we will have to devise means of education, possibly even new educational institutions, to undertake and meet this challenge. This paper has been limited to formal education, but obviously a good deal of Jewish education must be carried out through informal education: camping, youth movements, junior congregations, etc.[13] It is even more important to recognize that a clarification of the goals and content of Jewish education would make it possible for us to assign different and complementary tasks to the school, the youth movement, the club and the camp. Vacation periods, holidays and community service would be viewed as integral parts of the curriculum, and thus change the content and form of the formal curriculum. These last assertions are a bit more than mere speculation. The Melton Faculty Seminar[14] not only agreed upon goals for Jewish education which were dramatically different from any others known to me, but also suggested content for the curriculum that would revolutionize the Jewish school.

We will have to invest a good deal of money and energy in social science research that should accompany our investigation of the goals and content of Jewish education. I do not pretend to know whether ample psychological and sociological

---

11. These subjects are handled by and large in the high school which no more than twenty per cent of Jewish children attend.

12. Even with consensus alternative and competing curricula will be developed to attain the same goals.

13. Though the effectiveness of informal education, e.g. camping, has not been demonstrated "scientifically", there is good reason to assume that is a very powerful tool for Jewish education. Camps such as Ramah and Massad appear to have made a great impact on the lives of their students.

14. A seminar of the Melton Research Center consisting of scholars in Bible History, Jewish and general philosophy, Talmud, Hebrew literature, Jewish and general education.

research has been undertaken concerning the Jewish community. However, it is known that almost no information concerning the attitudes, reactions and commitments of students in Jewish schools is available to the educator. We know even less about parents and the family as related to Jewish education. What would happen if schools "succeeded"? Would parents engage in subtle sabotage? What are the expectations of rabbis, teachers and education administrators as to the potential of Jewish education? Could young people be induced into the profession of Jewish education if it were viewed as the vehicle by which the Jewish community and the child would be transformed into a sub-culture struggling to respond to traditional ethical and religious values in the complex world we live in? What price in money and nurture would be required? How does the community leadership feel and think and how would it react if new "off-beat" and expensive programs of Jewish education were presented?

Such problems, and many others, would have to be investigated if the educational reality is to be seriously dealt with, for there is little doubt that having agreed upon goals and content for Jewish education and even having discovered promising means and methods, logistics and strategy change means and ends as we are forced to decide about priorities.

Greater clarity as to the goals of Jewish education and sensible curricular suggestions would prepare us for the deliberation concerning personnel and the structure of the Jewish school. It is difficult to justify the current approach to the recruitment, training and retraining of personnel. No significant recruitment program has been attempted. Teacher-training has not been reexamined for years and the number of students being trained is inadequate. The financing of teacher-training institutions is not treated seriously, and the faculty of these institutions must be supported, enlarged and supplemented. As to retraining, it is all but non-existent.

Though we probably ought to defer judgment on how to attack the problem of personnel until we begin to see more clearly the kind of Jewish education we want to develop and gather sufficient data on matters that are related to this issue, there is one datum that appears to permit discussion even at this early state of our thinking. It is amazing to discover that there are practically no scholars or researchers in the field of Jewish education. It is obvious that this is a very serious problem, for how can we hope to train personnel for Jewish education or look at Jewish education reflexively if there are no people who by training and inclination can undertake these tasks. When we examine the faculties of the teacher-training institutes or the rabbinical seminaries, we are shocked to discover that there are almost no faculty members who would describe themselves as scholars or

researchers in the field of Jewish education. Therefore, most graduates of these institutions have had little training, theoretically or practically, for the field of Jewish education. This also helps to explain why our discussions never begin with reference to research findings or experimental programs. It is my claim that as long as the leadership of Jewish education is administrative by training and experience and not scholarly, the problem of personnel, among other problems, will remain insoluble. This claim is based on the belief that the young, intelligent, committed student will think of Jewish education only in the terms presented by the leadership of Jewish education. If Jewish education is discussed in terms of time, money and space, or imbedded in slogans that cover up and slough off complexity and diversity, we can only repel the very people we need most to attract. We should, I believe, learn from experience in the field of Judaica scholarship, where we see quite clearly how a few outstanding scholars have created a substantial following and have successfully competed with other fields for the bright and talented Jewish student. This may prove to be the key to many other matters.

Earlier, I stated that the discussion on the goals and curriculum of the Jewish school could not be undertaken by the present leadership of Jewish education.[15] The deliberation and the social science research discussed earlier will require the redefinition of the field of Jewish education or at least a redefinition of scholarship and research for Jewish education. The scholars in Judaica and the many social scientists and humanists that are Jewish will somehow have to be induced to devote their academic talent to these matters. This is by no means a radical suggestion. General education is deriving great benefits from the partnership of educators, subject-matter specialists (scholars in the natural sciences, humanities and social sciences) and social scientists. If we can recruit such people to the faculties of Jewish education in the teacher-training schools and rabbinical seminaries and if we can establish research institutes[16], the investigations I am arguing for can be undertaken. This work could attract many young Jewish students who are looking for ways to merge scholarly investigation with issues of action and commitment. If Jewish education searches for ways to affect character and if it insists on developing education that cultivates

---

15. This is not to be taken as a negative criticism of the present leadership of Jewish education or their recent predecessors. They were forced to devote their lives to the building of the institutions we are now looking at reflexively. It is doubtful whether they had any other options open to them.

16. There are only two institutes in the United States doing research in Jewish education.

intellect and affect simultaneously, and if it emphasizes the need for roots[17] as well as involvement in the contemporary society, then there would be many young people who could see Jewish education on a theoretical, practical or programmatic level as an attractive professional challenge.

There is little to be gained from considering the many other problems of personnel at this stage of our thinking. For as I have emphasized throughout, solutions will depend on answers to the prior questions of philosophy, curriculum and available resources. However, it is important to remember that we currently hold a rigid and unimaginative position. We train one kind of teacher for all tasks, and training methods are basically the same in all teacher-training institutions. But is it useful to think that one and the same teacher can develop language skills as well as conduct an inquiry into the traditional texts? Should this same person also be expected to serve as the model of religious behavior that is to be emulated by the students? On the other hand, can we afford, or is it necessary, to have all personnel and all tasks in the Jewish school handled by a B.A. in Jewish education. What can we learn from the various attempts to recruit housewives and train them for work in Jewish education? Can college students and even teenagers make some contribution to the Jewish school? This suggestion is not made merely out of expedience. It may be that these people are more appropriate for some tasks in Jewish education than the best of our graduates of teacher-training institutes.

The structure of Jewish education, that is, the organization of the schools and the relationship of the schools to each other and to other community organizations, will certainly be changed as we look more closely at basic issues. I am not sure that the school, or the school as currently conceived, is the best place to obtain a Jewish education. Here, too, premature and administrative suggestions must be avoided. We again hear the suggestion that we must combine forces and that denominationalism is the great ogre of Jewish education. Combining confused, tired and uninspired forces may not prove to be very useful. More of the same is not always better. Over-arching structures, or neutral organizational structures may increase or decrease costs, but they do not inspire and they can only lead to a consensus that is "against sin." The issue of the structure of Jewish education is a serious one and should not be viewed in administrative terms. It would be irresponsible to make suggestions based on extrapolations from past and present experiences. The present reality is different, and the past has not yielded

17. See Joseph J. Schwab, The Religiously Oriented School in the United States: A Memorandum on Policy, Conservative Judaism, Spring, 1964.

satisfying results.[18] I have already mentioned that we may have to discover or invent new forms and structures for Jewish education. There is little doubt that we can make better use of current assets by integrating the work of schools, youth movements, camps, leisure-time programs, adult education, and the media.

CONCLUSION

Jewish education can have a significant impact on the future of Jewish life in the United States if it is prepared to establish, through serious deliberation, philosophies of education that will guide the creation of new programs and practices. These programs will have to be based on a sound analysis of the reality and the potential of Jewish life. To undertake these tasks, a new kind of personnel must be recruited to assume positions of leadership in Jewish education. They will probably have to be enlisted from the ranks of Jewish scholarship and from Jews engaged in social science research. They could develop ideas that would inspire the talented young Jewish student, in turn, to consider a career in Jewish education. These new sources of energy could infuse new ideas into curriculum, teacher-training and the structure of education. Large expenditures will probably be required for such an undertaking. But the funding agencies will at last have the opportunity to base their decisions on competing futures rather than merely on competing demands.

---

18. It might prove useful to take a similar position on such matters as the "facts" of Jewish education, e.g. statements as to the involvement and attendance in Jewish schools. Our information, even if reliable, is dated.

GOALS AND PRACTICE IN JEWISH EDUCATION:

A PERSONAL PERSPECTIVE

Charles Silberman

GOALS AND PRACTICE IN JEWISH EDUCATION:

A PERSONAL PERSPECTIVE

My purpose this afternoon, as well as my method, may be clarified somewhat if I point out that I have modified the topic assigned to me. The topic listed in the Agenda is "Goals and Practice in Jewish Education: A General Perspective". The topic to which I shall address myself is "Goals and Practice in Jewish Education: A Personal Perspective". I have not constructed a scientific sample of Jewish schools or Jewish educators or Jewish students, nor have I used rating scales or any other scientific instruments (other than my own eyes, ears, and mind) to reach the conclusions I will be suggesting to you. I hope you will forgive me, therefore, if I speak from personal experience; it is the only kind I have had.

The primary experience from which I speak is that of a parent -- a parent of four active, intelligent, questioning sons and one active, intelligent, questioning daughter-in-law. More specifically, perhaps, I speak as a parent who has felt obliged at various times to remove each of his four sons from religious school, because those schools -- in three different congregations, in two branches of Judaism, in two different communities -- were destroying the affirmative feelings towards Judaism and Jewish identity that my wife and I were trying to create through our home environment. To those who feel that four is too small a sample, I could point out that Piaget's discoveries about cognitive and moral development in children initially were based on a sample of two; dispite the fact that I have twice as many children as Piaget, I do not claim to be twice as scientific.

In addition to my credentials as a parent, I can claim some expertise as a journalist and interviewer and as a student of education and observer of classroom practice. My observations of the education to which my children have been subjected in religious schools, and also in trips to Israel and across the United States, has been supplemented by the experience of a great many other youngsters of their own age and generation, which is to say, ages 15 to 25 -- from high school sophomores to this month's law school graduates. In addition to my children's friends, the youngsters with whom I have had contact and with whom I have discussed Jewish education include boys and girls from the east, midwest, and south, as well as Canada, with whom my wife and I used to meet each Tisha B'Av weekend during the years our children attended summer camp; and students at several colleges with whom I have discussed Jewish education over the past few years.

My findings are sharply different from those Professor Bock reported this morning. Some of the difference may reflect our different methods; most of the difference, I am persuaded, reflects the different universes we have studied -- a scientifically selected sample of adults, in Professor Bock's case, and an unscientifically selected, but in my judgment, nonetheless, reasonably representative sample of students of high school and college age in my case. Professor Bock's sample was drawn from the entire universe of Jewish adults, moreover -- people whose religious education was completed before 1962, and on average occurred in the 1930's or '40s -- while the universe from which my sample was drawn, is skewed toward the more acculturated end of the Jewish spectrum. For the most part, my sample represents the second and third generation born in this country; most of the youngsters come from homes in which one and usually both parents (and often one or more grandparent) are college graduates.

For this generation, Jewish education tends to be ineffectual at best, and destructive at worst, which seems to occur more often than not. Instead of developing or enhancing students' commitment to Jewish identification, or Jewish identity, or Jewish practice, their experience in Jewish schools and educational summer programs tends to reduce and weaken that commitment. Now it may be unrealistic and unfair to expect schools and other educational programs to develop commitment when the home and community are working in the opposite direction; but it is entirely fair and reasonable to expect that Jewish education will not make matters worse -- that they will not become a major force in the de-Judaizing of the next generation! But instead of evoking an interest in Judaism on the part of those who begin without interest or commitment -- instead of enhancing interest -- if not yet full commitment -- on the part of those who incline toward Jewish identification and practice, Jewish education tends to

alienate and repel the students who come within its reach. As my youngest son put it to me yesterday when we were discussing the subject of my paper, "Something must be terribly wrong when kids who were enthusiastic about beginning kindergarten or first grade hate Judaism as well as religious school by fifth or sixth grade."

Something is terribly wrong -- wrong with the practices of Jewish education, and wrong with its purposes. My purpose in this paper is to define, as best I can, what I think is wrong with educational purpose and practice, rather than to defend my thesis per se.

Admittedly, my thesis is harsh, and it may -- perhaps already has -- angered the practitioners who are here today. I had been tempted to soften the criticism and temper the harshness with which I made it, by beginning this paper with an acknowledgement of the hard work and serious thought -- on the part of many Jewish educators, and the occasional successes they enjoy. I decided against that mollifying tactic, when I remembered a midrash on this past week's Sedrah, describing the report that the spies brought back from Canaan. As Louis Ginzberg reports the midrash, "When Moses heard that the spies had returned from their enterprise" -- from spying out the future land of Israel -- "he went to his great house of study, where all Israel too assembled . . .

> There too the spies betook themselves and were requested to give their report. Pursuing the tactics of slanderers, they began by extolling the land, so that they might not, by too unfavorable a report, arouse the suspicion of the community. They said, 'We came unto the land whither thou sentest us, and surely it floweth with milk and honey.' . . . But they used these words only as an introduction, and then passed on to their actual report, which they had elaborated those forty days, and by means of which they hoped to be able to induce the people to desist from their plan of entering Eretz Yisrael."

Now, I have taken less than forty days to prepare this paper, and my hope is to lead you to the Promised Land, rather than away from it. Even so, I do not want to suffer the fate of the ten spies who gave that negative report; I decided that if I talked tachlis from the start, you might be persuaded that mine is an accurate truthful, rather than a slanderous, report.

What, then, is wrong with Jewish education? The root of the problem, I submit, is that neither the goals nor the practices -- neither the ends nor the means -- reflect the

radically different environment in which Jewish education is taking place in this country -- an environment different in kind, not just degree, from anything that has preceded it for the last 2200 years or so. Jewish education is essentially skill-oriented. Religious schools, that is to say, be they day schools, talmud torahs, or Sunday schools, operate on the assumption -- sometimes implicit, sometimes explicit -- that students arrive in school with a commitment to Judaism, or if not a full commitment, at least a considerable degree of self-awareness (or self-consciousness) as Jews. Given that assumption, the purpose of Jewish education traditionally has been to provide skills and information: to teach youngsters how to read Hebrew, how to translate chumash and Rashi; and to give them some information about Jewish history, about Jewish holidays and observances, and, in recent years, about Israel. The mix of purposes and the relative emphasis varies, of course, from denomination to denomination, but the emphasis on mastery of skills and memorization of facts obtains across the board. If you doubt my conclusion, I suggest that you take a look at the standardized tests that have been developed for religious schools; one of the best ways to discover the real goals of any educational system is to analyze what examiners and examinations are trying to examine.

That assumption -- that youngsters will arrive with some commitment or at least with some consciousness and awareness -- no longer holds. The fact that this is a "Colloquium on Jewish Education and Jewish Identity" demonstrates how problematic Jewish identity has become. As I think was suggested this morning, a generation or two ago people did not have conferences on Jewish identification. The plain and painful fact, however, is that a large proportion of students arrive at religious schools -- Sunday schools, afternoon religious schools with which I am familiar -- and which I concede may not be representative of day schools in general -- without any commitment to Jewish identity or Jewish practice, without any experience of Jewish observance and practice, without any particular self-awareness. Jewish educators have failed to come to grips with that fact -- have failed to change either their goals or their methods in response to that fact. We recognize the change, certainly -- which is to say, we complain about it very bitterly -- telling parents and one another every year -- year after year -- that it is impossible to educate children in a vacuum.

It is time to stop complaining, I submit -- to stop making excuses for failure -- and to begin asking what it is that a Jewish school or summer program <u>can</u> do -- what it is that it should <u>try</u> to do -- if the plain and uncomfortable fact is that a large proportion of the youngsters it deals with do in fact arrive <u>without</u> the commitment, without the identification that previously had been assumed and taken for

granted. One possible way of confronting that problem is to try to educate the parents with the children, as some Conservative congregations are now trying to do, and as the Institute for Jewish Life is trying to do, either family education programs or in-school programs which parents and children attend together. This is a valuable and thoughtful approach; it is grossly insufficient, because it fails to reach the children whose parents do not cooperate. Anyway, my own prediction is that only a minority -- a terribly important minority but still a minority -- of my generation of parents who do not observe or practice Judaism are likely to respond in any lasting way to these kinds of programs.

It is essential, therefore, to recognize the oldest law of pedagogy; that a teacher must ask where the student is at, if the teacher is take the student somewhere else. That means asking a new kind of question: in the time that is at our disposal as educators, whether it be a few hours each Sunday, or a few afternoons a week, or every day, or six weeks in the summer, how do we make Judaism attractive to students whose homes do not, and in all probability will not, provide any affirmative view of Judaism, let alone any commitment to it? Note the way I formulated the question: not, how do we develop Jewish identity, not how do we develop commitment, certainly not how do we develop shomrei Shabbat or kashrut observers; I am suggesting a much more modest goal: how do we make Judaism attractive to these youngsters -- sufficiently attractive to persuade some significant proportion of them Judaism is something they want to know more about, something they want to explore more fully and deeply in college, and in their adult lives. To achieve that modest goal would require a transformation in the way we conceive of both ends and means in Jewish education. Indeed, I am persuaded that it would require scrapping most of what we now do and starting all over again. The question we need to ask is not the one that practitioners understandably ask: how do we improve what we are now doing, but rather, how can we make Judaism and Jewish identity attractive to this generation of acculturated Jewish-American students.

The first question (the wrong question) -- how do we do better what we are now doing -- undoubtedly will lead to improved curricula and improved teaching methods. For reasons that I will elaborate, I do not think that those improved curricula or improved teaching methods are adequate to produce a generation of Jews. The question I propose -- how do we use the resources we now have at our disposal to interest kids in Judaism -- may mean scrapping schools altogether, and concentrating money on summer programs, trips to Israel, weekends, camping programs, family retreats, or year-round programs run in congregants' homes, in living rooms rather than in classrooms. The greatest contribution this generation of rabbis, school

administrators, and lay leaders could make to the survival of Judaism, I suspect, would be to close down every school and every educational program now being operated for a period of one year -- if that one year were used to think through the question I am proposing.

This total reorientation of purpose is essential, not simply for the youngsters I have been talking about -- youngsters who arrive without commitment, youngsters who come from unobservant, uninterested, apathetic Jewish homes. It is every bit as necessary for the youngsters who come from committed, practicing Jewish homes as it is for those from completely assimilated homes. For all of them live in an environment radically different from anything we have experienced in Jewish life for 2300 years. American society has been transformed since World War II. It is only in the last twenty or thirty years, that we have begun to really feel the effects of the Emancipation of the 18th and 19th centuries; we are just beginning to see, and feel the consequences for Jews and for Judaism of living in an open, pluralistic society. And make no mistake about it; American society is a vastly more open, more hospitable place for my children than it was for me. I've seen a profound change simply from my oldest son, who is 25, to my youngest son, who is almost 16.

Because of this growing openness, the participants in the previous sessions of this Colloquium have been asking, and trying to answer, the wrong question. As I read the summaries of previous meetings, I was struck by the degree to which all the participants kept returning to the question that troubles, and often agonizes, our generation: How can we be Jewish? How should we be Jewish? That was the central question running through the meeting of May '74 in particular. I do not mean or intend any criticism of the organizers or participants, when I suggest that the question is secondary, not primary, for my children's generation. For our generation, the question, how can we be Jewish is primary; I, certainly, have been struggling to find satisfactory answers to that question most of my adult life.

But it is not the primary question for my children or for their generation -- nor is it, I submit, the primary question for your children or their generation. The question they ask -- the question they are bound to ask at some point, if they have not already asked it -- is a question that has not been asked for 2300 years, if indeed it has ever been asked at all! The question is, why should I be Jewish. For this is the first generation in history, at least the first generation that feels that it can choose whether to be Jewish or not, and that can ask, therefore, "Why should I be Jewish?" The question, "How can I be Jewish?" is not one that can be addressed until the question, "Why should I be Jewish?" has been answered.

It is a question quite different from the one I and those of my generation asked in our youth. When we were rebelling, we asked, "Should we be Jewish?", not "Why should we be Jewish?" Being Jewish was a fact. One either observed or didn't observe; one either accepted or rejected. One was not indifferent; one could not be indifferent. My children, their friends, their generation are not rebelling in that sense. They are not rejecting their parents because their parents are too Jewish; if they do reject their parents, it is because their parents are too American -- because they are not Jewish enough. The question they ask is, "Why should I be Jewish?"

Let us not waste time, I beg of you, debating whether they are right or wrong in their perceptions. Of course, they exaggerate the degree of choice that they have; I know that; you know that; on one level, they know it. But we tend to underestimate the degree of choice that they in fact do have. The openness that my children meet and find in school and college and law school and in practicing their professions means that they live in a society that is different in kind, not just degree, from the society in which I grew up. And I grew up as the second generation born in this country, the second generation to go to college. Whether they are right or wrong is irrelevant, in any case; for their experience persuades them that they do have a choice. Hence, they do ask, "Why should I be Jewish?"

Most religious schools, I am sad to report, and all too many summer programs, encourage a negative rather than a positive answer, for they provide a sterile, forbidding and thoroughly unattractive picture of Judaism and of Jewish life. They do this partly through their formal curriculum, but largely and far more importantly through what sociologists of education call the "hidden", or the "invisible curriculum"; the unconscious clues, values, attitudes that emerge from the way in which adults behave, from the way in which they deal with students and with one another, and the nature of the student culture that forms as a result.

What kinds of messages do students receive from religious education? One message is a message of rigid, unbending authoritarianism. There is a distinction -- a critically important distinction, I submit -- between authority and authoritarianism. Judaism involves authority; it does not, at least in my understanding of it, involve authoritarianism. This is partly a defect of the formal classroom. It seems to me that after-school religious schools, Talmud Torahs, Sunday schools, are doomed almost before they start, if they operate within a formal classroom setting, because they are dealing with students who have been in a formal classroom setting all day long, five days a week, and who frequently are reacting negatively and hostiley against it. And this means that only the exceptional teacher

can take charge of a classroom, can interest and excite a group of kids who have a negative mindset before anything begins, simply because of the nature of the physical environment. The great teacher can do it. We have to organize schools and educational programs for the average teacher.

This authoritarianism, however, is not just a function of classroom organization. The message comes from the way in which teachers respond to questions, from the ways in which they talk to kids, from the kinds of questions they encourage, the kinds of questions they discourage. It appears to be true of summer programs as well. My youngest son was on a trip under religious auspices last summer. When I asked him to describe the trip to me, his major characterization of it was that "They never asked why, and they never let us ask why." "They" means the counselors: two of them were principals of large religious schools, one in the midwest, one in the east; one was a student in a rabbinical seminary; the fourth was a classroom teacher in a large religious school. These were not run-of-the-mill conventional camp counselors, in short; they were Jewish educators with impressive credentials of their own, operating within a program that had been described to me for years as one of the "best" Jewish summer experiences available. And I know from my own observations, as well as my wife's, that Steve's assessment of the summer was correct, for we experienced the same rigidity and authoritarianism in a long telephone conversation with the senior "educator" halfway through the summer. Indeed, we were tempted to pull Steve out of the program, before it began -- at first because of the peremptory tone of the literature he received, and then as a result of an all-day orientation for kids and parents the day and evening before the program began. The entire day was punitive, humorless, and negative; in session after session, exuberant but nervous teenagers were being told all of the things they would not be permitted to do over the course of the summer, and all of the punishments that would be visited on them, if they violated the rules. As late as 10 p.m., kids were still being told what they could <u>not</u> do in cities they would not reach for another four or five weeks! They also were told, over and over again, how difficult it would be to "do Jewish" -- how much trouble kashrut would be, how stringent the rules for Shabbat would be, and so on and on and on.

This was the atmosphere of the entire summer; it is terribly reminiscent of the experience another of my children is having this summer, working as a bank teller. The answer to every question there,is "That's the rule", and this was the answer that these youngsters got last summer. It is the answer that they get in religious school over and over again -- unconsciously, perhaps -- because teachers are tired, they are harried. Whatever the reasons, the message that comes through is "Don't ask". "We do it because that's the way to do it."

What is the second message that comes through, that tends to predispose kids to answer that question, "Why should I be Jewish?" in the negative? The second message, I think, is the message of joylessness. The classrooms themselves are grim, are harsh, are unpleasant; the curriculum hardly suggests the ways in which Jewish observance can enrich life. The nature of the curriculum is suggested by this question, which I have taken from a national standardized examination for Jewish religious school students: "Do you observe Shabbat because you enjoy it, or because it is a commandment?" The right answer, I take it, is "because it is a commandment." That "right" answer gives a very clear message to the kids -- that enjoyment and mitzvot are opposite -- that they have to choose one or the other -- rather than seeing them as two aspects of one whole. And this is the message that comes through -- it comes through in all kinds of subtle ways.

The third message that comes through from the informal curriculum, even more than from the formal, is a message of parochialism -- a parochialism, moreover, that involves a meanness of spirit. I am not talking about particularism; that is an appropriate message. I am talking about parochialism in the narrowest sense -- a denigration of other religions, a fear of other religions. The precipitating crisis for my first son in religious school occurred, when a teacher spent a part of one period explaining to the students that, when he drove past a trefa butcher shop, he had to roll up his car windows, because the stench was so terrible.

This kind of cheap parochialism is more frequent than any of us would like to admit. On my son's trip last summer, the 36 kids on his bus were not permitted to leave their motel rooms in Salt Lake City to see the Mormon Tabernacle. When I asked why -- the national religious body that sponsored the trip had described the visit to the Tabernacle as one of the major sights that the kids would see -- I was told that the group was being punished because several of their members had violated the previous Shabbat. "And besides," this so-called Jewish educator asked me, "what's the big deal about the Mormon Tabernacle? After all, they davened shachris at Lake Michigan, when they were in Chicago."

He saw this as a choice, in some curious way, and that message transmits itself to the youngsters. It is not a choice; one can daven shachris at Lake Michigan without denigrating another religion; one can daven and still find it interesting to see the structure and nature of another religion -- in this case, the fastest growing religion in the United States, if not the world.

The most important message of all, I think, is the intellectual sterility that emerges. Schools in particular, but

summer programs, too, tend to teach the most primitive kind of Jewish theology. Many youngsters do not discover that there are wide debates among Jewish theologians, until they happen to take a college course in Comparative Religion, and discover Buber and Rubinstein, and, if they are lucky, Heschel. But unless it is a course given in a Judaic studies department, they are not likely to discover Rosenzweig or Fackenheim or Borowitz.

More important, questioning is discouraged, if not actually forbidden. Youngsters I have met with are amazed to learn that questioning God -- indeed challenging God -- is not only acceptable but encouraged in our tradition so long as one remains inside klal Yisrael. With all the Bible stories they are taught, with all the Chumash they study, they don't really know that Abraham and Jacob and Moses challenged God, or that Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev challenged God -- they never heard of Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev, or the Kotzker Rebbe -- or even, in our time, that Elie Wiesel has challenged God.

This is compounded by the failure (perhaps the inability) to confront the Holocaust, to confront the unanswered -- for many of us, the unanswerable -- challenge to faith that the Holocaust provides. After the Holocaust, it is difficult to speak of faith in the old sense; for many of us, at least, it is hard, if not impossible, to believe as our parents and grandparents. As Rabbi Irving Greenberg has suggested, after Auschwitz we can speak only of moments of faith -- moments of faith that we hope will sustain us during our long periods of doubt.

Kids know that faith is a problem; they feel that it is a problem. And the more sensitive they are, the more thoughtful they are, the more deeply they feel it. But what they receive in schools, what they receive in summer educational programs, all too often is either a refusal to talk about the problem of faith at all or an answer so primitive as to be meaningless -- an answer so primitive as to be blasphemous. And it is blasphemy, Abraham Joshua Heschel taught, to suggest that the existence of Israel can explain or compensate for the Holocaust. In Rabbi Heschel's phrase, the existence of Israel is "a slight hinderer of hindrances to believing in God." It seems to me that if kids understand that these are troublesome questions -- that these are questions that agonize the best minds of our generation -- the fact that we do not have answers may be less troublesome to them. But the message they get is that nobody has ever thought about it, because the question never arises in the course of their studies -- or is discouraged if it does arise.

If the Holocaust itself is taught, moreover, all too often it is taught in a vulgar and mindless way. After years of

lobbying, for example, my wife and I finally managed to get a course on the Holocaust included in the curriculum of the religious school my younger sons were attending. We were sorry afterwards that we had succeeded. As my third son said when he heard who the teacher would be, "I can predict what the final exam is going to be like; it will consist of questions such as, 'How many box cars were there on the third train to Auschwitz?' and 'How many people did each box car contain?'" And that was the way the course was taught! The teacher or principal even managed to find a textbook, with all the dullness and banality that textbooks usually have, instead of beginning with Elie Wiesel's Night, and going on from there in accordance with the kids' response to it. And adolescents do respond to Night, they do respond to The Diary of Anne Frank, because both books describe youngsters their own age, in ways that make them come alive -- in ways that make American youngsters of this generation identify with their fellow Jews of Europe a generation ago. What must be understood -- what so few parents or teachers seem able to understand -- is that for this generation of American children, the Holocaust is as much ancient history as the Destruction of the Temple. To a 12 or 14 or 16-year-old youngster, both events are equally distant in time; it takes the genius of an Elie Wiesel, or the compelling imagery of a documentary, for children to really understand what the Holocaust was about, and how it relates to them.

It takes thought and imagination to help acculturated youngsters identify with Israel, too; our generation, after all, did not really discover what Israel meant to us, and our lives and faith, until 1967. Describing the extraordinary impact of those weeks of waiting before the war began, while the Arab armies were mobilizing, Rabbi Heschel wrote, "I had not known how deeply Jewish I was." Most of us came to that knowledge in 1967, and again in 1973. But the generation I am talking about was born after the state of Israel was created; for them, Israel has always existed, and they do not automatically feel the mystery and awe at Israel's existence that overwhelms us, who lived through the years of struggle and doubt. For our children to feel -- or even to understand -- our visceral identification with Israel, they need experiences that touch them where they live.

Identification with Israel and commitment to it will not be built by the vulgar or simplistic way in which, all too often, Israel is discussed. From the way Israel is discussed in religious schools -- or in adult meetings, as far as that goes -- one would never know that Israelis disagree with one another, indeed wage intense debates over domestic social policies as well as foreign policy. Israel is seen as little more than an object of American Jewish philanthropy, or a place in which to have a second bar mitzvah. In teaching

students about Israel, in short, Jewish schools tend to ignore the students' emotions and patronize their minds.

The intellectual sterility of the curriculum is manifested, too, in the general failure to discuss, or even mention, the role of mysticism in Jewish thought. This might have been excusable a generation ago; it is intolerable today in the light of the emphasis the youth culture has placed on mysticism and meditation. As a result, a whole generation of youngsters has received a Jewish education without learning that they do not have to turn to Zen or other Eastern religions, if they want to study, or experience, mysticism and meditation. (Perhaps some of that generation might have been saved, had they been taught the traditional Jewish view about the dangers as well as the attractions of mysticism.) In any case, the message of intellectual sterility follows students throughout their Jewish education.

Let me conclude with a warning and a plea. Many of us, I am afraid, delude ourselves into complacency; we think we can avoid that uncomfortable question, "Why be Jewish?" by sheltering our children from contact with American society -- by building walls around them. It won't work. It may succeed for a time, but only for a time, and at the cost of growing weaker, not stronger, Jews. Another midrash on this week's sedrah seems particularly relevant in this regard. Before the twelve spies set out on their trip, Moses instructed them on how they should proceed, and more important, on what they should look for. "Look about carefully what manner of land it is," he told the spies, "for some lands produce strong people and some weak. ... If you find the inhabitants dwelling in open places, then know that they are mighty warriors, and have no fear of hostile attack. If, however, they live in a fortified place, they are weaklings, and in their fear of strangers seek shelter within their walls." We need to produce a generation of mighty warriors, not weaklings.

IDEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES

Orthodox - Norman Lamm
Conservative - David Lieber
Reform - Martin Rozenberg

AN ORTHODOX PROSPECTIVE ON JEWISH EDUCATION AND JEWISH IDENTITY

Norman Lamm

I. Relation of Jewish Identity and Jewish Education. Jewish identity does not necessarily derive exclusively from Jewish education. But it cannot flourish or thrive in a free society without it. In this sense, Jewish education is more important now, under conditions of freedom, than it ever was in the Ghetto.

II. A) The Zohar teaches the famous triad: The Holy One, Israel, and Torah are one. Rav Kook interprets this as unity approachable by one of three avenues, like a wheel with three spokes. "Jewish Identity" is essentially only the second -- the love of Israel -- and it is only one of three ways to attain this totality. An "Orthodox" approach must emphasize all three simultaneously.

B) Torah. The goal of all Jewish education must be the goal of all study of Torah: Torah Lishmah, for its own sake. Our ultimate aim must be to develop students who will study of their own accord and out of selfless motivation.

Strangely, this was more easily achievable in the early years of this decade than it is now or in the foreseeable future. The counter-culture was highly critical of vocationalism and the practical bent, and although it emphasized "relevance" to an exaggerated degree, it did away with the materialistic motivation. Unfortunately, the apparent end of the counter-culture means a reversal of the epistemological revolution that it ushered in, and we shall now be forced to appeal to self-interest in a greater measure than we had to a mere five or eight years ago.

Nevertheless, Jewish teachers throughout the ages insisted that self-interest was an indispensible propaedeutic to the

study of Torah for its own sake. "A man should always study Torah not for its own sake, so that he may ultimately arrive at Torah for its own sake." The method for achieving this in our times is, most effectively, by creating a society or community which will cherish Torah scholarship and not denigrate it relative to other values. Hence, societal reform outside the classroom is as crucial as all the pedogogical work that takes place inside the classroom if the educational venture is to be successful. Jewish education cannot be separated from the value-ecology of the community.

c) God. The purpose of Torah is not to generate the secularized "education" that, as a metamorphosed vestige of an authentic Jewish value, is responsible for the Jewish folk emphasis on graduate degrees... Rather, true Torah study must be theocentric. The Talmud teaches תלמוד תורה כנגד כולם. Torah, as the repository of divine wisdom, must ultimately lead to repentance and good deeds. We shall take each one separately.

1. "Good deeds": The importance of establishing patterns of conduct, the מצוות מעשיות. This is a distinguishing feature of the Jewish religion. "Jews not only have a religion, but are religious." Despite the fact that Jewish practices must be inculcated as having their autonomous worth, independent of "relevance," nevertheless the teaching of Torah ought to be related to ethical and social idealism. There is, however, a set sequence of instruction in order to be true to Jewish values and to avoid the banality of "relevance." First must come the development of life-long habits of "good deeds" or Mitzvot. Then, as a second step, must come the explication of these behavioral patterns in a manner relevant to issues of the day and to overarching moral values. Thus, Passover and Hanukkah must be taught for what they are, both halakhically and historically, but then must be related to the ideals of freedom and self-determination. Shabbat must be taught for what it is, and its implementation in the rhythm of the week, but also as freedom from the tyranny of technology.

2. Teshuvah. By this, I mean the development of a genuinely religious personality. An Orthodox educational system must go beyond the imparting of dates and the inculcation of routines or even value judgments on social and moral issues. It must seek as well to nourish a Jewish subjectivity, emphasizing the affective side of the personality. Judaism, as Rabbi Soleveitchik has said, has not only a tradition of ideas, but also a tradition of feeling and affect. The upgrading of the affective side of personality over the rational and intellectual in the recent counter-culture was a sign of the famine that the Western soul had experienced until this revolution in style, manners, and values erupted. This aspect must not be allowed to atrophy again. Education must emphasize feeling, experience, excitement, subjectivity. Hence, Jewish

Education must have more drama, not only dramatics. Inspiration is at least as important as instruction in Jewish education. That is why more orthodox schools are now beginning to emphasize certain experiential factors they had heretofore neglected: seminars, shabbatonim, etc. The school must make up for what is lacking in the home and in society.

D. Israel.

1. The school must develop in the child a sense of identification with his people, a sense of community:

כל ישראל ערבים זה בזה.

2. The importance of the state of Israel. Jewish schools may differ, according to their various perceptions and ideologies, as to the status of the state in Jewish thought. But certainly it cannot be ignored, and the attitude must be positive and reinforcing. The encouragement of aliyah.

3. More and more, schools are coming to realize that teaching the Holocaust, by one means or another, is an indispensible ingredient in Jewish education. To omit or or understate it is not only morally irresponsible, but educationally wasteful.

GOALS FOR THE CONSERVATIVE JEWISH SCHOOL

David Lieber

1. A prime function of education in every society is to transmit the accumulated wisdom of the past generations to the children of the next. This provides for a smooth transition, socializing the young into the culture and life style of their elders.

   A. In this way, the youngsters are gradually equipped with the knowledge and skills they require to meet their maturer responsibilities. They are also helped to internalize the values and standards of the group so that they may enlarge upon it in order to meet their own needs.

   B. The society in turn is strengthened by the vigor and loyalty of the members of the new generation. Its heritage becomes theirs at the same time as they enlarge upon it in order to meet their own needs.

   C. This process does not function so well when rapid social and technological changes occur. Conflicting values and alternate life styles compete for the child's attention, while the society into which they are born, loses its integrating vision. The very institutions -- such as the home, church and synagogue -- which are expected to provide the moral and spiritual anchors are themselves swept away by the latest theological and moral fashions, or alternately lose touch entirely with the world outside of them. The growing child is then left with neither guiding principles, nor an overarching sense of purpose with which he may choose from among a bewildering array of values and standards.

II. The American Jewish community has been less than successful in transmitting the Jewish heritage to its native-born children.

A. What Dr. Simon Greenberg has called the fundamental goal of Jewish education is rarely achieved, viz. "the training of the young so that they would identify themselves as Jews and with the Jewish people (a) positively -- rather than merely by accident of birth; (b) happily -- rather than reluctantly; and (c) significantly -- rather than peripherally."[1]

B. By and large, Judaism, its values, concepts and practices -- is of marginal influence in the lives of the third and fourth generation.

III. The task of the Jewish educator is to help his student to develop what Ernst Simon calls "critical identification"[2] with the Jewish people. This should be expressed in commitment, involvement and behavioral response, which flow from a "self-attachment"[3] to a transcendent purpose and a reflective decision to share in the future of the Jewish community.

A. This involves the student understanding and appreciating his religious and cultural heritage as well as choosing it freely for the most intimate center of his ever-expanding system of loyalties.[4]

B. It requires the creation of settings-- formal and informal -- to facilitate the internalization of values and rules of behavior as part of the central core of the student's personality.

1. These settings must reckon with both the cognitive and affective aspects of learning and be constructed with care so as to aid the individual develop his own critical faculties as well as his ability to make informed decisions.

2. As far as the school is concerned, it suggests a curriculum which aims at the establishment of what Schwab has called[5] the ties of lineage, peerage and linkage -- a sense of continuity with the Jewish people and its history; a feeling of membership in a peer group which adheres to a common pattern of values and practices; an awareness of sharing such a pattern with one's parents. The learning process is to be conducted in a spirit of free inquiry, encouraging the student, as soon as he is sufficiently mature, to adopt a critical stance toward the subject matter.

IV. The classical triad of God, Torah, and Israel may serve as a touchstone of the adequacy of the subject matter of any Jewish religious school curriculum. What is, of course, crucial is the manner in which each of these broad themes is handled.

A. In dealing with the Jewish people, it is not enough to treat its past vicissitudes and glories, its hopes and dreams. The teacher must come to grips with such crucial concepts as "the election of Israel," and "the covenant of Israel," as well as the varied movements and trends that constitute the Jewish past.

1. The student must be taught to appreciate the intertwining of the ethnic and the religious components in Jewish history. Tension between universalism and particularism should not be ignored as well as the consequences of placing too great an emphasis on either one of these two poles.

2. He has to be taught that the Jewish people live in the real world, that they have always interacted with their neighbors, and that change as well as continuity with the past is a fact of life.

3. The host of questions centering around the relationship of American Jews to world Jewry and especially Israel have to be dealt with. 'Aliya,' support of the Jewish State and its policies, the possible clash of loyalties, etc. -- have to be subjected to study and full discussion.

4. Relations between Jews and other religious communities should be considered realistically, but free from defensiveness and self-justification. The common attachment to universal human values should be taught, as well as the differences, the possibilities of cooperation, as well as those areas in which each group must go its own way.

5. The student must learn very early of his need for the Jewish community. As Elie Wiesel has recently put it very movingly:

> "Alone a Jew is nothing. But if he is with other Jews, he's a force. Because then automatically he inherits all the strengths and all the tears, all the despairs and all the joys of his ancestors. A Jew alone cannot be Jewish. A Jew can be Jewish only if he's part of a community."[6]

B. Torah is both the length and breadth of the Jew's experience in his outreach for the divine, and the series of classical religious works which embody it.

1. Clearly, any Jewish education worth its salt must provide at least a minimal introduction to this literature.

2. It should be taught, however, as sacred text, i.e., whose purpose is to enable Jews to introduce sanctity into their lives.

3. At the same time, the student must be helped to see that it is neither monolithic nor changeless, reflecting, rather, a variety of emphases and developments.

4. Through the study of Haggadic materials, he can be made aware of the classical value concepts and how they provide a value frame for the life of the people. He can also see the need for ordering them hierarchically in an integrated life which is dedicated to לעשות את רצון אבינו שבשמים.

5. In studying the Halakah, he will be taught to view it <u>not</u> as a system of divinely ordained laws but as a pattern of behavior consciously adopted to implement the values of Judaism in the life of the individual and his society. As such, it will be seen as subject to adaption and change, depending on new social conditions and altered moral perceptions.

   He will recognize individual Mitsvoth -- both ritual and moral -- as religious imperatives, providing him with so many opportunities to experience the divine. At the same time, he will see how the ancient sages, like the prophets before them, gave precedence to the moral imperatives as pleasing in the eyes of God.

C. Neither an Israel centered school, nor a value centered one is a complete answer to the needs of Jewish religious education. At the heart of Judaism is a God-faith and this must suffuse the school, if it is to have any impact on the students.

1. It can be communicated through experiences which are intended to awaken a sense of awe and appreciation. These should include religious celebrations and the recitation of prayers, though not be limited to them.

2. As they grow older, they should be exposed to the traditional concepts of God the creator, the redeemer and lawgiver and how they can be translated into the modern idiom.

3. Contact with genuinely religious people -- as opposed to merely observant ones -- can prove helpful, as well as their writings.

4. No effort should be made to conceal the difficulties in coming to grips with this question. Indeed, as the students become more sophisticated, they should be introduced to representative views of Jewish thinkers, both medieval and modern, which offer no definitive answers. At the same time, the students should be encouraged to seek an integrating religious vision which will provide him with a sense of belonging in the larger universe and help him relate to it in a meaningful and satisfying manner.

5. Both Jewish identity and Jewish survival are by-products of a meaningful Jewish existence. As such, they should not be the focus of the Jewish educational effort.[7] Rather, its goal should be to make the individual's Jewishness "a source of vital personal significance,"[8] by enabling him to participate to the full in the experience of Jewish living.

FOOTNOTES

1. "New Approaches in Jewish Education," Jewish Education, Vol. 37 (1968), p. 164.

2. הכשרת מדריכים בתנועות הנוער
1974-5 pp. 23-27

3. cf. A.J. Heschel, "Jewish Education," in The Insecurity of Freedom, Phila.: JPS, 1966, p. 229.

4. cf. Horan Kallen, "Goals for Jewish Education" (unpublished papers) presented at symposium at Dropsie Golden Jubilee.

5. cf. "The Religiously Oriented School in the United States," Conservative Judaism, 1964, pp. 1-14.

6. "On Teaching Jewish Identity," Jewish Education, Vol. 43, 1975, p. 8.

7. J. Lukinsky, "The Study of Jewish Identity," A Symposium, Hebrew University, Institute of Contemporary Jewry, 1971, pp. 22-25.

8. L. Honor, quoted by L.H. Spotts, "Trends and Currents in Curriculum Development," Jewish Education, Vol. 40, 1971, pp. 36-45.

A PERSPECTIVE ON REFORM RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Martin Rozenberg

To gain a balanced view of Reform Religious Education we have to consider (a) what is happening in the Reform movement as a whole, and (b) what is our vision for the future as well as what is happening right now.

In the universalism-particularism tension that had always existed within Judaism, Reform, in the past veered more in the universalist direction. Reform, thus, tended to define Judaism primarily as a moral doctrine, which had been truncated from its people and land. Still greatly influenced by the philosophy of positivism, it sought to effect the unity of mankind through a commonality of values and beliefs. In its extreme expression, this approach manifested itself in a denial of Jewish peoplehood, anti-Zionism, devaluation of the Hebrew language, and a de-emphasis of Jewish rituals and folkways. It was, therefore, no surprise that Reform of yesteryear should have given birth to the one-day-a-week religious school. The Sunday School was adequate for the needs that Reform then *felt*.

But today isn't yesterday. Reform has come a long way in correcting its course and is now steering more toward mainstream Judaism. The signs of course are quite visible in the more traditional rituals adopted in synagogue worship. But these signs are only reflective of a more basic change in philosophy having to do with the affirmation of Jewish peoplehood, the quest for Kelal Yisrael, the importance of the Hebrew language, and the emphasis on Eretz Yisrael. The word "Halakha" is being heard with increasing frequency and seriousness in official Reform circles, not as a kind of nostalgic return to an abandoned past, or a willingness to embrace all

the stringencies of Orthodox Judaism, but rather as a realization that being a Jew is a full-time occupation, and is a rather serious business.

It goes without saying that these new winds which began to blow in our midst must have had an effect on Reform religious education, and continues to do so even now. This effect is perhaps best revealed in a newly proposed Reform statement on goals which hints at the direction toward which we are now tending. The following is the statement:

> "The goal of Jewish religious education within the Reform movement is to deepen Jewish experience and knowledge for all Jews, so as to strengthen their commitment to God, their identification with the Jewish people, the basic concepts which unify Judaism and the various trends within it, to the end that each Jew may willingly choose to be part of that history, and a bearer of the Jewish tradition.
>
> Implicit in our statement of the goals of Jewish education is our belief that within Judaism are contained the answers to the most profound challenges and questions that confront the human spirit and that only the fully enlightened Jew can successfully discover these answers.
>
> The Commission on Jewish Education therefore calls upon every synagogue to provide a program of Jewish education which will enable children, youth, and adults, to become:
>
> 1. Jews who affirm their own Jewish identity, and by word and deed bind themselves inseparably to their people.
> 2. Jews who bear witness to God's brit with the Jewish people by observing the mizvot, as they are accepted and interpreted in the light of both historic development and contemporary thought.
> 3. Jews who embrace Torah in its broadest sense, through learning and teaching its contents, and by applying it to daily life.
> 4. Jews who affirm their historical bond to Eretz Yisrael, the land of the Jewish people, and who support Medinat Yisrael, the State of Israel.
> 5. Jews who treasure and practice tephillah in its widest sense.
> 6. Jews who enhance the cause of justice, freedom, and peace by demanding of themselves, their people, and their society high ethical standards of tzedek, mishpat, and chesed.
> 7. Jews who, in understanding and joy, celebrate with Jewish ceremony every significant occasion in their lives, and every Shabbat, holy day and festival in the Jewish year.

8. Jews who so live as to respect and cherish --
   a. their own person and the persons of others
   b. their families and the families of others
   c. their own community and the community of others
   d. their ties to Hebrew, the language of the Jewish people
9. Jews who express their kinship with Kelal Yisrael through responsible participation in Jewish life.

Such Jews will strengthen the fabric of Jewish life, guarantee the future of Judaism and the Jewish people, and bring ever closer the day when 'They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain'."

You will note, of course, within this statement the heavy emphasis on Jewish peoplehood. The stress by Reform on the Jewish people, no doubt spurred on by the Nazi and holocaust experiences, has probably had the strongest rippling effect within Reform education. It resulted in giving a high priority in the curriculum to Hebrew as a living tongue; in teaching Eretz Yisrael as the national homeland of the Jewish people; and in a general resurgent pride in the Jewish past and in Jewish rituals. Great importance was placed on <u>experiencing</u> Judaism, and on developing Jewish cultural motifs to enhance within the Reform child the Jewish soul. Toward this end Reform entered into camping where an adapted Israeli culture of language, song, and dance prevailed. Study and worship became part of the normative life in the camp community. Because the camp setting allowed for greater freedom, it invited the kind of experimentation and license which undoubtedly would not have been tolerated by the established congregations. The result was that the tail wagged the dog. The camps had a powerful influence on the religious schools in introducing a new spirit and emphasis. The success of the camps was such that at times there was an over-reaction in some schools. That is to say, the school in its attempt to develop a Jewish identity went overboard in abandoning formal weekly instruction and instead turned itself into a monthly camp. While such monthly experiences achieved certain benefits, it has now been recognized that they should be viewed not as a replacement of, but as a supplement to regular instruction.

Reform's more encompassing embrace of the full Jewish life, with all that the term implies, has led to the concomitant conclusion in some quarters that the only way to achieve it is through full-time Jewish education. An increasing sentiment favoring day schools is developing within the Reform movement. At the moment there are about six such schools of varying quality. If this trend continues it will unquestionably have a decided effect on the afternoon schools.

The trend within the Reform movement is toward the multiple day afternoon school. In all too many cases, however, a minimalist philosophy of Jewish education still prevails, and the one-day-a-week Sunday School is not yet dead. The realistic aim of the Commission on Jewish Education is to encourage schools to extend instruction time to 4-8 hours per week. Conditions within the schools, regardless of the length of the instructional period, are neither uniform in standard nor in quality. The official UAHC curriculum has exerted decreasing influence within recent years as individual schools asserted greater independence in developing their own course of study. In all too many cases, such curriculums are not thought out carefully, lack in content and logical sequence, and are often primarily aimed at keeping the students happy. The matter is complicated and exacerbated by the lack of a competent professional teaching staff. The result is that all too many students find little joy in the religious school experience and complain of boredom and vapidness.

The variety and latitude presently existing within Reform religious education is no doubt reflective of the groping going on among many Reform Jews for an identity. As the Reform Jew turns more toward Kelal Yisrael, he tends to prefer more form in the practice of his religion. He also inclines toward greater emphasis on Jewish sources. It is my guess that the coming trend in our religious schools will be to mirror these new influences and that we will see an increased emphasis on structure and content.

77-750-56
AJC/JCAD
1977

For additional copies, write to
THE AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE
Institute of Human Relations
165 East 56th Street
New York, New York 10022

Single copy 75¢

INSIDE THE JEWISH SCHOOL

A Study Of The Cultural Setting For Jewish Education

by

Samuel Heilman

ajc THE AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE, Institute of Human Relations, 165 East 56 Street, New York, N.Y. 10022

THE JEWISH COMMUNAL AFFAIRS DEPARTMENT

The Jewish Communal Affairs Department is one of the major national program departments of the American Jewish Committee. To achieve its overall goal to improve the quality of Jewish life and secure Jewish continuity, the Department engages in planning programs of research, publication and action in five major areas. These include: the dynamics and maintenance of Jewish identity; the Jewish family (the Department created the William Petschek National Jewish Family Center in 1979); Jewish education at every level (in 1974 it founded the college level Academy for Jewish Studies); the communal involvement of Jewish academics; Israel and Jewish communities in other parts of the world.

The JCAD implements its objectives through commissioned research, conferences, publications, leadership training, consultation services, demonstration projects, and preparation of program guidelines for AJC chapters and other Jewish agencies.

Robert S. Rifkind, Chairman
Jewish Communal Affairs Commission

Yehuda Rosenman, Director
Jewish Communal Affairs Department

Dr. Steven Bayme, Assistant Director
Jewish Education Consultant

INSIDE THE JEWISH SCHOOL

A Study Of The Cultural Setting For Jewish Education

by

Samuel Heilman

Samuel Heilman earned his Ph.D. from the University of Chicago. He is Professor of Sociology at Queens College of the City University of New York. He is the author of Synagogue Life and The People of the Book (both published by the University of Chicago Press) and numerous articles on the sociology of American Jewry.

FORWARD

The ultimate goal of Jewish education today is the affirmation of Jewish identity. Simply stated, we wish to assure that as many as possible of our next generation will remain proud and active Jews. We would also like to produce as many Jewishly knowledgeable Jews as we can. In the past, we took Jewish identity for granted, assuming that the home, the neighborhood, the community, and outside pressure, would guarantee Jewish identity and Jewish consciousness. The feeling of Jewish self-esteem and group belongingness was a product of the environment and a network of relationships and practice. Jewish schooling was called upon only to provide knowledge and transmit cognitive information. Today, environmental conditioning can no longer be taken for granted. As a result, Jewish education is now expected to do what is probably an impossible task, to serve as a surrogate for the home and neighborhood in Jewishly socializing the children as well as to transmit Jewish knowledge.

The American Jewish Committee has had a long-standing concern with Jewish education and has contributed through research, colloquia and publications toward a better understanding of the problems and accomplishments of Jewish education. Notable among these AJC contributions was a three-year colloquium conducted in the mid-seventies on Jewish Education and Jewish Identity. This colloquium, consisting of an interdisciplinary group of scholars, based its deliberations on related research which was funded by the AJC. Both the research and the colloquium, in their focus on the impact of general society on Jewish education and the role of the family in identity formation and education, represented an important departure from the usual studies of Jewish education. The latter, more often than not, attempt to assess curriculum and methodology and to evaluate results in terms of the acquisition of information.

Dr. Geoffrey Bock's research on Jewish education and identity which was the basis of the AJC Colloquium, suggested, for example, that all things being equal, the family is almost twice as important as schooling in the formation of a private Jewish identity. Private or personal identity is defined as a set of values and beliefs, Jewish self-image and self-esteem and behavior in day-to-day private life. The significance of this finding in terms of its implications for the future of the Jewish community and on communal programs to maintain and strengthen Jewish identity is self-evident. Furthermore, this finding is almost revolutionary when viewed against the prevailing conviction that sending one's child to a religious school will assure his/her Jewishness.

Continuing the broader, cultural approach to Jewish education, the Jewish Communal Affairs Department of the American Jewish Committee commissioned Dr. Samuel Heilman, Professor of Sociology at Queens College, to conduct an ethnographic study of several Jewish schools which would focus on the culture of the school, human relations, attitudes and expectations. Dr. Heilman's report which is based on on-site observations of three different schools--Orthodox, Conservative and Reform--describes what is actually going on inside the classroom and recommends policy and program changes for communal consideration and action.

Many of Dr. Heilman's findings illustrate the theme of dissonance between parents, children, and teachers. Each group approaches the subject matter with its own set of expectations and values. Although some difference in perspective is healthy, the wide cultural gaps between teacher and students make effective teaching difficult, if not impossible. Furthermore, Dr. Heilman finds that the schools reflect the values, lifestyles and expectations of the parents and the Jewish culture of their community.

To rectify this situation, Dr. Heilman urges consideration of efforts to transform the school into a total community. This can mean involvement of parents in their children's studies as well as informal experiences such as Shabbatonim and other types of retreats. Beyond such activities he also suggests the creation of Jewish boarding schools which would form total Jewish communities. This last recommendation is far reaching in its potential effect and calls for most serious and objective consideration.

Dr. Heilman's study suggests the need for further investigation of the cultural dissonance between the world of the teachers and that of the students, between the school community and the total community. It gives equal weight to the expanded study of ways of making the family the focal point of Jewish education, which should be distinct from public school education and oriented towards transmission of values and personality development.

The findings and recommendations contained in Dr. Heilman's report deserve serious communal study with appropriate action as the goal, not only by Jewish educators but by concerned volunteer communal leaders as well.

Yehuda Rosenman
Director, Jewish
Communal Affairs Department

There is a story about a learned man who came to visit a rebbe. The scholar was no longer young -- he was close to thirty -- but he had never before visited a rebbe. "What have you done all your life?" the master asked him. "I have gone through the whole of the Talmud three times," answered the learned man. "Yes," replied the rebbe and then inquired, "but how much of the Talmud has gone through you?"

Much concern about and research on Jewish education has focussed on how successful our schools have been in getting students to go through the Talmud and other Jewish texts. To be sure, the content of Jewish learning is fundamental, since no amount of feeling, however deep or sincere, can take the place of knowledge and Jewish literacy. Moreover, few Jewish educators would argue over what constitutes the basic corpus of information that should be passed on to students. Nevertheless, while we are interested in whether or not our students go through the traditional texts and cover the lesson plans, we are also concerned about the extent to which these texts and all they signify manage to get through to them, to penetrate their consciousness and character, their environment and culture.

Unlike other researchers in the field who have focussed on matters of pedagogy, curriculum, administration or educational philosophy, I have, as a social anthropologist and ethnographer, concentrated on the social environment and culture inside the Jewish school. By entering into the school as neither teacher nor administrator nor student nor parent, I have spent my time watching in order to discover what constitutes normalness, to expose the taken-for-granted life as it unfolds within the institution. For it is the normal rather than the exotic that reflects and reveals the inner character of life as experienced by insiders. Throughout, I have concentrated not so much on what is learned but on how it gets through and what impact it has.

This technique, often referred to as "seeing things from the actor's point of view" allows a level of interpretive understanding that is not normally available with other methods of research. It makes it possible to share moods and motivations with those one is studying and renders their behavior less opaque.

Yet, even the most empathic understanding is not enough, for all insiders presumably have that. The professional social scientist brings an additional element of interpretation to the enterprise. He or she can look upon the inhabitants of the Jewish school (both staff and students) as if they were members of a small community, expressing the larger Jewish culture of which they are a part. We thereby discover not only what goes on inside the school, but also gain a sense of that school's connection to Jewish peoplehood. As anthropologist Clifford Geertz has eloquently put it, "seeing heaven in a grain of sand is not a trick only poets can accomplish."[1] Social scientists too can see the larger reality by looking intently and with an informed eye at the particular case.

For me, as for most observers of culture and society, "the road to the grand abstractions of science winds through a thicket of singular facts."[2] As an ethnographer of the Jewish school, I have searched for the larger reality by looking intently and with an informed eye at the details of school life.

Doing ethnography, trying to decipher the precise character of human behavior in order to describe it and render it comprehensible, is, however, like trying to read "a manuscript -- foreign, faded, full of ellipses, incoherencies, suspicious emendations, and tendentious commentaries, but written not in conventionalized graphs of sound but in transient examples of shaped behavior."[3] One immerses oneself in details not for their own sake but rather because they are symbolic expressions of culture, genuine slices of life from which the informed and careful observer may piece together the narrative line of that manuscript we call human culture.

To reach some understanding about the Jewish school and the culture to which it is bound, I spent a total of approximately 100 hours inside three types of schools: an Orthodox day school, and two afternoon schools, one Conservative and the other Reform. I attended classes, loitered in the hallways, went to the neighboring shops to watch the students when they "broke away" from the school, and talked informally with people around me. To be sure, this amount of time was far from sufficient for a comprehensive view of any one of these educational settings; but my own native familiarity as both student or teacher in similar institutions as well as my experience as a social anthropologist, enabled me to reach certain tentative conclusions. I add one disclaimer. Having studied Orthodox, Conservative and Reform Jewish schools, I sought to identify trends common to all three. There are, however, important differences among them, which are beyond the scope of this paper.

CULTURE TENSION AND JEWISH LEARNING

A underlying assumption of all education, and especially Jewish education, is that "we are, in sum, incomplete or unfinished animals who complete or finish ourselves through culture -- and not through culture in general but through highly particular forms of it."[4] The classical educational approach emphasizes completion through knowledge. Knowing is the prerequisite to being and doing. Thus to train students in skills such as reading and writing, to expose them to history and teach them science is not simply the way to introduce them to western culture and its great tradition. It is to civilize and thereby complete them. Applied to Jewish education this approach suggests that to be a complete Jew one must first learn what it is Jews do and have done. In religious terms, one might say that he who would believe must first know.

In fact there may be an alternative: in order to want to learn about what Jews do and have done, to become complete, as it were, one may first have to feel

Jewish, to identify with and be committed to Jewish life, people and culture. He who would know must first believe. As the Book of Proverbs (1:7) puts it: "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge."

If that is the case, what are the indications for Jewish education? First, an appreciation of the role that Jewish learning can play in one's life may be a necessary prerequisite to assimilating the material. The absence of strong attachment and commitment, and a concomitant feeling of cultural tension, a sense of distance or alienation from Judaism, Jews or Jewish life, will directly and negatively affect the educational process. Those who do not feel bonded to their Judaism and Jewish peoplehood, and even those who feel only marginally attached will to some extent be unwilling and therefore unable to learn. As Avraham Yehoshua Heshel, the rabbi of Apt, once put it when addressing a crowd that had come to hear his teachings: "Those who are to hear will hear even at a distance; those who are not to hear, will not hear no matter how near they come."[5]

Second, where there is a confusion about the nature of the Jewish life to which one is tied -- as when, for example, the teachers embrace one form of Jewish life and the students another, or if each is unclear as to what is demanded of the other as Jews -- the learning process, even if technically successful, will be impaired, and so will Jewish identity. Cultural confusion and dissonance stand in the way of Jewish learning, while cultural competence and harmony abet it.

These general tendencies can be seen in the details of classroom life. Consider, for example, the phenomenon of "flooding out." First a definition. Commonly, in classrooms as in all encounters, "it is proper involvement that generates proper conduct."[6] "During any spate of activity, participants will ordinarily not only obtain a sense of what is going on but will also (in some degree) become spontaneously engrossed, caught up or enthralled."[7] Thus, for example, during a class in Bible, if the students become involved in and comprehend what is

going on, the learning will continue without disruption. Under certain circumstances, however, proper involvement is not maintained and a break occurs. People talk out of turn, switch into some activity not at all in line with the lesson plan, break into laughter, radically change the subject and so on. Such a disruption may be called "breaking up," a term often associated with the disengagement that comes by way of laughter, or it may be called "flooding out." When someone has flooded out, "he is momentarily 'out of play."[8]

Flooding out is contagious because involvement is an interlocking obligation. Whatever causes one individual to break his involvement in an ongoing activity, produces in him behavior which causes others to flood out. "Should one participant fail to maintain prescribed attention, other participants are likely to become alive to this fact;" and then they either join in or turn their attention to what the break means and what to do about it.[9] For example, if someone talks out in class, either others join him in the disrupting talk, or else they shush him. In either case, the whole class is removed from their proper involvement. "So one person's impropriety can create improprieties on the part of others."[10] The one who floods out is thus something of a revoluntionary whose actions threaten the steady flow of proper behavior. But why do people flood out?

In his careful consideration of the phenomenon, Erving Goffman, has explained that in social settings, "as the tension level increases, so the likelihood of flooding out increases, until the breaking point is reached and flooding out is inevitable.[11] The source of such tension, while often interpersonal or situational, can also be cultural. When, because of their cultural background, participants cannot "get into" or remain involved in what is going on, they break away or flood out. What follows is "either disorder or a new, more manageable definition of the situation."[12]

There are three options of involvement that culturally tense participants may choose. First there is "high involvement." This occurs when students disattend their sense of unease and can therefore become attached and committed to what is being taught. When the teacher is able to charm his class by his pedagogy or personality, when a significant group of other students become involved and the culturally tense student gets caught up with them, or when the occasion simply has an inherent drama which forces the student to forget himself, this may happen.

The student may also pursue the option of "partial involvement," in which he carries on side involvements (doodling, reading something else, passing a note, and so on) while simultaneously remaining somewhat involved in what is going on in class even though he is not completely absorbed by it. Such students represent a real challenge to the teacher for they are potentially still engageable. However, if the teacher does not involve them, they may ultimately be overcome by a sense of tension, and then break out. The note is passed in a disruptive way, or some other open breach occurs. This leads to the last option: "non-involvement." Here flooding out is the rule, where even a side involvement (a conversation with a friend, a request for a drink of water or permission to leave the room and so on) becomes dominant.

These matters are crucial, for it is not unusual to find a third of class time taken up with matters of structuring and maintaining student involvement. Teachers and students frequently spend much time sparring with one another to see who will succeed in determining the focus of involvement. Will it be the lesson plan, or some other plan of disruption and digression? In every setting, with a variety of students and teachers, I witnessed instances of flooding out. Consider some examples:

The setting is a Conservative afternoon school. The teacher, personally committed to ritual practice, is training his students in tefila, prayer. Each one is supposed to recite a line from the Ashrei prayer. But the students come from a

world where prayer is rarely if ever part of their lives. To immerse themselves in it, even in the artificial setting of a classroom, does not come easily. Cultural tension arises, and even temporary commitments are difficult.

A student raises his hand, apparently to volunteer to recite or perhaps to make an inquiry about the text. The teacher turns toward her. "Shoshana?" "Can I go to the bathroom?"

The shift in focus is abrupt and wrenching. Other students barely conceal their amusement. The teacher realizes he has been had. Any success he may have enjoyed in weaving an atmosphere of prayer is shredded. What should have been a side involvement at best has been turned into the main act. Soon others request their turn -- not to recite the prayer, but to go to the bathroom or get drinks. Finally, the focus of activity becomes so blurred that when the teacher calls on a student, the latter, believing it to be his turn to recite, begins to pray only to be stopped by the teacher.

"No, I thought you wanted to go to the bathroom. It's your turn now."

Consider a second example in a similar setting. The instructor is about to begin teaching. He has been spending the opening few minutes of the class in friendly banter, waiting for his students to wander in and settle down. There is a warm atmosphere and the observer can see that these students are happy to be in one another's company. The teacher formally begins the class by announcing that today they will begin Megillat Eicha, Lamentations. Discovering that none of his students has ever studied this book before, and that they view it as unconnected to their concerns, he nevertheless asks them to open their texts to page 68, on which the first verse appears.

"Did you say 69?" one student calls out, to the amusement of the others. It is a clear effort to break away from the text and its solemnity with a subtle but

unmistakeable off-color reference drawing attention away from the lesson plan. It is a barely veiled refusal to become engaged by the activity of study.

The teacher ignored the remark, as if believing that if he did not respond, he would be able to continue to manage the situation. He began to explain the meaning of the opening verse, trying to tap the students' capacity to identify with the devastation and mourning the book recounts. But they would not, perhaps could not, become engaged. To know one must first believe.

One student raised his hand. The teacher had to make a choice. He could ignore the raised hand, assuming it to be a potential disruption. On the other hand, it might be a genuine inquiry which would move the class into a more engaged learning. The teacher looked up and acknowledged the student. "Are you going to give out snacks in this class like you did in my brother's?"

The teacher gambled and lost. The question broke the flow and the teacher would either have to ignore it, risking additional disruptive inquiries from the others, or else answer it and then try to move back to the text and recreate the mood for which he was aiming.

A third case. The setting is a day school during an evening "mishmar" (all night) class reviewing Talmud. The teacher tries to explain the topic under discussion: the need to be careful, indeed circumspect, in one's use of language. He offers a talmudic illustration, explaining that the Torah takes great care in its use of language, preferring to use more refined terminology whenever possible. So too, he continues, b'nai torah (yeshiva students), must pay heed to the way they speak, using only refined language. Coarse language is something he associates with non-Jews and which by implication he wishes his students to view in the same way. "Shkotzim" (the incarnation of evil) use dirty words on the street, on the playing fields, even in the supermarket, he explains. Near me I hear a boy whisper to another, "they're not the only ones."

There are smiles and murmurs from the boys. There is not yet an open break, but the observer can sense the building up of tension. Offering illustrations from contemporary life and from his own experience, the teacher either is unaware of the tension or has chosen to overlook it, hoping perhaps to introduce and ultimately engage his students in a Jewish culture different from the one to which they are accustomed. The boys resist the effort.

To charm his class and involve them in this lesson, he recounts a personal experience. When he was in yeshiva, he tells them, he used to drive a truck during summers. At truck stops, he would meet other truckers -- naturally they were all Gentiles, he points out. Their language was foul.

"But when I came to the yeshiva I heard how beautifully the boys addressed the rebbe, never directly but only in the third person. Here I first understood what the Torah means when it teaches us to use nice language." The description of a yeshiva worlds away from the one in which we sit. The cultural tension explodes and the class floods out.

"What did the truckers say?" a student calls out. "Yeah, tell us what they said?" another quickly adds. "Did they talk about Preparation H?" asks a third.

It is a clear effort to get the teacher to flood out or at least to break up the other students. And it works; even the teacher smiles.

Quickly, many of the boys began to outdo one another in placing words in the mouths of the truckers and the teacher. Some others, more intent on returning to the Talmud, cried out for quiet, in an apparent effort to help the teacher regain control. In fact of course, <u>everyone</u> flooded out and the teacher spent much of the rest of the time trying to bring everyone back to the original focus on the text and its subject.

These are but three of many examples. The situation is familiar to anyone who has spent time inside the Jewish school. The question is: what does it mean?

Reviewing the incidents of flooding out that I witnessed as well as those occasions when it did not occur and everyone remained caught up in the learning at hand, I noticed a pattern emerging that involved cultural tension. When the matters being learned or discussed are difficult to assimilate, for social, intellectual or cultural reasons; when other options are unavailable, students are likely to flood out. Moreover, those students who have a sense of marginality, who feel a distance from and ambivalence about matters Jewish are most likely to initiate or enthusiastically participate in flooding out.

Though it occurred everywhere, flooding out seemed more prevalent among those students who were not clear about why they were in school or what their association with Judaism was, than among those who had an unambiguous sense of Jewish identity and a prevailing commitment to Jewish life. Flooding out thus serves as a kind of signal that something is blocking the Jewish learning from getting through to the students. Recall the examples I have cited. In the first, the teacher has been trying to get the students to pray. But prayer, and specifically mincha on which he is concentrating, is not comfortably a part of their lives. They have no attachment to what it implies and can therefore not become involved in it. Going to the bathroom, getting the teacher off the track, involvement in us-versus-him play is far more engaging.

In the second case, the teacher is trying to get his class to comprehend and deal with the matter of mourning over the loss of the Temple and Jerusalem. This is not something they can appreciate. Perhaps in the context of a Tisha B'Av commemoration, with the lights low, candles burning and all the other elements of the environment set into places, they might be able to become involved. But here on a weekday evening, smack in the middle of their lives of civil secularity, the matter of mourning over the Temple is "distant" to them in every sense, and flooding out seems the proper response.

Similarly, the importance of speaking in a refined manner, addressing the teacher in the third person, and avoiding coarse language are hard to accept for modern Orthodox students in a day school. As Orthodox Jews, they already perceive themselves as separated from the outside American Gentile world in many unavoidable ways. As modern Orthodox Jews, they seek to be neither remote from nor untouched by the modern world even as they remain committed to the tradition. One of the ways they have learned to play this dual role is by sounding like the Americans/Gentiles around them, even as they remain bound to Orthodox practices and beliefs. To suggest that they must separate themselves in this way as well raises all the ambivalences inherent in modern Orthodoxy. Flooding out is a way of avoiding the issue.

In my study of modern Orthodox synagogue life, I argued that the ubiquitous gossip and joking -- in fact a kind of ongoing flooding out -- that is so much a part of shul life, "blocks out -- literally as well as symbolically -- the possibility of the speakers' having to come to terms with the deeper antinomies inherent in their modernity and Orthodoxy."[13] The same is occurring here. As their parents do in shul, so the children do in school.

Put another way, one might argue that flooding out signals the presence of cultural dissonance. That is not to say that students are aware of the tension. Commonly, they flood out simply because it "feels right," it gets them out of a tight spot.

There is another key point here. As insiders will attest, flooding out often seems to be mandatory behavior. Even those students who come to class intending to become involved in the lesson soon discover that there are social pressures which encourage them to join in the flooding out. For example, I observed an occasion on which a student was answering all the questions the teacher asked.

Throughout he behaved properly, displaying the ideal level of involvement from the pedagogic point of view, while around him the other students were desperately trying to get the teacher and the class to flood out. Proper answers ran against the grain of the occcasion.

"Stop getting so involved," one boy finally called out in desperation. "Would you stop being so smart'" said another. Embarrassed, the "good" student became silent. It was an extraordinarily graphic illustration of a process which is usually much more subtle. The lesson was not lost on the other students.

In these instances of group pressure there is tacit agreement among the participants to limit their engagement, because all more or less share the same cultural dilemma. Only when there are varying cultural groups in a class do such pressures fail. Thus, for example, in classes where some of the students come from more Jewishly observant homes than others, where a variety of communities are served in the same setting, cleavages occur in levels of classroom involvement -- with teachers sometimes playing only to the engaged.

Interestingly, in those day schools and yeshivas where the Jewish curriculum is most emphasized attitudes toward secular studies reflect a similar pattern of disruption. Thus, traditionalist yeshiva boys are more likely to flood out during a lesson in social studies rather than during a Talmud class.[14]

Indeed, teachers have found ways of coming to terms with the flooding out, perhaps reflecting their own difficulties in becoming engaged too deeply in subjects that their students cannot embrace. The teachers' response is seen in their willingness to move with the flow, to allow digressions as long as the subjects of these digressions do not lead to disruptions and seem in some way associated with Jewish learning. Moreover, those unwilling or unable to "go with the flow," but who remain wedded to their lesson plan even when it does not engage their

students, may sometimes maintain decorum, but usually lose all but those students already committed to the material. Hence, the class which started out as a recitation of mincha devolved into a march to the bathroom and water fountain. Yet the teacher continued the liturgical recitation while keeping an eye on who went out and who came in. Students were lost in boredom, seeking ways to leave their seats or get the teacher to flood out. The class reviewing Lamentations evolved into a discussion about tenets of Conservative Judaism. Other classes in other schools got on other tracks in the same way. Digressions were the teachers' way of impeding flooding out. A continuous flow of changing activities requiring only the shortest commitments were the best way to get and keep students engaged.

Indeed in one afternoon school, the principal experienced this very attitude. After he explained that he would have liked all his students to have more intensive Jewish educations and to come from Jewishly committed homes, he concluded that, that, alas, was not possible. So his goals had changed: "I am happy if I can get my kids to the point where they are happy to come to school here." A similar attitude was echoed by a day school principal who explained: "The school is haymish and we want it to be haymish and the kids feel at home here."

THE JEWISH SCHOOL AS JEWISH HOME

The principals' stated aims should not be viewed negatively. While from a pessimistic perspective they constitute an admission of pedagogic failure, they may also be considered in more positive terms. What does it mean, after all, that the students "are happy to come to school?"

It is worth recalling that for many contemporary Jewish children, the Hebrew school represents the only environment which celebrates Judaism as a civilization and where they are completely surrounded by other Jews. This is more true for

those attending afternoon schools, but it is to a degree true in day schools as well. That is what often tinges the Hebrew school or religious side of the curriculum with an aura of intimacy that some day school students refer to as "haymish" or homey. While pursuing the secular curriculum, they are in a more formal environment, surrounded by ideas and echoes of the non-Jewish world. This is true even in day schools since few if any of them integrate the Jewish and secular curricula; compartmentalization is rather the rule.

Thus, the Jewish school and classroom become the last ghetto, an extension of and often a replacement for the Jewish home, a standing contrast to the public school, the secular curriculum. In some ways, Hebrew school is the Jewish cultural analogue of an after-school extra-curricular club. Thus, for example, in preparing the grade point average for college admissions, one of the day schools observed does not average in grades for chumash (Bible) and navi (Prophets), in spite of the fact that such courses are taught in college and students often seek transfer credits for them. This suggests that two separate worlds are involved in the teaching, and that the world of Jewish studies is, so to speak, off the record. This may make students feel more relaxed and more at home in the Jewish studies environment.

To paraphrase Y.L. Gordon, who urged Jews to "be a man in the street and a Jew in the home," most of the students attending today's Jewish schools are "men in the streets and Jews in Hebrew school." Indeed, for some parents, particularly those who are marginally concerned with the content of Hebrew school, the major reason for sending their children to the schools (beyond the matter of bar or bat mitzva preparation) is to insure that they maintain contacts with other Jews, that they experience Jewish community.

By and large this goal has been reached. In every setting I observed, even those students who were clearly alienated or at least distant from the content of

the curriculum displayed a closeness to their fellow students. Not only during class, when the display of camaraderie might be interpreted as a vehicle for flooding out, but also during breaks and before and after school, the students demonstrated closeness and communion in many ways. They exchanged news about their lives. They shared food with one another and at times with their teachers. They often came to and from school together. Indeed, at times the most important part of coming to school seems to be opportunity to enjoy one another's company, in spite of their commonly experienced feelings of unease with the curriculum, and this explains the otherwise curious fact that students claim to "like Hebrew school" even though they may have little or no interest in what is learned there.[15]

The homey quality of the Jewish school not only characterizes relationships among students and their peers, but is also found between students and staff. This comes out in a number of ways. First, even when there is boisterousness and "misbehaving" in class, there is a notable absence of overt hostility. Teachers may get irritated and students may feel aggrieved, but both sides manage to overcome these feelings much as everyday conflicts fail to leave lasting trauma on a stable family. There appears to be a tacit agreement that, in spite of all tensions, the basic unity of the group remains intact. No teacher, however harrassed, ever evinced the kind of anxiety and fear that public school teachers often experience. To be sure, this may be a product of the middle-class nature of the environment. It may, however, also have a Jewish source, which may be called the "kehilla imperative." This communal bond is of great value for it leaves students with warm feelings for their fellow Jews. And we all know how sorely that has been missed at various times in Jewish history.

If there were nothing else positive emerging from the Jewish school experience than a residual feeling of comfort when one is with other Jews, that

might be sufficient reason to perpetuate the institution. It is quite conceivable, moreover, that youngsters who feel at home in the Jewish school will as adults feel more bonded to the Jewish people than their peers who have missed that school experience with its Jewish relationships. And might these sorts of Jews not be the ones best suited to survive in an American Judaism that, on the one hand, retains some vague notions about the value and importance of Jewish life, while on the other is uncomfortable with much of its substance and ambivalent about its demands?

This homey quality of the school has consequences for learning. When students feel at home in the school, their acquisition of knowledge becomes an expression of this feeling. Thus, for example, in the day school it is common to find students independently reciting prayers or reviewing texts because this is a way of displaying their belongingness to the place. And even in the afternoon schools students would refer to matters Jewish (Bible stories, dietary laws, prayer and so on) which they would be unlikely to talk about anywhere else, simply because these subjects were at home in the school. To be sure, this will only happen if the school injects Jewish content into the homey environment, making clear that the feeling of closeness requires familarity with Jewish lore.

Surprisingly, flooding out, while signalling cognitive tensions, can sometimes lead to feelings of intimacy because it creates a sudden atmosphere of informality. When the teacher allows himself to get caught up in the flooding out, he can share in the feeling of closeness. Therefore, teachers will sometimes not only join in, but also encourage flooding out.

For example, in one fifth grade I observed, the class was reviewing grammar, going over their workbooks. This was rote learning; the material was excruciatingly boring, and neither teacher nor students seemed engaged by what

they were doing. Still, the class was decorous and seemed to get along well with the teacher. He made jokes occasionally, some related to the exercises in the workbook, and some about relationships he had with the children, or about sports. In a sense these bracketted remarks, moments when everyone flooded out, were among the most animated periods of the class. It was as if the group truly came to life only when they digressed from -- indeed, abandoned -- their formal class. They were intimate and warm toward one another, close friends who were, alas, caught up in a task they were not excited about but structurally committed to doing. They did it, therefore, out of a sense of loyalty to the teacher and the formal definition of the situation -- but all were happy whenever they could break into something more animating.

On another occasion, after a particularly intense period of learning, a teacher in one afternoon school pre-empted all student efforts at flooding out by organizing a musical chairs game. The exercise itself, virtually an organized pandemonium, had nothing to do with formal learning except that the commands in the game were all given in Hebrew. Yet, if the students did not learn these Hebrew phrases, they surely had a good time playing, and clearly displayed feelings of closeness to one another and to the teacher at the end of the hour.

There are other ways in which the Jewish school plays the role of Jewish community. One, already mentioned above, is that cultural attitudes towards Gentiles are easily expressed. The attitudes I heard served to distinguish Jews from Gentiles and celebrate Jewish superiority. Sometimes these contrasts are subtle, as when a Bible teacher associated all the grumbling and discontent among the Israelites with the "eruv rav", the so-called mixed rabble, non-members of the covenant who during the exodus from Egypt joined the Jews. And sometimes the message is far more obvious. I have already noted how the teacher in the day

school contrasted refined Jewish behavior with alleged Gentile coarseness. (It is intereting to recall how common this practice and its reverse among non-Jews has been throughout history.) These contrasts were made on numerous occasions.

Calling students by their Hebrew rather than their English names also stresses Jewish-Gentile differences. It is as if the school and teacher are saying that in the Jewish environment you are someone different, the possessor of a separate identity by which no Gentile knows you and by which no Gentile could be known. Students who fail to respond to their Hebrew names or who do not know them are sometimes locked in subtle but unmistakeable struggles with the teacher, and by implication, with their Jewish identities. Thus, one is far more likely to see students called by their given English names in those schools which make only partial Jewish demands on students' involvement or where a sense of Jewish marginality reigns supreme.

CULTURAL DISCOVERY

Attending a Jewish school is not only an opportunity to share in the experience of Jewish communion. It may also be an experience of cultural discovery and sentimental education during which the child learns what it means to be a Jew -- and not simply a Jew in general, but a particular kind of Jew. The latter is the case because schools are often agencies of one or another ideological movement. As the students recite and reiterate their lessons, review and react to what their teachers tell them, speak in Hebrew, perceive the world in Jewish terms, students and teachers -- at least within the boundaries of their classes --can form and discover their relationship to both their ethnic Jewishness and their religious Judaism.

In afternoon schools the process has largely become an oral tradition. Students simply are not sufficiently competent in Hebrew to read and comprehend

texts in the original, so they must depend on translations and the teachers' explications. Informal conversation, questions and answers, and discussion are the primary media of learning. This means that their contact with the sources of Judaism are at best secondary. In the day school students have a greater facility in Hebrew and can therefore study original texts. Consequently their study resonates greater authenticity. But even here, culturally bound interpretation of the texts -- what, for example, is metaphor and what reality -- is an important component of the learning.

Listening to themselves and their fellows bring the tradition to life -- in however limited a way -- gives students what for some are their only direct encounters, not just with the texts, but with the substance of Judaism. For many students the Hebrew school and what they learn there disambiguates the fuzzy ideas of what it means to be Jewish.

Sometimes these cultural discoveries occur outside of class. For example, during informal conversations which took place between teachers and students in the break between classes in one afternoon school, I recorded the following 29 Jewish terms which made their way into talk: minyan (quorum), kaddish (memorial prayer), shul (synagogue), kol boynick (jack-of-all-trades), aliya (call to the Torah reading), yahrzeit (anniversary of bereavement), omud (synagogue podium), pasken shaylos (to adjudicate religio-legal questions), tsaddik (righteous man), meshullakh (charity emmisary), nedava (donation pledge), pilpul (casuistic argument), mitzva (Jewish observance), minhag (custom), shulkhan orukh (a codex of Jewish law), sefer (holy book), shiva (Jewish seven day mourning period), shloshim (Jewish thirty day mourning period), kikhel (a type of cake), shalosh seudot (the three Sabbath meals), aufruf (the bridegroom's call to the Torah on the Sabbath before his wedding), simkha (joyous occasion), bris (circumcision), tefilin (phylacteries), khupe

(wedding canopy). Some of these terms the students knew; others were at first foreign to them and were therefore defined matter-of-factly in the flow of conversation. Their insertion into the informal banter in the halls turned this activity into an occasion for literally speaking in Jewish terms. To speak in these terms, moreover, is to see the world from a Jewish perspective, to evoke, discover and explore Jewish cultural reality.

To see how Judaism is disambiguated and acquired in class it is worth reviewing, however, briefly, a strip of classroom activity in which such cultural activity occurs. Consider the following:

> The class in an afternoon school is reviewing the story of the exodus from Egypt. The students are reading from a translation because they are not versed in biblical Hebrew. They are limited, therefore, to talking about general concepts. One student reads the text aloud, as others follow along. The teacher, as a sort of surrogate for the traditional commentators which are inaccessible in their original, periodically offers glosses to accompany the text. There are references to midrash and Talmud, Rashi commentaries are retold by the teacher, and a variety of other Jewish texts and traditions are cited. Throughout, the teacher structures the learning by asking questions that will elicit from the students the desired, doctrinaire responses. As a result, the students repeat fundamental elements of Jewish tradition, and sometimes tenets of a sectarian form of Judaism: what we Conservative, Reform or Orthodox Jews believe. It is an indirect but not unsuccessful form of learning.

This approach also allows students to display their "knowledge." Once committed to the action by their displays, they seem more willing to expand that knowledge. But the questions must be carefully framed lest they generate flooding

out. And the teacher must be ready to move in the direction of student interest too, which runs the risk of disruption and digression.

In the midst of a discussion of the exodus a girl speaks up, recalling her experience with hand-baked matza. Interrupting the teacher's review of the biblical narrative, she asks the reason for such matza. The teacher turns the disruption into a part of the ongoing lesson, explaining that this is called "matza shmura" (specially-guarded Matza). The question and subsequent digression are just as appropriate as the Bible is for the upcoming Passover holy days. The ability to go off on tangents so naturally communicates openness and a relaxed air about the learning. The students are discovering the extent to which digression is built into their Jewish learning experience. At the same time, however, they are learning something substantive about the Jewish tradition. Moreover, one observes here how conversation between students and teachers in the Jewish school takes place against the background of a world that is silently but unmistakably taken for granted. This is precisely the sort of teaching Franz Rosenzweig idealized when he argued that one who desires to tap the spontaneous interests of his students "cannot be a teacher according to a plan; he must be much more and much less, master and at the same time a pupil." And, he concluded, in the encounter between teacher and student, "the discussion should become a conversation...[that] brings people to each other on the basis of what they all have in common -- the consciousness, no matter how rudimentary, no matter how obscured or concealed, of being a Jewish human being."[16]

"What's the difference between matza shmura and the matza we eat?" the teacher asks, simply continuing the line of conversation begun by her students. "The other has to cook in the sun," the girl shoots back. "No, but technically it should be," the teacher replies. "Can we try that? Take a piece of bread and put it in the sun," a boy asks.

"We can make matza here," the teacher responds, altering the boy's request or perhaps refining it. "What we would be making would be something more like shmura matza."

The teacher is treading carefully here, avoiding the flooding out and the consequent alienation from the activity of learning that is possible. Her control of the situation requires self-confidence and competence in harnessing student interest, rare qualities in teachers. But she is successful, and the students get caught up in the line of discussion that the teacher is able to dominate. They learn about the details of "matza shmura."

Some of the students seem confused and murmur explanations among themselves. The teacher inserts herself into the discussion almost immediately and goes with the flow. When one girl says that this matza tastes "like cardboard," the teacher quickly agrees. No uncontrolled breaks in the action will occur here. As long as all digressive breaks can be assimilated into the learning, the teacher remains in charge and the class does not break up. An examination of the details of her method is in order. The teacher is plumbing the depths of the exodus story.

"What is Pharaoh like? He keeps saying 'I'll be good, I'll be good' and he's bad. And you have to believe he means he's going to be good. Why does he keep being bad?" the teacher asks, elaborating her question by animating Pharaoh. She tries to make him sound like a contemporary character as she speaks his words in tones and phrases the students would presumably comprehend and even identify with. This is how an ancient tale is made applicable to a contemporary youth. It is an expression of the timelessness of Bible stories that they can be thus 'translated.'

"Because when he sees that it works out so well...." one boy begins to say but is interrupted by another who explains: "He continues because there's nothing he can do about it." The students are vying with one another, trying to come up with an answer. They are obviously getting caught up in the lesson. It touches them.

"Well what is Pharaoh lacking?" the teacher asks. "Oh! responsibility," one boy suggests, as if this long and special word which resonates established moral lessons of childhood will satisfy his teacher. He has clearly identified the situation as an opportunity for a repetition of the classic moral lessons. Some of the students giggle at this -- flooding out because they cannot allow themselves to take this all too seriously or because they believe this boy has obviously missed his cue.

Other students continue in the face of the teacher's silence, her non-ratification of his answer. To them, Pharaoh is missing: "Truth." "Brains." "Loyalty? Something like that."

But the teacher is searching for something else. "What keeps you from doing the same thing wrong twice when your mother says not to?" she asks. Again she tries to bring the ancient text into terms the students can understand and through which they can be touched.

"Because my mother smacks me," a boy breaks in, amidst the chuckling of the others. The teacher, moving with the student and thereby trying to avoid his flooding out, responds immediately to his idea, "O.K. God is smacking him and he keeps doing it. What is he missing? He's an evil person and he keeps doing the same evil thing. What is he missing, what feeling? What is he missing?"

"Oh," the boy calls out. He's been captured by the topic and has caught the teacher's drift. He continues: "Conscience." "Conscience," the teacher repeats softly for emphasis. This was what she was looking for. With it she has humanized the character of Pharaoh and perhaps set the stage for the students' empathic comprehension of the story.

"Yeah, Pharaoh was like Pinnochio," one of the students suggested. He wanted to show he understood, but through the banality of his example could still display a degree of distance from the proceedings. He at least was not ready to be

wholly caught up in this discussion. Yet even this somewhat alienated youngster has obviously been stimulated enought to be engaged, albeit in a limited way. It is eloquent testimony to the teacher's masterful performance.

A question from another student, however, is even more impressive for it leads to a further exploration of the underlying theological questions with which the lesson is undeniably concerned. He asks about free choice and destiny, something that has concerned and puzzled commentators for generations. "Why didn't they give him a conscience?"

Asking this question as if it were personal and original of course gives it an urgency far above what it would gain had the teacher expressed it as part of a formal review of some commentary. Moreover, these kinds of students -- largely illiterate in Jewish matters -- could not even follow such a commentary if it were open before them. Only if the teacher stimulates them to ask these classical questions from out of their own consciousness will they have any meaning to them.

"Because Pharaoh, like all people," the teacher replies, "has free choice as a human being to either be good or bad. Nobody's going to make you be good or bad." The switch from "Pharaoh" to "you" is a subtle one but it cannot help but bring the two characters -- the one in the story and the one hearing it -- together. The teacher was in a sense being asked to speak in behalf of the Jewish tradition.

"People are responsible for the choices they make. They were given the choice to do right or wrong, and Pharaoh was one of those people who chose to do wrong again and again and again."

The class was silent, apparently satisified with this response from the teacher.

"I have one last question," the teacher added. "When people read the (story of the) ten plagues at the seder, why do we spill the wine?" She subtly takes for

granted a certain degree of cultural competence on her students' part: that they are familiar with and carry out (she says "We spill") this practice. "Is that a symbol of something?" she continues.

"Is that the blood that was given, something like that?" a boy answers. It is a chance to repeat lessons learned, to recite Jewish traditions. "Whose blood?" the teacher asks. "The Egyptians!" "Right. Why are we commemorating the loss of their blood?" "Cause they're human?" "Right. What happens when they come out of Egypt? What's the first, when they cross the sea, what's the first thing Moses does?" she now asks.

After a few wrong answers, the students finally recall the Az Yashir, the song of thanksgiving that Moses offered. The teacher continues:

"Now, what's God's response to Az Yashir? "He liked it; he thinks the Jews are nice," a boy answers, drawing what to him seems to be a logical conclusion and one that the teacher does not argue with but is not prepared to accept completely. "What else? What's wrong with Moses singing a song of praise to God after 20,000 Egyptians have drowned in an (sic) ocean?"

"Oh, you told us about that. He doesn't like when they're happy cause he killed them, that they're happy that his creatures died."

"Same thing," she now responds, "with the wine. We want to show we agree; we're not completely happy that human beings died."

Suddenly, in the midst of this rather free-wheeling discussion, one boy asked the teacher to tell the story of the time that Moses struck the rock. It was clearly a narrative he and all of the others knew but which he believed deserved retelling in the present context. His request, reaffirmed by some of the other students, called for a cultural performance, an opportunity to reflect, communicate and perpetuate an inherited conception of Jewish tradition. Retelling old stories,

already known, as if they were new and fresh is after all the blood and tissue of ritual Jewish learning.

The teacher agreed and retold the story, inserting commentary into the narrative, and bringing the encounter between God and Moses vividly to life. The students listened attentively and at last asked why Moses was punished at all. The teacher, turning the question back to them, elicited at last a response she considered adequate when one boy explained Moses "was losing his trust in God." This turned the conversation toward a consideration of the responsibilities placed upon the righteous man. Hearing the consequences of righteousness, one boy asserted, "then I'd rather not be a righteous man."

"You take a risk," the teacher admitted. Here were moral lessons quietly but undeniably inserted into the digressive flow of a routine class. The classroom is the place where Judaism is discovered and explored, and cultural performance takes place in that <u>everyone gets to see where everyone else is coming from Jewishly</u>. To be sure, sometimes such learning is accomplished serendipitously. Sometimes it is segmented and incomplete. But, it can still occur, even if to a far more limited degree than it perhaps once did.

I have reviewed this class at some length for I believe it exemplifies relatively successful Jewish learning. In the day school, the discussion might be more detailed and nuanced. It might refer more often to original texts and commentaries while drawing more deeply from Jewish tradition. The questions and answers might vary in content. But in all cases the basic method of digression and discussion, of a teacher sensitive and responsive to students' interests is what makes for learning.

To be sure, the variety of Jewish perspectives in the classroom do not always lead to a fruitful encounter. As I earlier suggested, when the Jewish world which

the teacher takes for granted is not the same one that the students inhabit, the conversation can sometimes undermine Judaism rather than inform and strengthen it. When neither side understands the nature of the Jewish world that the other accepts learning is endangered.

A simple illustration will help. The setting is a Conservative afternoon school. The teacher has just announced to his students: "I'm prepared to discuss any topic if it's presented to me before class or even during class...if you find it in the Mishneh Torah." (Maimonides, Code of Jewish Law). This is a fairly loose mandate, but it was accepted in the free-wheeling discussions that this class often had about matters of Jewish law. Following some general remarks about definitions of the word "kosher," the teacher was interrupted by one of the students. The speaker, a boy who comes from a mixed marriage (his mother is Vietnamese), asked a question. It began a digression which lasted through the rest of the class hours.

He referred to an article which another teacher in the school had read to the class earlier, one which discussed some principles of Conservative Judaism.

"I learned that the Conservative movement is based on that you take the laws and you weigh them and say what is necessary, what is applicable to today's society, and then you decide that this is what we as Conservative Jews are going to do."

He had hardly finished when the teacher paced to the other side of the room, leaned against the wall and looking furious, replied: "You know me. You know me for two years, maybe longer, o.k.? And you know my background; you know I'm from the Orthodox world." The teacher continued. "When I hear this, I have very serious questions."

The class was silent; they listened attentively.

"For me, I believe that the Torah is divinely written. Ve zot ha torah asher... (This is the Torah which God commanded....) He let the students complete the verse, which several of them knew. Here was a clear cultural performance, a chance for the students to hear themselves verbally reaffirm and at least partially associate themselves with the traditional belief in divine revelation.

"In other words," the teacher went on, "Moses wrote every letter, as dictated to him by God."

The students remained silent once again; they had, after all, just recited words that according to their teacher asserted this truth, words they were familiar with and which on occasion they recited as part of the liturgy.

Now came an oblique reference to the text they were nominally studying: "And the Rambam (Maimonides) will say when we learn about what is a prophet -- we will find that Moses is the father of prophets." The teacher was using this class to insert into his students' consciousnesses a whole variety of little tidbits of information about Judaism and Jewish tradition. But, and it is a big but, the Jewish world which he inhabited and the one they did were not the same one. The conversation took place against two different backgrounds which were not necessarily compatible -- that is what made the encounter troubling for the class. When for example at one point the teacher remarked that in Conservative Judaism "people pick and choose what they want from religion," he meant it as a criticism. His students responded, "that's right," and clearly understood such a characterization of their brand of Judaism as one of its positive qualities, its flexibility and capacity to meet the particular needs of their lives. Neither side, however, seemed able to perceive the viewpoint of the other. Thus, a number of students left the hour shaking their heads in frustration about their inability to resolve this issue. Afterwards the teacher explained to me: "They just don't

understand it at all." In both cases, the frustration expressed was not generated by bad interpersonal relationships between students and teacher; these seemed good by and large. Rather, the frustration was rooted in the cultural contradictions of their situation.

When the teacher concluded his lesson with a kind of Orthodox creedal question and asked "Who, who today in this generation, in the last generation," and now with his voice rising to a crescendo, "in any generation -- including the generations of Moses -- could stand up and abrogate something that is written in the Torah?" he was at last confronted by a chorus of "no's" from the students who tried, in the words of one, to explain "A Conservative Jew isn't saying that."

Yet as the class went on it was clear that the students were not altogether certain what was demanded of them as Conservative Jews nor was the teacher clear about the nature of the Jewish commitment they were prepared to accept. Each side tried to communicate its attachment to Judaism, but the Judaism to which each felt attached was not the same.

Something similar occured in another class I observed where the teacher, an Orthodox Jew, and his students, marginally Conservative in background and outlook, discussed an eruv, the boundary within which certain activities otherwise prohibited may be carried on during the Sabbath. A student had asked why an eruv was necessary; the teacher responded by explaining how an eruv works halakhically (according to Judaic law). Neither seemed able to conceive the cultural perspective of the other.

In this case, the cultural backgrounds and Jewish orientations of students and teacher are not different but at odds with one another. Can the Orthodox teacher serve as vehicle for the Reform or Conservative Jewish student's discovery of his and his parents' brand of Judaism? Can a non-Orthodox teacher stimulate

Orthodox practice and foster a traditionalist worldview? Yes, but only if the teacher is able to suspend his own conceptions of the world and become sensitive to those of the communities he serves.

Often, though, out of the sincerest of intentions, teachers and students serve unknowingly as agent-provocateurs, trying to undermine one another's cultural assumptions. Thus in one class I observed the students who were non-Orthodox tried to convince their Orthodox teacher of the ludicrousness of a "Shabbat elevator" while he tried to persuade them of the benefits of living within the "four cubits of the halakha (law)." And in another, teachers, acting in accord with their day school's policy, instructed their students to pray, but did not do so themselves, thereby communicating at best an indifference to prayer.

These examples and the many others like them illustrate that a teacher cannot always disambiguate the substance of Judaism for his students. It requires more than technical training; it takes cultural competence. "Religion requires a religious community," sociologists Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmannn argue. "And to live in a religious world requires affiliation with that community."[17] To this one could add that religious education requires that the educator be part of the religious community into which he or she is presumably leading students. When this is not the case, when the Jewish world the teacher and student inhabit are not the same one, and neither can make the leap toward the other, learning is replaced by frustration and cultural continuity by disruption.

This is not only a problem in afternoon schools where the teachers are often Orthodox and the students something else; it can happen in the day school as well. The teachers responsible for secular studies, and sometimes even the principals responsible for that side of the curriculum, are all too often culturally segregated from the Jewish studies side. Or, just as the afternoon schools are forced to draw

their teachers from the liberal wing of Orthodoxy, so analogously the day schools sometimes find their teachers drawn from more traditionalist elements.

While all groups nominally subscribe to the same "Great Jewish Tradition," they often overlook, at their own risk, the "little tradition," the cultural nuances and differences among them, and this weakens their schools. It is clear, therefore, that insofar as each wing of American Judaism feels committed to its own interpretations of Judaism, it must accordingly produce its own culturally competent and pedagogically trained teachers. Without a cadre of teachers who share the value systems, worldview, and ethos of the communities they serve, cultural dissonance will continue to be built into even the best classrooms.

In addition, this suggests that students and staff should share community life (and the associated ethos and cosmology) outside of the class as well as in it. In this way the teacher will persuasively play his role as cultural agent, guide into Jewish life. But if that community, however, is one which at best is ambivalent about matters Jewish and at worst is indifferent or even hostile to them, then both teacher and students need to share a world which is insulated from the host community. That is precisely what successful Jewish summer camps or yeshivas accomplish by locating themselves far from the homes of their students in environments which force the school to become a cultural island. That is what many prep schools and colleges with their isolated campuses have always done.

JEWISH IDENTITY

Critics of Jewish education often argue that the Jewish school does not work. It works. It is a model <u>of</u> the Jewish community it serves, a mirror image of what goes on in the Jewish world around the school. And, the Jewish school is a model <u>for</u> Jewish community life, a blueprint; or more precisely a template, that produces Jews who are suited to inhabit and sustain the community. As psychoanalyst Allen

Wheelis has explained: "Every culture creates the characters best fitted to survive in that culture."[18] The Jews are no exception. Thus, each of the schools I observed turns out students who will feel at home in the community, and will in turn give life to that community. The Orthodox day school produces students who can inhabit and sustain the same sort of dualistic and compartmentalized culture their parents lived in, often experiencing the same conflicts and cultural dissonances that their parents do. Similarly, the Conservative and Reform school students display the same confusions about Jewish life that their parents do: on the one hand retaining some vague notion about the value and importance of Jewish education, while on the other expressing discomfort with much of its substance and ambivalent about its demands.

Those critics who argue that Jewish schooling does not succeed really mean, therefore, that it succeeds too well; what they are actually lamenting is that the Jewish community, instead of being altered by the education it provides, perpetuates itself along with all its attendant problems. But how can we expect a school which is not a cultural island to create anything radically different from what exists in the surrounding milieu? To be sure, the school can provide knowledge in place of ignorance, if it has devoted students, a competent staff and a community committed to Jewish education (elements often lamentably missing). But in great measure the Jewish school's aims are not limited to inculcation.

Indeed, one might accurately describe the school's essential goals as enculturation and socialization. While we Jews have always believed that the study of Torah was an invaluable intellectual exercise, we also understood that such regular review would help us keep spiritually in touch with the tradition, allow us to replay the past in the present, and serve to communicate as well as perpetuate the inherited conceptions that define Jewish culture.

To demonstrate how a school may reflect and reenforce the nature of Judaism and Jewish identity which the students and teachers bring to it, I offer an extended and telling illustration.

The teacher, a Conservative rabbinical student obviously committed to traditional values and norms, was exploring with his students the question of what they believed Conservative Judaism demanded of them. In response to his opening inquiry about the nature of their Jewish identity, all the students characterized themselves as Conservative. He then proceeded to ask them a series of questions about beliefs and practices, to which they would call out answers. Often one or two students spoke for the entire class. If there was agreement, the rest would signal their concurrence with nods, murmurs or silence. In cases of disagreement, two or three students would voice the varieties of opinion for all.

One boy volunteered a definition of himself as a Conservative Jew. "Well, I celebrate most of the holidays and..." He ran out of things to say. There was apparently nothing more that he could immediately call to mind.

"What makes you different from an Orthodox or a Reform?" the teacher asked.

"Well, I'm not Reform because I go to Hebrew school and I do celebrate the holidays and stuff."

"But so do Reform Jews," one of the other students pointed out, to which the first seemed to have no answer. The distinctions were obviously fuzzy.

The teacher tried to focus their attention. "How many of you can safely say that you can give me a good definition at least of Conservative Judaism?"

A girl tried. "Somebody who is not as strict as Orthodox. Because they go to the Temple on holidays but they -- but they don't have to, like, not ride on Shabbat."

"Well, it's just in between Reform and Orthodox," another suggested.

"Is there anyone who disagrees firmly with that?" the teacher asked. No one did. "So everyone would agree here that Conservative practice is in between Orthodox and Reform? What would you do if I said that that's not true."

"I'd say you lied," one student responded.

"But then all Jews would be the same," another girl broke in. She continued. "There wouldn't be Orthodox, Conservative and Reform. So how would Conservative Jews know if they should be kosher or they shouldn't be kosher?"

The teacher ignored the question and instead began to list behaviors and beliefs and asked the students whether or not they believed these to be part of the formal definition of Conservative Judaism. He asked them about keeping kosher in the home. Most seemed to agree it was important; a few did not.

"How about observing kashrut when eating out?" he continued. Some said "yes," while the majority called out "no." Still others responded, "half the time" only to meet with a chorus of "no, not at all."

"Being a member of a Conservative synagogue?" Everyone agreed that was crucial to the definition.

"Speaking Hebrew?"

"Well, speaking it but not understanding it," one student said. For most if not all of the others this was a particularly apt way of putting it. "I know how to read it," added one girl (whose earlier performance left some doubts on this score), "but I don't understand it." This was a particularly telling admission to be made in "Hebrew School."

The teacher continued listing such matters as contributing to Jewish charities, observing the Sabbath, lighting Sabbath candles, saying kiddish (blessing over wine) and attending Shabbat services, spending time in Israel, making aliya,

participating in high holy day services, having a Passover seder, praying every day, and helping the poor or the aged. Throughout, the students gave responses that reflected all of the ambivalences and attitudes of Conservative Jewry. They were for giving charity, having Passover seders and participating in high holy day services; split on the importance of Sabbath observance and kashrut, confused about how important Israel should be in their lives but convinced that they were not expected to move there.

"Remember," the teacher added, "I'm not asking you what you do, just what you think is important for Conservative Judaism." To him there was clearly a useful distinction to be made here, but for the students, as indeed for their parents, the difference between ideology and behavior was minimal. It might not even have been conceivable.

The teacher now asked the students whether or not they believed that maintaining regular Jewish study throughout the rest of their lives was part of the Judaism they practiced. At first the immediate response was a uniform "no."

"Listen to this one, dating only Jewish people," the teacher continued. Here there was some division, with a vocal majority agreeing but a minority saying that it was alright as long as there was no marriage involved.

"What about marrying non-Jewish people?" "No," one boy answered on behalf of the rest, and then another added: "That's very important." No one explained why this prohibition was to be maintained but all had clearly received the message that it was. This stimulated conversations among the students during which some asked others if they would abide by this stricture. They all -- at least here and now -- agreed that they would.

"Do you believe that Conservative Jews should believe that the Torah is the word of God?" the teacher continued. When quite a few said yes, the teacher

remarked, somewhat incredulously, "You believe a Conservative Jew should?" Now the students seemed less sure. A subtle message about the theology of Conservative Judaism, as understood by this teacher, had been passed on to them.

He continued. "Conservative Judaism on the books, what it is ideologically -- what it is in written form, so to speak -- what it's supposed to be is a lot different from what it is. Now, those of you who raised their hands and said they're Conservative Jews -- are all your parents members of a Conservative synagogue?

As one, the students answered: "yes."

"Then you have a perfect right to say you're a Conservative Jew. But when I tell you -- it'll take maybe twenty seconds to tell you what Conservative Judaism demands of people who call themselves Conservative Jews, you'll find that there's a big gap between what it's supposed to be and what it is."

"Alright, so what is it?" one of the boys asked. There was silence now, perfect and utter silence for the first time all class.

"According to Conservative Judaism, Conservative Jews are supposed to observe all halacha which means they must observe all Jewish law. So you're not allowed to go shopping on Shabbes, according to Jewish law."

There were rumblings of conversation among the students, while the teacher continued. "According to Conservative Judaism you have to abide by all these laws: you have to pray three times a day; you have to go to services--"

"Forget that," one girl said.

"No way," added another.

"So Reform must really be reform, reform, reform," said a boy.

"Now," the teacher continued, "someone tell me what the difference is between that and Orthodoxy."

One girl answered immediately: "Because Orthodox is a lot worse. Orthodox probably says if you don't do it..." The teacher completed the line: "lightning."

The students were not quite prepared for this sort of explanation and moved instead to a description of Orthodoxy that was anchored in specific practices.

"Orthodox have to wear a yarmulke everywhere you go if you're a boy," a girl explained.

"Conservative Judaism doesn't say you have to, but when you're eating, saying any bracha (blessing) -- most of the day you should have one on," the teacher explained. He continued: "Have you ever seen those tsitsiyot, arba kanfot?" (fringes on garments)

"Like Tevya wore?" asked one of the boys, making reference to the closest he may have ever come to an image of a traditional Jew.

"Yeah," the teacher answered. The students had seen these. "Well, Conservative Jews have to wear those."

"Oh no!" a boy called out.

"Do you wear them?" asked another, without getting an answer from the teacher.

"Only on Shabbat?" asked a girl, referring to the one day that in her calendar seemed to have been set aside for religious life.

"Every day," answered the teacher.

"Now what's the difference between Conservative and Reform?" he asked.

One boy was ready with an answer. "Reform is more assimilated than Conservative. They don't follow all the rules. You know they're the ones with the Hanuka Bush and all that."

"On the books," the teacher continued, "what is a Reform Jew supposed to do?" There was no ready answer, so the teacher gave one.

"According to Reform Judaism, you must follow all of the moral rules of the Torah," the teacher explained.

"Because you believe in them?" one of the girls asked.

The teacher did not really address this question but went on to suggest that Reform Judaism does require one to carry out the laws between man and man but not between man and God. This meant, for example, that adultery was prohibited but driving on Shabbat was not. From this the teacher concluded: "The Conservative Jews says, 'We have to be concerned about what God cares about;' and the Reform Jew says, 'We have to be concerned about what we do with other men.'"

The students were not quite sure what to make of this. Quite a few had already turned their attention away and were involved in conversations among themselves. They had already begun to flood out. The teacher concluded: "Haverim, (friends) what I want to leave you with, although not everyone meets up to what Conservative Judaism is supposed to be, that doesn't mean we're not Conservative Jews."

As one listens to this exchange between teacher and students one cannot help but be struck by the extent to which the students reflect the Jewish community from which they come. The teacher has not simply been polling his students about Conservative Judaism, he has also provided them with an opportunity to recite their understanding of its basic tenets. In the process, all the classic values, behavoirs and attitudes have been passed on and are reflected and reaffirmed in this classroom encounter. The session is a model <u>of</u> and <u>for</u> Conservative Judaism. It presents and sustains a particular form of Jewish identity. And it appears to work.

The example cited is not unique. In all the settings I observed the participants found ways of communicating culture and forming Jewish identity. Sometimes there were problems of cultural dissonance created by the varying

backgrounds of the participants. But then flooding out often occurred, making it clear that there was a problem. A teacher sensitive to the meaning of such disruptions and willing and able to try again could turn things around. He could digress along with his students, reach out to them, as long as he remained aware of who they were and from whence they came. That is, as long as the teacher was culturally and pedagogically competent and had basic interpersonal skills, he could succeed. To be sure, teachers like that are not easy to find, and once found even harder to keep, considering the meagre rewards they receive from the community.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Commonly, in anthropology working hypotheses and explanations of behavior are most successful for translating the meaning of human behavior in situ. Longer explanations run the risk of drifting into theoretical fantasies because cultural theory -- for which anthropology aims -- is not strictly speaking predictive. Since, however, the mandate of my research called for some policy recommendations which have emerged as a result of my work and because every field researcher inevitably places his observations and interpretation of action into some overall conceptual framework from which certain conclusions may be refined, I shall close this paper with such comments.

Certain conclusions seem obvious. I began by arguing that a sense of attachment to being a Jew may precede learning, and that the process of Jewish education may be understood as a form of cultural expression and completion. Therefore, some form of cultural preparation may be necessary before sending children to Hebrew school. This may take the form of enrolling parents and children in Jewish cultural enrichment programs before the beginning of formal instruction so that the entire family comes to feel a more intensive Jewish identity and involvement. Jewish family summer camps, institutes, family pre-school programs are some possibles vehicles for this.

I pointed out that sometimes confusion or ambivalence about cultural matters results in flooding out, breaking away from the substance of learning. I have shown that there are nevertheless occasions when successful learning does occur. For such success, I have suggested that teachers and students must share a single Jewish culture, or at least be able to comprehend and even empathize with the one from which the other comes, and teachers should be willing and able to move with the flow of their students' interests. This requires minimally that teachers must be informed about the Jewish world from which their students come. Maximally, this requires a sharing of culture and community. As noted earlier, the easiest way to accomplish this would be to create separate self-contained school communities.

Simply stated, for the teachers and students to share a controlled learning environment where ther is cultural continuity between the world inside of class and the one outside of it, they must have their own campus. Before this can happen, though, teachers will have to become endowed with a sense of vocation, the sort that roshei yeshivot, (heads of yeshivot) camp directors, and prep school dons have. That requires better pay, facilities that can be used to house staff and students, deeper commitments all around, and a fundamental rethinking on the part of American Jews about the sincerity of their interest in Jewish education. If this sounds grandiose, it is. But the stakes, after all, are high.

No one imagines that this will be easy, especially given the modest compensation that teaching in general and Jewish teaching in particular now offers. Salaries and benefits are abysmal; prestige is essentially non-existent; and a sense of vocation has for all intents and purposes disappeared. As a number of recent studies have documented, only a minority of teachers of Jewish education plan to stay in the profession. In a particularly striking finding George Lebovitz in a survey of day school teachers, discovered that less than half them planned to be in the same profession five years from now, nearly all those planning to leave were

under forty, and 30% of the teachers under forty planned to leave at the first opportunity.[19]

The problem that teachers and students come from different cultural milieux is compounded by the fact that parents are often only marginally aware of what happens inside the school. This is not to say that they do not receive the information that schools send home via their children or in the mails. But they do not often have an opportunity to share the experience of the school with their children.

One might object, perhaps, that no public school allows the parents to share its experiences with their children. This is true but irrelevant when one realizes that the purpose of the Jewish school, as I have suggested, is to act as a model of and model for Jewish cultural life. And, as I have also noted, for many students in afternoon schools, the institution represents the only totally Jewish environment in which they regularly participate. What goes on there becomes the embodiment of their Jewishness. Simply stated, "to be a Jew," as one young girl in one of the schools I observed put it, "is to be someone who goes to Hebrew school."

If being Jewish is so tied up with the school experience, then it behooves the parents to share that experience. There was a time when Jewish education in the school was an extension of the home and the Jewish community. Now it has largely become a replacement for them. Parents must now join the children in school in order to share in the Jewish experience. As long as Jewish schools are housed within local communities, parents must become part of what goes on inside the classroom. In one Conservative school I observed, just this sort of program had been established, and it succeeded beyond expectations. Not only did many parents attend once a week with their children, but the same children who at other times might not be engaged by the classroom activities become far more involved in learning when their parents learned along with them. To be sure, there must be

some generating sense of commitment to get them into the school in the first place, but once they are both there, that commitment can develop and deepen. Students and parents acquire during such joint sessions a capacity for what Bateson has called "deutero-learning," learning how to learn.[20] And that is a significant skill for a people who values "torah lishma" (try for its own sake) and believes that "talmud torah keneged koolom." (The value of studing torah outweighs all).

Another significant problem is that of motivation. In both types of afternoon schools, and, to an extent, in the day school, countervailing curricula confront both students and teachers. On the one hand there is the secular curriculum, with its academic demands and career objectives. On the other is the Jewish curriculum, connected to all intents and purposes with another world. In all the schools I observed there was seldom if ever a continuity between the two. Rather, each implicitly interrupted the domain of the other, and students were forced to choose between them. In the afternoon schools there is a tacit affirmation that the secular curriculum dominates. Hebrew school, as noted earlier, is an after-hours involvement, often competing and sometimes identified with extra-curricular activities in the public schools. Commonly, students miss Hebrew school in order to attend some activity at public school. With the exception of missing public school on holy days, the reverse never occurred. On one occasion in one school, two thirds of the class was missing because they were rehearsing a play at the public school. The teacher did not challenge the legitimacy of that excuse for their absence; she simply accepted it as a fact of life. Another time, when the vacations of the Hebrew and Public schools did not match, it was taken for granted by students and tacitly accepted by teachers that the students would skip Hebrew school during the public school recess and vice-versa. In a third instance it was understood that students would absent themselves from their Jewish studies in order to prepare for Regents Examinations.

The dissonance is undeniable even in the day schools, which value an effort to demonstrate the dominace of Jewish studies by putting them first in the day or scheduling the day to make the students see that each curriculum demands equal time and effort. On rare occasions there is a dialectical interplay between the two curricula, and hence the two traditions. In most cases, however, there is simply compartmentalization. The student moves first to the Jewish tradition, then to the secular one, back again and so on. Recall the fact that chumash (Pentateuch) and navi (prophets) grades are not averaged into the student's official transcript. As the adept day school students learn to compartmentalize their Jewish and secular concerns in school, so they repeat this skill in later life.

But if the temporal differences are clear, the value orientations which distinguish the two curricula are even more important. The secular curriculum emphasizes achievement and perhaps, in some secondary way, character training. The accumulation of skills and knowledge is paramount, leading to some specified goal, variously articulated as "high school," "college" or "career." For students who aspire to this goal, work is largely teacher-dominated, for the teachers have the information the students seek to master. This is of no small consequence to Jews for, as Rosen and D'Andrade[21] have shown, they stress achievement.

The Jewish curriculum, while ostensibly also aiming for specific achievements and skills, primarily emphasizes Jewish identification and the development of a Jewish consciousness. That is, while secular studies provide skills and specific knowledge, Jewish studies provide students with a sense of peoplehood,something that might best be described as "Yiddishkeit". The presence of other Jewish students and the social world constructed in the classroom may therefore be as or more important than the teaching. Recall that especially in the case of afternoon schools, the students' time there may be the only one in their entire day when they are surrounded completely and solely by Jews. The school

becomes the symbolic Jewish home, the Jewish community for all intents and purposes. In this situation, moreover, the teacher must be a facilitator and catalyst, role model and co-participant to a greater degree than a teacher of secular subjects. Perhaps only a genuine community insider can achieve this.

These special goals of the Jewish curriculum also make success harder to measure. The secular teacher has succeeded when the student has mastered certain skills: reading, mathematics, geography and so on. The Jewish teacher may succeed in getting his students to learn some Hebrew, comprehend some sacred text, or acquaint themselves with points of Jewish law. But even so, he has not necessarily fulfilled his mandate which, in the final analysis, is to make Jews out of his students. Conversely, even if the Jewish school teacher does not succeed in making his students fluent in Hebrew or enabling them to make their way independently through a Jewish text, he may still succeed in eliciting a warmth towards and attachment to their Judaism and ethnic identity.

Accordingly, the secular achievements can more easily be evaluated, graded -- if you will -- than the Jewish ones. Yet strangely, the same grading system is used for the Jewish curriculum as for the secular one -- and this even when Jewish studies grades are not part of the official grade point average. Lacking the same basis in reality, however, these grades are largely meaningless, and students look upon them with a jaundiced eye. They realize that time in Hebrew school is not like time anywhere else. "Another world to live in -- whether we expect ever to pass wholly over into it or no -- is what we mean by having a religion," philosopher George Santayana once suggested.

If the Jewish school is in fact a religious school, an institution forming and confirming religious identification, then it ought to stress its difference from rather than its sameness with the secular curriculum. In practice this might mean

a different system of evaluations, a different format of teaching (stressing, for example, the intimacy of religious community rather than the formality of the classroom, a different language and so on). Too often our Jewish schools try to mirror secular institutions. They need and can forge their own identity from the besmedresh and cheder (European-style Jewish schools) rather than the public school. "Religion for the Jews," as Herman Wouk has put it, "is intimate and colloquial, or it is nothing."

CONCLUSION

Since we agree that the goal of Jewish education is worth the effort, what is to be done? I am convinced that to know one must first believe; that feeling and being actively Jewish may be a prerequisite to becoming more so; that the number of volumes of the Talmud we have gone through may be less important than how many of them we have let get through to us. Nearly half a century ago, the great Jewish student and educator, Franz Rosenzweig, in an essay arguing for a renaissance of Jewish learning, wrote something eerily similar: "Books are not now the prime need of the day...what we need more than ever, or at least as much as ever, are human beings -- Jewish human beings..."[22] If we form communities in which being Jewish is a positive and active element of life, then we shall produce Jewish human beings, and our schools will ineluctably reflect that success. If we fail, our schools will mirror that failure.

REFERENCES

1. Clifford Geertz, The Interpretation of Cultures (New York: Basic Books, 1973), p. 44.
2. Ibid., p. 363
3. Ibid., p. 10
4. Ibid., p. 449
5. Martin Buber, Tales of the Hasidim: The Later Masters (New York: Schocken, 1948), p. 115
6. Erving Goffman, Frame Analysis (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974), p. 346
7. Ibid., p. 345
8. Erving Goffman, Encounters (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1961), p. 55
9. Frame Analysis, p 346
10. Ibid.
11. Encounters, p.57
12. Ibid.
13. Samuel C. Heilman, Synagogue Life: A Study in Symbolic Interaction (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), p. 309
14. Brian M. Bullivant, Competing Values and Traditions in an Orthodox Day School: A Study of Enculturation Dissonance (Doctoral Dissentation, Monash University, 1975), pp. 388-9
15. Cf. Georg Simmel, The Sociology of Georg Simmel, trans. K. Wolff (New York: Free Press, 1950), pp. 40-57
16. Franz Rosenzweig, On Jewish Learning trans. N. Glatzer & W. Wolf (New York: Schocken, 1965), pp. 69-70.

17. Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, The Social Construction of Reality (Garden City: Doubleday, 1967). p. 147.

18. Allen Wheelis, The Quest for Identity (New York: Norton, 19), p.

19. George Lebovitz, Satisfaction and Dissatisfaction Among Judaic Studies Teachers in Midwestern Jewish Day Schools. (Ed. D., 1981, University of Cincinnati).

20. Gregory Bateson, Naven (2nd Edition), (Stanford: Stanford University Press), pp. 285-6.

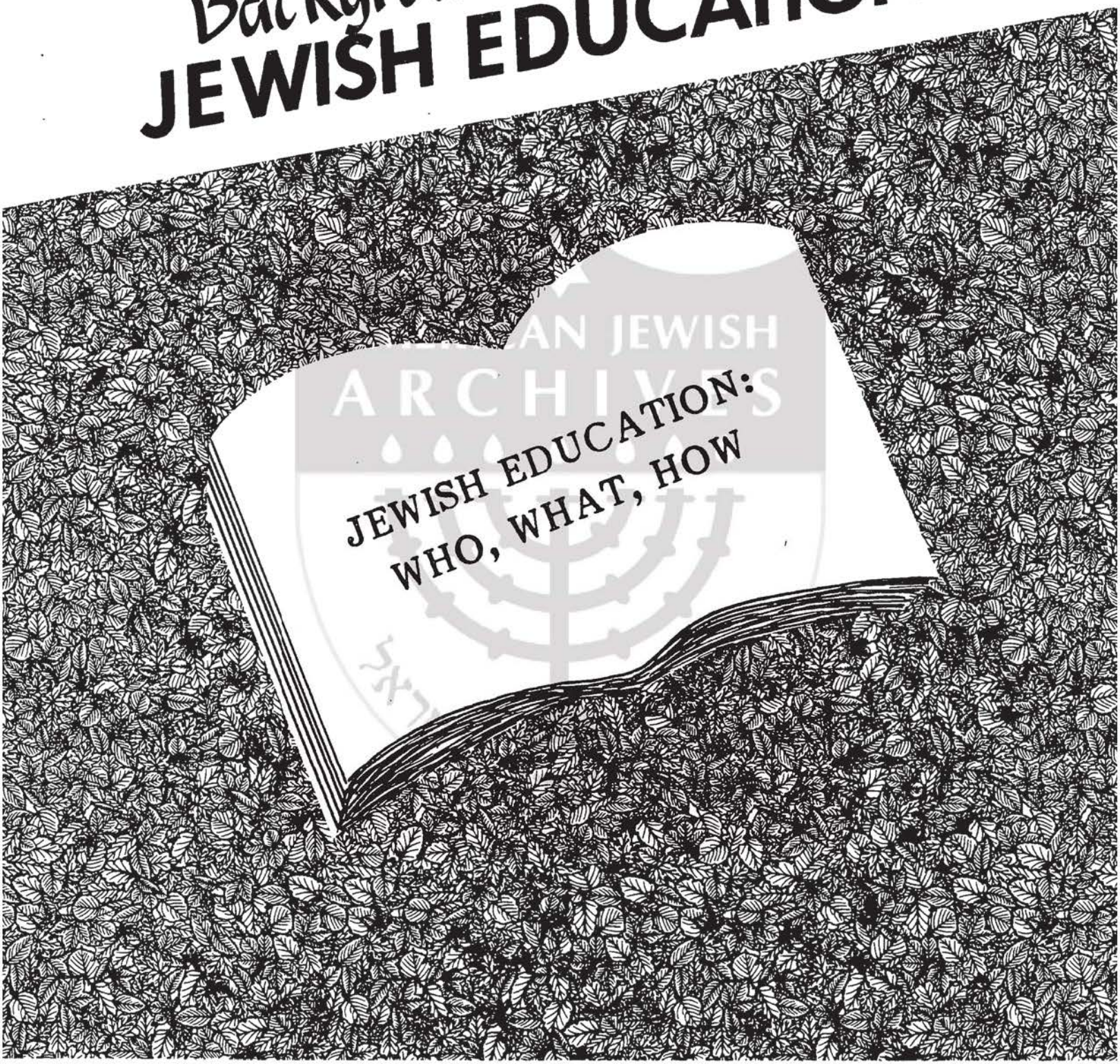
21. B.C. Rosen and R. G. D'Andrade, "The Psychosocial Origins of Achievement Motivation," in B.C. Rosen, H.R. Crockett, & C.Z. Nunn (eds.), Achievement in American Society (Cambridge, Mass.: Schenkman), pp. 58-84.

22. On Jewish Learning, p.53.

Single Copy $2.50
Quantity prices on request

ISBN 0-87495-057-0
September 1983

Background Papers in JEWISH EDUCATION



ajc THE AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE, Institute of Human Relations, 165 East 56 Street, New York, N.Y. 10022

THE JEWISH COMMUNAL AFFAIRS DEPARTMENT

The Jewish Communal Affairs Department is one of the major national program departments of the American Jewish Committee. To achieve its overall goal to improve the quality of Jewish life and secure Jewish continuity, the Department engages in planning programs of research, publication and action in five major areas. These include: the dynamics and maintenance of Jewish identity; the Jewish family (the Department created the William Petschek National Jewish Family Center in 1979); Jewish education at every level (in 1974 it founded the college level Academy for Jewish Studies); the communal involvement of Jewish academics; Israel and Jewish communities in other parts of the world.

The JCAD implements its objectives through commissioned research, conferences, publications, leadership training, consultation services, demonstration projects, and preparation of program guidelines for AJC chapters and other Jewish agencies.

JEWISH COMMUNAL AFFAIRS DEPARTMENT

BACKGROUND PAPERS ON JEWISH EDUCATION

On December 20, 1982, the Board of Governors of the American Jewish Committee approved "A Statement on Jewish Education" which read in part:

> We urge our members to assume responsibility for Jewish education through membership on Communal Boards or Bureaus of Jewish education and education committees of synagogues and lay schools so as to better assure the translation of their concerns into policies and programs.
>
> We must demand the same high standards and the same pursuit of excellence in Jewish education that we demand in the secular education of our children. We should insist that processes for impartial evaluation of instruction, such as testing and external professional assessment, be instituted and strengthened, and that the results of such measures be made available to parents and to communal leadership. Knowledge about both the achievements and the failure of Jewish education is essential to effective community efforts to improve Jewish education.

Eager to implement this policy statement, the Jewish Communal Affairs Commission of AJC has established a National Committee on Jewish education chaired by Solomon Fisher and Marshall Zissman.

The Jewish Communal Affairs Department will supply members of this new body and other interested individuals and groups with a series of background papers on significant aspects of Jewish education. It is expected that these pieces will be useful resources for Jewish men and women who wish to press for more effective Jewish schooling in their communities.

The first paper presents an overview of contemporary Jewish education and a description of the institutional structures which prove that education. The paper is based in part upon research and writing done by Dr. David Resnick, Director, Department of Community Services, JESNA. Subsequent backgrounders in this series will deal with:

Jewish Teaching as a Profession
Students in Jewish Schools
The Ambience of the Jewish School
Curricular Issues
Testing and Accountability

JEWISH EDUCATION: WHO, WHAT, HOW

Jewish education takes place in a variety of settings -- the home, school, youth groups, summer camps, college campuses, and adult institutes. In each of these settings, the goals of education include, but are not limited to, imparting information, developing skills for further study, and inculcating an appreciation for Jewish values, thought, and culture.

However, education in each of these settings may stress different things. A university-based Jewish Studies Program, for example, will emphasize understanding Jewish culture, while the Jewish home may emphasize experiencing Jewish rituals in order to strengthen links among family members. In the home, authority and responsibility rest with the parents. They determine which values they want to communicate to their children through the way the family lives and the rituals its practices. If the parents are committed Jews, they will, in all likelihood attempt to structure family life so as to communicate respect for Jewish values and culture. In contrast, at the university the faculty usually determines matters of curriculum and instruction. As academicians, the faculty members usually strive to create courses that help students understand Jewish civilization rather than advocate its value-system.

This paper, the first in a series of backgrounders designed to acquaint lay people with the basic issues of Jewish education, deals only with Jewish elementary and secondary school systems. Although we recognize the significance of the other settings for Jewish education, our primary focus is the Jewish school rather than the university or the summer camp. In that sense the paper attempts to clarify the structure of Jewish school systems. It will discuss the different kinds of Jewish schools -- day schools, supplementary afternoon schools, and Sunday schools -- (the different categories of students enrolled, including their ages and numbers), the different bodies which sponsor and carry responsibility for the functioning of these schools, and funding sources for schools.

I. Jewish Students: Ages and Numbers

Recent demographic studies have suggested that there are approximately one million Jewish children aged 7-17 in the United States. According to the Hebrew University census of Jewish students, approximately 360,000 of those children are engaged in some formal Jewish schooling. This figure indicates a long-term decline in both absolute numbers and percentage. In 1962 supplementary schools alone enrolled 540,000 pupils, and just one decade ago 2/3 of all *school-age* Jewish children were enrolled in some type of Jewish school.

Moreover, we must distinguish between elementary and secondary school-age pupils. Generally Jewish education is compulsory for children who wish to hold a bar-mitzvah or bat-mitzvah ceremony in the synagogue. Attendance past this age into the high school is entirely voluntary, depending on students' interests and parental values rather than on congregational norms or requirements.

As a result, it is not surprising that 85% of all Jewish students enrolled in Jewish schools of all types are pre-bar/bat mitzvah. In supplementary schools,

which enroll 250,000 Jewish children, 90% are pre-bar/bat mitzvah. Thus, only 10-15% of Jewish children continue their Jewish schooling into their high school years. Of those who do elect to continue, most stay on only 1-2 years. As we will see, this issue of continuation is a crucial problem that threatens the effectiveness of these schools.

Finally, we should note that 40-60% of Jewish children never receive any formal Jewish schooling. The wide latitude in this estimate deserves further explanation. The general estimate of 360,000 pupils presently enrolled omits those enrolled previously but who are now no longer enrolled. Similarly, the estimate omits those who will enroll at some point in the future. As a result, current estimates of the percentage of Jewish children who never receive Jewish schooling range widely.

II. The Faculty

Since we will explore the entire state of the Jewish teacher, including training, development, and compensation, in a separate paper, we limit ourselves here to some general comments regarding faculty size and workload.

Overall, Jewish schools employ some 23,500 instructional personnel. Of these, however, only 4,100 are designated as "full-time." The term "full-time," though, requires careful definition. Day schools, which employ 3500 "full-time" instructors, define it as teaching 25-30 hours per week. In contrast, the 600 "full-time" instructors in supplementary schools teach but 12 hours per week. Naturally, this disparity in the meaning of "full-time status" is reflected in significant disparity in compensation as well.

III. Types of Jewish Schools:

As noted above, there are essentially three types of Jewish schools -- the all-day school, the afternoon supplementary school, and the Sunday school.

Day Schools

The all-day school, as its name suggests, educates students the entire day in both Jewish and general subjects. Day school students usually attend only the day school, which provides them with virtually all their instruction. It is the day school alone that carries the weight of the responsibility for both their Jewish and their general education.

Day schools are unique in two respects: first, they offer a complete Jewish environment in which students socialize with fellow Jews, explore current societal issues in a Jewish context, and experience what it means to live in a Jewish community. Moreover, day schools may allocate equal time to Jewish and general subjects, so that students perceive the relative equality of the two civilizations in which they live and can strive to integrate the values of both.

One salient feature of contemporary Jewish life in America has been the explosive growth of the day school. Only seventy-eight such schools existed

in 1945. Today, approximately 110,000 Jewish students attend over 540 Jewish day schools found in virtually every community with a Jewish population over 7,500. This growth is testimony both to the dedication of the Orthodox, who have long argued that day school education offers the primary guarantee of Jewish continuity and peoplehood, and the growing acceptance of cultural pluralism which emphasizes the importance of ethnic and group traditions as an American value. Finally, given American Jewry's strong emphasis upon social mobility and secular success, day schools have always striven to provide a first-rate general education as well as Jewish instruction. The few studies that have been done of day school graduates show that their alumni score high in both Jewish communal involvement and on professional attainment.

Most day schools are under Orthodox auspices. 86% of day schools are Orthodox and more than two-thirds of all day school students are enrolled in Orthodox schools. Only 8% of day schools are Conservative-sponsored (usually called Solomon Schechter schools). 5% of day schools are independent or communally-controlled, and 1% designate themselves as Reform.

Moreover, two thirds of all day schools are found in the metropolitan New York area. Perhaps most importantly, only 20% of day school students are enrolled on the post bar-mitzvah level. Day schools apparently are far more successful at retaining students on the pre-bar-mitzvah than on the post-bar-mitzvah level, and it is on the latter level that many believe students require the maximum Jewish education.

The Supplementary Schools

For most Jews the supplementary school remains the primary Jewish educational setting. As the name indicates, these are schools which supplement public school instruction with after-hours Jewish education. Of Jewish students enrolled in Jewish schools, 70% are enrolled in supplementatry schools. Currently 1835 supplementary schools are functioning -- 760 Reform, 785 Conservative, 250 Orthodox, and 40 community schools. Similarly, in terms of students, 80% attend schools under Conservative or Reform auspices.

Supplementary schools vary from the one-day-per week Sunday schools to the three-day midweek afternoon schools. The tendency everywhere has been to increase the number of hours that schools hold classes. In 1966-67, Jewish schools averaged 182 pupil hours per school year. By 1980, that figure had risen to 248 pupil hours.

The increase in hours reflects the view held by many that a school's long-term effectiveness, defined as continued Jewish identification into adulthood, depends in part upon the number of hours pupils actually attend classes. Recent studies claim that a minimum of 1,000 hours is required for a school to impact positively upon a student's adult Jewish identification, and the degree of adult identification increases as the number of hours of school attendance goes up to a maximum of 4000 hours. However, to approach the latter figure, students must continue in supplementary schools through their

high school years. Yet, as indicated earlier, only 10% of students in supplementary schools will continue into the Hebrew high schools.

Limited hours creates other problems too. Supplementary schools must often abandon any pretence at teaching the Hebrew language, which, like other languages, demands continuous drilling and instruction. Moreover, since the number of hours devoted to Jewish education are so minimal, students quickly sense that the whole enterprise has only marginal, if any, importance to themselves or to their parents. Finally, the paucity of hours of instruction means that there are few full time teaching positions and those that do exist cannot offer salaries at a professional level.

Finally, there is the question of sponsorship and responsibility. Since World War II the prevailing tendency in supplementary schools has been the predominance of the congregational school. In part this represents the growth and importance of the synagogue and synagogue membership in American Jewish life. Also, the shift from community schools to congregational schools signifies the trend toward suburbanization in Jewish residential patterns. Secular Hebrew Schools, to say nothing of Yiddishist Schools, have virtually disappeared from the scene. Jewish education takes place under the auspices of religious institutions. This development raises new problems which merit attention:

1) There is a gap between the desires of non-religious parents who send their children to school on the one hand, and the attitudes of the religious authorities responsible for instruction, on the other. The parents frequently reject the very life-style the school authorities are seeking to impart.

2) Enrollment in congregational schools is declining. In New York alone 211 schools enroll fewer than 100 pupils each, and about 100 of these enroll fewer than 50 each. Nationally, the average school size in 1982-1983 was 130 pupils compared to 260 just one decade ago. Schools with small enrollments are often both pedagogically and financially unviable. Many communities faced with this problem have tried to encourage mergers between schools of different congregations into a community school. However, intercongregational and interdenominational rivalries often inhibit mergers. Community schools, of course, might draw upon wider resources in terms of funding, students and teachers.

3) The congregational schools are responsible to the Rabbi and the Synagogue Board. Often these individuals are concerned primarily with matters other than education. Though the congregation will at times appoint a school committee, that body remains subject to the authority of the Synagogue Board and the Rabbi, who have other, frequently more pressing priorities.

IV. Bodies Concerned with Jewish Education

The question of sponsorship and authority in congregational schools raises a larger question of who is concerned with Jewish education. A number of national and local bodies and commissions exist, and we shall attempt to clarify their roles and functions:

1. Like secular education in this country, Jewish education is highly decentralized and most of the power resides in local educational boards (of individual schools, camps, etc.). Even where individual schools (or other educational settings, like camps) are affiliated with or accredited by national organizations, the funding and supervision of the schools are almost entirely local matters. For the individual interested in helping Jewish education, this decentralized situation is, on the whole, a good thing. Because each educational unit relies on its local community for support and guidance, its lay board often has significant educational input. In fact, there already are about 35,000 lay people involved in Jewish school boards and committees.

   The key local organization is the Bureau (or Board) of Jewish Education. Generally funded by the local Federation (which usually has an education committee of its own) there are about forty such central agencies nationwide. They range from huge institutions, like tne New York City BJE which serves more than 600 schools, to the Toledo, Ohio BJE which operates the community sponsored afternoon Hebrew school and day school, both of which serve all the synagogues in town. Though the range of services to schools varies, Bureaus generally provide pedagogic guidance and other special services (in-service seminars, testing, the arts), act as liaison to the public schools, license teachers and accredit schools, as well as providing various types of funding to individual schools.

2. Jewish Education Services of North America (formerly the American Association for Jewish Education) is the cross-denominational, national umbrella organization for Jewish education. It conducts a regular census of school enrollment as well as other research. Essentially JESNA serves as a national clearing-house of information regarding Jewish education and as an agency servicing local Bureaus. For the Council of Jewish Federations, JESNA acts as the primary avenue of communication between the Jewish educational bodies and the communal lay leadership. Finally, through its placement services, JESNA aims to create a profession for Jewish educators by insisting on adequate standards for recruitment, placement, retention, and promotion.

   In short, the BJE functions as the local agency responsible for direct services to schools in the form of curricular and instructional consultation, researech of existing trends, and experimentation with new models. Finally, the local BJE is charged with responsibility for school evaluation. To date, however, very few mechanisms exist whereby qualified and disinterested observers may conduct on-site inspections and evaluations so as to be able to alert a community about what is actually occuring inside the classroom.

3. Coalition for Alternatives in Jewish Education. As its name indicates this is a broad-based coalition of those concerned with improving Jewish education. Membership is open to all persons interested in contributing toward this end. CAJE is a grass-roots organization of front-line educators and serves as a network and support organization for the often lonely Jewish education professional. It disseminates information and curricular materials to its members and conducts an annual conference which brings together educators and lay people from the entire spectrum of Jewish ideology and belief.

4. National Commissions of the Religious Movements. All of the main religious denominations have rather highly developed commissions on Jewish education, e.g. the Union of American Hebrew Congregations (Reform), the United Synagogue of America (Conservative), and the National Commission on Torah Education (Yeshiva University, Orthodox). Though the various commissions differ somewhat, generally speaking they set policy and standards for the schools in their movements (though enforcing standards is always problematic), publish curricula and offer teacher services, and help organize or sponsor professional organizations and placement services for teachers and administrators. Each of them also has a separate division for informal educational endeavors, including camping and youth organizations.

   Each Commission publishes statements of broad educational policy and has begun to develop curricular materials and guidelines. For instance, the United Synagogue has recently developed a curriculum emphasizing what distinguishes Jews from other Americans. Similarly the Orthodox Commission on Torah Education has been emphasizing the affective dimension of education towards religious feeling and committment.

5. The American Section of the World Zionist Organization operates two departments of education and culture (one religious, the other not) which provide personnel, programs, services, and material to a wide variety of educational institutions.

   The Education Departments of the World Zionist Organization supply curricular materials designed to foster love for Israel, a sense of Jewish peoplehood, and the importance of the Hebrew language. Several years ago it established a special Commission on the Teaching of Zionism and Israel to develop innovative and effective projects in this area. In addition the Department of Education and Culture sponsors a National Bible Contest for American Jewish students.

6. Torah Umesorah serves as the national coordinating body of Orthodox day schools. It has been especially active in establishing new day schools and in enhancing standards of day school curricula and personnel.

V. Funding for Jewish Education

All agree that quality Jewish education requires sufficient funding to ensure adequacy, let alone excellence of standards. The most recent estimates place the total budget for Jewish schools -- excluding administrative bodies such as BJE's and

colleges of higher Jewish education at 400 million dollars, a considerable sum by most standards. Essentially the money comes from several sources: tuition, congregational budgets, private fund-raising, and federation allocations. The following chart for day schools and supplementary schools outlines funding sources:

	Day Schools	Supplementary Schools
Total Budget:	$270,000,000	$130,000,000
Tuition:	57%	40%
Communal Funds:	13%	6%
Congregational Budget:	0%	45%
Other (private fund-raising, personal scholarships, fees)	30%	9%:

Tuition fees in particular range widely. At quality day schools tuition charges hover around $3,000 per child and often exceed that figure. As inflation persists the danger looms that the cost of intensive Jewish education may exceed the means of all but the wealthiest Jewish families. To date efforts have been exerted to maintain day school tuition at affordable levels, but the community increasingly faces the challenge of maintaining quality day schools without placing undue burdens upon parents of moderate means.

In supplementary schools the situation has been just the reverse: tuition fees have remained at unrealistically low levels for fear that parents might withdraw their children entirely were tuition fees to bear a realistic relationship with the actual cost of educating a child. Thus one survey indicated that between 1950-1970 average tuition at supplementary schools rose from $50 for children of members and $65 for children of non-members yearly to $85 and $150. In 1975 a survey of Conservative afternoon schools indicated an average tuition of $115 per child. Tuition fees of this scale will do little more than defray the cost of paper. In these circumstances congregational budgets must supply the bulk of funds necessary to maintain a school.

Since World War II Federation allocations to Jewish education have increased constantly. By 1977 the total dollar amounts exceeded 27 million, and by 1982 they exceeded 39 million. Similarly, in 1976 allocations to Jewish education represented 22.9% of all local allocations. By 1981 that percentage had risen to 25.4%.

An analysis of 95 individual federations indicates how these funds have been distributed:

Total Jewish Education	100%
Allocations & Subsidies to Schools	63.4
Day Schools	49.8
Congregational Schools	3.3
Other Schools	10.3
Jewish Institutions of Higher Learning	6.2
Services and Programs by Bureau or Committee	29.3
All Other	1.2

As noted in the table, allocations to local bureaus of Jewish education constitute almost 30% of the total. Day schools also have benefitted from increased federation disbursements. By 1981, day schools were receiving almost half of all federation allocations to Jewish education.

Analysis of local distributions indicates some variation from the national average. In Baltimore, for example, Federation allocated in 1981 $1,646,526 to Jewish education. The local BJE received $633,788 of this total, and day schools received $227,820 (the remainder was allocated to Jewish institutions of higher learning, e.g. the Baltimore Hebrew College. By contrast, in St. Louis the BJE received $393,900 out of a total allocation of $481,833. St. Louis day schools received $81,587 of the total.

Finally, the trend towards increased allocations to Jewish education must be placed in context. Federation disbursements amount to but 10% of the total budget for Jewish education. Even in the day school, which receives the lion's share of federation funds, distributions provide day schools with but 13% of their budgets.

Conclusion:

This initial Jewish education backgrounder has attempted to clarify the structure of Jewish education and the problems inherent in the structure. In particular, it has focussed upon major areas of communal concern -- students' ages and numbers, different types of schools, and funding sources. The paper's thrust has been to stimulate thought and discussion rather than to advocate specific recommendations or policy changes. Such recommendations, however, may follow from discussion of the factual data contained in the backgrounder.

83-750-83
5/83

For Further Reading

Ackerman, Walter, "Jewish Education Today," in The American Jewish Yearbook, 1980.

Ackerman, Walter, "Jewish Education: For What?" in The American Jewish Yearbook, 1969.

Resnick, David, "Toward an Agenda for Research in Jewish Education," in M. Sklare (Ed.), Understanding American Jewry, 1982.

Targan, J., "Jewish Education," in The Second Jewish Catalogue, 1976.

Jewish Education magazine, published quarterly by the Council for Jewish Education.

Jacob Neusner, "Seven Settings for Jewish Education," The Synagogue School, Winter, 1973-74, pp. 4-21.

Alvin Schiff, "On the Status of the Jewish Supplementary School" Jewish Education, VOL. 50, no. 4 (Winter, 1982), pp.2-4

Directory of Organizations

1) Coalition for Alternatives in Jewish Education -- 468 Park Ave. South, New York, N.Y. 10016, (212) 696-0740.
   Dr. Eliot Spack, Nat'l. Dir.
   Stuart Kelman, Chairperson

2) Jewish Education Services of North America -- 114 Fifth Ave., New York, N.Y., 10011, (212) 675-5656
   Fred Sichel, Pres.
   Dr. Shimon Frost, Exec. V.P.

3) Melton Research Center (JTS) -- 3080 Broadway, New York, N.Y., 10027, (212) 678-8031.
   Eduardo Rauch, Chmn.
   Barry W. Holtz, Chmn.

4) Merkos L'Inyonei Chinuch, Inc. (The Central Organization for Jeish Education) -- 770 Eastern Parkway, Brooklyn, N.Y., 11213, (212) 493-9250.
   Menachem M. Schneerson, Pres.
   M.A. Hodakov, Dir., Treas.
   Nissen Mindel, Sec.

5) National Commission of Torah Education, Yeshiva University, Division of Communal Services -- 500 W. 185 Street, New York, N.Y. 10033, (212) 960-5265.
   Rabbi Robert Hirt, Dean, Div. of Communal Service

6) Torah Umesorah -- National Society for Hebrew Day Schools -- 229 Park Ave South, New York, N.Y., 10003, (212) 674-6700.
   Sheldon Beren, Chmn., Nat'l. Bd.
   David Singer, Chmn., Exec. Comm.
   Rabbi Bernard Goldenberg, Nat'l. Dir.

7) Union of American Hebrew Congregations -- 838 Fifth Ave., New York, N.Y., 10021, (212) 249-0100.
   Rabbi Daniel Syme, Dir. Education
   Rabbi Howard Bogot, Assoc. Dir. Education

8) United Synagogue of America, 155 Fifth Ave., New York, N.Y., 10010, (212) 533-7800.
   Dr. Morton Siegel, Dir. of Education

9) World Zionist Organization -- American Section -- 515 Park Ave., New York, N.Y., 10022, (212) 752-0600.
   a) Dept. of Education and Culture
      Dr. Aviv Ekrony, Dir.
   b) Dept. of Torah Education and Culture
      Mr. Abraham Finkelstein, Acting Dir.
   c) Nat'l. Commission on the Teaching of Zionism and Israel
      Rabbi Israel Miller, Chairman

Religion and Public Education

A STATEMENT OF VIEWS

THE AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE

The American Jewish Committee is frequently asked to express its position on the many complex issues related to religion and the public schools. This statement of views is an attempt to respond to such requests.

The beneficent teachings of religion have contributed immeasurably to man's progress from barbarism to civilization. This country particularly, settled in large measure by those seeking freedom of conscience, has been profoundly influenced by religious concepts. With church affiliation in the United States now at an all-time peak, religion is certainly an important factor in our lives.

In the opinion of many, the vitality of American churches and synagogues flows from our unique tradition of separating church and state. This cardinal principle has insured freedom of conscience for all. It has permitted scores of religious sects to flourish without hindrance. It has enabled us to escape most of the sectarian strife and persecution which has marked the history of other lands.

Today, the long-established interpretation of the separation principle, especially as it applies to the role of the public schools with regard to religion, is still being debated. While our time-tested concept of public education as a secular institution is relatively secure, there are numerous areas of controversy as to the implementation of this concept.

There are, of course, many church-state issues unrelated to the schools—religious symbols on public property, for example. But since public education continues to be the center of concern, it is here that attention is focused.

NATURE OF THE CONTROVERSY

Recurrent world crises have caused many Americans to question whether our moral fibre is strong enough to surmount the stresses and strains of troubled times.

Such soul-searching has provoked much discussion about the role of religion in the education of our children. Because of the increase in juvenile crime, drug abuse and other youth-related problems, some anxious parents are wondering whether there ought not be greater religious emphasis in the public schools.

Some religious leaders claim that public education, in neglecting religion, has failed to perform its full function and that our children are therefore morally deficient. These critics contend that since the child's "working day" is spent in the classroom, it is incumbent upon the public school to provide opportunities for religious training and expression.

Other clergymen maintain that, in keeping with our constitutional principle of separation, the task of inculcating a religious outlook is the responsibility of the home, the church and the synagogue, and is not a legitimate function of the public school.

Quite apart from the role of religion in the public school, a very significant controversy exists with regard to the use of public funds for sectarian schools. Proponents of such aid argue in terms of what they conceive to be simple justice for citizens who pay taxes for public schools which they do not use, as well as in terms of the financial needs of sectarian schools today. Those who resist public aid for religious schools contend that such aid breaches the constitutional principle of separation and that diverting public funds away from public schools embodies a grave threat to the future of public education.

BASIC PREMISES

The American Jewish Committee's long-held position with respect to this problem, which was reaffirmed in October 1971, is based on two primary convictions:

1) *Separation of church and state, as defined by the United States Supreme Court in interpreting the guarantees of the First Amendment, offers a sound foundation for maintaining religious freedom.*

In the words of the Court:

> Neither a state nor the Federal Government can set up a church. Neither can pass laws which aid one religion, aid all religions, or prefer one religion over another. Neither can force nor influence a person to go to or to remain away from church against his will or force him to profess a belief or disbelief in any religion. No person can be punished for entertaining or professing religious beliefs or disbeliefs, for church attendance or non-attendance. No tax in any amount, large or small, can be levied to support any religious activities or institutions, whatever they may be called, or whatever form they may adopt to teach or practice religion. Neither a state nor the Federal Government can, openly or secretly, participate in the affairs of any religious organizations or groups and vice versa. In the words of Jefferson, the clause against establishment of religion by law was intended to erect "a wall of separation between Church and State."*

Applying the Court's pronouncement to education, three general conclusions emerge:

—The maintenance and furtherance of religion are responsibilities of the church, the synagogue and the home, not of the public school.

—The time, facilities, funds and personnel of our public schools must not be used for religious purposes.

—Public funds may not be used for aid to

---

* *Everson* v. *Board of Education*, 330 U.S. 1, p. 15 (1947).

denominational schools.

2) *The public school is one of the chief instruments for developing an informed citizenry and for achieving the goals of American democracy.*

Any effort to revamp the school curriculum by introducing a religious emphasis would inevitably create divisive intergroup tension, thus undermining the effectiveness of our schools as builders of democracy. Therefore, to maintain the non-sectarian character of the public school system, satisfactory solutions to the problems of religion in education are required.

Guiding Principles for the Schools

The public schools should continue to be governed by certain general principles dictated by experience, law and tradition:

—The schools should maintain complete neutrality in the realm of religion. They should never undermine the faith of any child nor question the absence of religious belief in any child.

—While ordinarily the will of the majority governs in a democratic society, the First Amendment makes this rule inapplicable to matters of religion. Freedom of conscience is the wellspring of the First Amendment.

—Teachers should not undertake religious instruction in the schools.

—Children of whatever shade of religious opinion should enjoy total equality in the classroom. Thus, whether the children be Protestant in a predominantly Catholic community, Catholic in a predominantly Protestant community, or Jewish in a predominantly Christian community, they should be on an equal footing with all their schoolmates. Moreover, students with no formal religious training, as well as those who do not accept religious viewpoints, must stand as equals of

their religiously educated, observing schoolmates.

—Pertinent references to religion, even to doctrinal differences, whenever intrinsic to the lesson at hand, should be included in the teaching of history, the social studies, literature, art and other subjects. Great care must be taken to insure that the teacher's religious identification or absence thereof does not color his or her instruction. Where discussion of doctrine is not relevant to an understanding of subject matter, the teacher should refer the children to home, church or synagogue for interpretations.

THE MAJOR ISSUES

Religion in the School Curriculum

Teaching about Religion: One of the most perplexing problems stems from the suggestion that the public schools teach about religion—in other words, that children study it in a factual and objective way.

The merits of this proposal are difficult to appraise, especially on the elementary and high school levels, because there is no generally accepted definition of "teaching about religion." To some, it merely implies discussing the influence of religion and religious institutions on our civilization; to others, it means examining and comparing different theological doctrines; still others feel it should also include teaching a common core of principles undergirding the major faiths.

The schools are, of course, obligated to provide our youngsters with insights into the ethnic and religious sources of American life. Such instruction, however, should not be regarded as "teaching about religion." Rather, it should continue to be viewed as an integral function of general intergroup education. In the same context, the public schools can and

should instill in children an understanding of the origin and meaning of religious freedom, an awareness that our nation abounds in religious sects and an appreciation that it is the genius of American democracy to welcome and respect religious diversity.

The schools should also foster an understanding of the impact of religion on our civilization. Indeed, this knowledge is intrinsic to a well-rounded education. Such events as the Crusades, the Inquisition, the Reformation and the colonization of America, as well as the Holocaust, would be hopelessly distorted if religious motivations were not given proper weight. It would be equally wrong to omit the Bible from courses in literature or to ignore religious influences which illuminate the study of art or music. But separate courses in religion are quite another matter. Despite the best of intentions, such courses are all too likely to become vehicles for sectarian inculcation. Public schools cannot promote any or all religions.

If, as some charge, teachers shy away from religious references even when they are basic to an understanding of subject matter, prompt investigation of current school practices is called for. A study of this kind would disclose whether our children are, in fact, being deprived of essential learning. Hopefully, it also would result in better handling of religious references in today's public school curriculum.

Teacher Training: One immediate need may be to improve the quality of teacher training. Many delicate and complicated matters are included in the public school curriculum. Often, they touch on serious emotional involvements stemming from religious differences. Teachers could be helped to avoid offending the sensibilities of parents and of children in their classrooms if all teacher-training institutions included in their courses

of study the necessary sociological and historical background concerning the different ethnic and religious groups in our land.

Comparative or "Common Core" Religious Instruction: Any instruction in the public schools attempting to deal with religious doctrines on a comparative basis is undesirable. Teachers and school administrators would encounter great difficulty in determining where "facts" end and dogmatic belief begins. Indeed, the definition of religion itself would present a serious stumbling block, and the role of the teacher would become quite untenable. For instance, how would teachers interpret the crucifixion of Jesus? The Trinity? The Nativity? Are they expected to conceal their personal convictions on matters as to which they may feel deeply? One might well doubt that every teacher could do so. Should the teacher explore all points of view, thus making the classroom an open forum for religious discussion? And most important of all, would this not tamper with the child's traditional family faith during his tender, impressionable years?

It is likewise inadvisable, if not impossible, for the public schools to teach a common core of religious belief. Such instruction, in all likelihood, would be unacceptable to some religious groups. Moreover, teachers and school administrators would be subjected to severe pressures arising from the need to accommodate the conflicting viewpoints found in almost every American community. That is why religiously oriented textbooks are unacceptable.

In short, teaching about religion in the doctrinal sense is the function of the home, the church and the synagogue.

Some people urge that the schools affirm the existence of a personal God, in the belief that children would thus learn the source of our

inalienable rights. Most people recognize that children should learn about God. But if this were done in a public school setting, the discussions concerning His nature and His revelation would inevitably lead to creedal divisiveness. Instruction in this subject matter, as in other areas of the curriculum, would necessarily be governed by a set of guiding principles, thus requiring the schools to adopt a body of religious principles. While a majority of the religious leadership might well agree on certain basic tenets, the difficulty of interpretation in the classroom would remain, as would the problem of the unaffiliated minority.

The Clergy as Instructors: Some would invite clergymen into the classroom to give sectarian instruction to children of their respective faiths. This practice, which might well lead some children consciously or unconsciously to conform to one of the dominant faiths represented in the school, has been ruled unconstitutional.*

Stressing the Religious Faith of Our Ancestors: It has been suggested that the schools stress the moral and spiritual heritage handed down by the Founding Fathers, in order to bring home the fact that Americans are a religious people. Advocates of this proposal urge, as one way of carrying it out, a study of historical documents, such as the Declaration of Independence. For example, the New York Board of Regents, in a statement in 1951, expressed the belief that school studies would thereby be brought into "focus and accord," and would teach "respect for lawful authority." But it is also worthy of note that the Constitution of the United States contains no mention of God, an omission which was scarcely inadvertent.

There can be little question of the wisdom of pointing to the religious influences which

* *McCollum* v. *Board of Education*, 333 U.S. 203 (1948).

motivated the Founding Fathers—though it should also be remembered that they held divergent religious views and that some of them were strongly anti-clerical. Nor is there any doubt that children should understand the religious values implicit in our great charters of liberty. However, any tendency to provide other than an objective historical perspective in the study of these documents should be discouraged.

Providing a Non-Sectarian Religious Emphasis: It is virtually impossible for public schools to provide "non-sectarian" religious education. Agreement is hard to achieve even on the meaning of this term. Sometimes it refers to religious instruction acceptable to a majority of the Protestant denominations, but not necessarily acceptable to others.

The term is also used to denote the highest common denominator of the three major faiths. Assuming such a formula could be arrived at, it is all but certain that its practical application would be sectarian. The teacher's unconscious bias, arising from personal convictions or lack of them, would inevitably color his interpretation.

Moral and Ethical Values: The total school environment should reflect and help clarify the highest moral and ethical values of our society. Hence, through all of the curriculum, the school should seek to develop character and responsible citizenship, as well as encourage young people to respect all people according to individual worth.

Certain moral and ethical values are basic to all religions. But curricula should make it clear that these values do not have their sole sanction in religion and should not lead to the conclusion that those not religiously affiliated are morally suspect, or that good citizenship and belief in God are synonymous. By taking sides in the age-old philosophical dispute over

the ultimate sources of values, the school would thereby be using its authority to usurp the proper function of the home, church and synagogue, at the same time encroaching upon the right of personal choice in a matter of conscience. Our schools must recognize that there is no unanimity concerning the well-springs of moral behavior. While many hold that the values which guide human conduct stem from the great religions, there are others who believe that these values derive chiefly from human experience.

The Bible and Prayer in the Schools

Bible Reading and Prayer Recitation: Most Americans look upon the Bible as the source of religious inspiration. Children are taught to revere it as sacred. *Therefore, the reading of any version in the public schools, except when explicitly undertaken as part of a literature course, must be regarded as a devotional act, inappropriate for classroom or assembly.*

Organized prayer, whether spoken or silent, constitutes an act of worship and has no place in public school classroom or assembly. The U.S. Supreme Court has held that neither Bible reading nor prayer recitation in the public schools is permissible under the Constitution.* In the *Schempp* and *Murray* cases the Court declared:

> The conclusion follows that in both cases the laws require religious exercises and such exercises are being conducted in direct violation of the rights of the appellees and petitioners. Nor are these required exercises mitigated by the fact that individual students may absent themselves upon parental request, for that fact furnishes no defense to a claim of unconstitutionality under the Establishment Clause. Further, it is no defense to urge that the religious practices here may be relatively minor encroachments on the First Amendment. The breach of neutrality that is today a trickling stream

**Engel* v. *Vitale*, 370 U.S. 421 (1962); *Abington School District* v. *Schempp*, and *Murray* v. *Curlett*, 374 U.S. 203 (1963).

may all too soon become a raging torrent and, in the words of Madison, "it is proper to take alarm at the first experiment on our liberties."

In sum, in the United States it is not the business of government either to compose or to sponsor prayers for children to recite.

Distribution of Gideon Bibles: Neither the Gideon Bible nor any other sectarian tract should be distributed on school property. Since religious groups are thereby aided in propagating their faiths, this practice has been held to be unconstitutional. *Equally objectionable would be proselytizing of students, whether by teachers or by other students, however this may be done.*

Use of School Premises for Religious Purposes

After School Use: Where school buildings are habitually made available to civic groups after school hours, thus converting the premises to general community centers, religious groups should be accorded the same privileges enjoyed by other organizations. However, the buildings should not be used during school hours for religious education, meetings or worship.

Religious Census: It would be constitutionally invalid to extend public school facilities to sectarian groups for the purpose of conducting a religious affiliation census.

Religious Holiday Observances

Although sectarianism has no place in the American public school, the problem of religious holiday observances cannot be resolved by a doctrinaire application of the separation principle. Many factors must be taken into account:

—Even before public schools were established in America, Christmas and Easter were celebrated in classrooms. These observances

are therefore deeply imbedded in tradition.

—There are differences of opinion among both Christians and Jews as to which aspects of the holiday observances are sectarian and which are not.

—The nature of each celebration varies from community to community, from school to school and even from classroom to classroom.

—For many people, these holidays have assumed the aura of national, as well as sectarian, events.

—Many Christians deeply resent the removal of sectarian content from traditional holiday programs.

—Experience shows that a fair and dispassionate public discussion of this problem is difficult to attain and that the attempt invariably induces community friction.

Under these circumstances, making a public issue of religious holiday observances in the schools on balance is not likely to be beneficial. However, through informal discussions with school administrators and teachers, it may be possible to plan these events in such a way that no child's religious sensibilities will be offended by undue sectarian or doctrinal emphasis. Such discussions are best initiated many months before the holidays, rather than immediately prior to or during the holiday observances. *Certainly it should be made clear to administrators that deeply devotional or Christological holiday observances, such as Nativity scenes, plays, pageants or carols that worship the infant Jesus, are objectionable.*

The alternative of joint observances, such as Christmas-Hanukkah celebrations, presents additional complications. Some see no difference in principle between celebrating a single religious event and holding a joint observance. They feel that if one part of the program is sectarian, the wrong is simply compounded by adding still another religious emphasis.

Others, however, believe that the joint observance fosters cross-cultural understanding by showing children how their neighbors celebrate religious holidays. While joint religious holiday programs are inadvisable—Hanukkah is not comparable with Christmas—it should nevertheless be recognized that they have enjoyed a measure of support in a few communities.

Federal and State Aid to Education

It is abundantly clear to most people today that massive government assistance, Federal assistance in particular, is indispensable if the quality of education in America is to be improved. *But, on the elementary and secondary levels, public funds should be used to support public schools only. Extension of such aid, either directly or indirectly, to denominational schools is opposed in principle both on constitutional grounds and for reasons of sound public policy.* Among the kinds of indirect aid that are opposed, for example, are tax credits or deductions and voucher plans or tuition grants to parents of students in private schools. To divert public funds to private schools, religious or otherwise, would weaken the fabric of public education.

However, benefits directly to the child, such as lunches and medical and dental services, should be available to all children at public expense, regardless of the school they attend, provided there is public supervision and control of such programs, while others, educationally diagnostic and remedial in nature, such as guidance, counseling, testing and services for the improvement of the educationally disadvantaged, where offered public school students, may also be made available to all children at public expense, regardless of the school they attend, provided however that such programs shall be administered by public agen-

cies and shall be in public facilities and do not preclude intermingling of public and private school students where feasible.

Within the context of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA), which was expressly designed to aid disadvantaged children, certain types of assistance such as textbook loans and remedial educational services on parochial school premises are not opposed, subject to judicial review of the constitutionality of this legislation. (By remedial educational services, Congress specified those benefits that were "therapeutic, remedial or welfare.") Studies of the implementation of the law on the community level have uncovered abuses which might ultimately cast doubt on the constitutionality of significant portions of ESEA. For example, public school teachers have been assigned to instruct parochial school students on parochial school premises in other than the "therapeutic, remedial or welfare" categories contemplated by Congress. While the teaching of art and music is surely enriching, it is doubtful that it falls within the Congressional intent as manifested by the Act's legislative history, in contrast to the work performed by speech therapists, remedial reading specialists or guidance counsellors. In other words, implicit in the Act is a rather subtle and perhaps specious distinction between specialized educational services to benefit children and regular curricular instruction which would benefit schools.

While the constitutionality of public busing of parochial school pupils has been upheld under the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment as a welfare benefit to children, rather than assistance to religious schools,* the American Jewish Committee is opposed to such busing in principle.

Everson v. *Board of Education*, 330 U.S. 1 (1947).

Providing for transportation for religious school pupils does constitute aid, even if indirectly, to the religious schools themselves. Moreover, experience has shown that limited bus laws, once on the statute books, are readily expanded to permit the transporting of religious school children over distances which depart from the regular public school routes, thus imposing a financial burden on taxpayers beyond that initially contemplated.

If a state is justified in providing busing as a welfare benefit, to protect pupils from traffic hazards, it may be argued that the state has a corresponding duty to fireproof parochial schools in order to protect pupils from fire hazards, or to heat such schools in order to protect pupils from cold. Hence, busing is seen by some not as an end in itself, but rather as an opening wedge toward the goal of full public subsidy of religious school operations.

In the implementation of any government aid involving children in sectarian schools, the following safeguards should be included:

1. No religious institution may acquire any new property, or expand already existing property.

2. No public funds may be used for any religious purpose.

3. To the maximum extent possible, the expenditure or distribution of funds allocated should be controlled by a public agency.

In general, the distinction between health, safety and welfare benefits to *children* in all schools, and substantive educational assistance to non-public *schools* is a crucial one and must be maintained. Thus, while the U.S. Supreme Court in 1968 upheld the constitutionality of a New York State law requiring public school systems to lend secular textbooks to pupils attending religious schools,* such loans are so

---

* *Board of Education* v. *Allen*, 392 U.S. 236 (1968).

close to educational assistance to schools that they are opposed as unwise, unless the use of such textbooks is limited to disadvantaged children, as under ESEA.

It should be stressed that the controversy over government aid to religious schools is not an issue juxtaposing one faith group against another. All faiths have their "separationists," as well as their "accommodationists," depending upon individual attitudes and values, and even when persons of different faiths find themselves on opposite sides of this controversy, fellowship and cooperation in other matters need not be impaired. Interreligious good will does not require anyone to compromise basic principle.

Dual Enrollment

*The American Jewish Committee endorses Dual Enrollment or "Shared Time" programs—in which non-public schools send their pupils to public schools for instruction in one or more non-religious subjects, provided that certain basic safeguards are adhered to in their implementation.**

1. All pupils involved in such programs must be under the exclusive jurisdiction of public school authorities while on public school premises.

2. Parochial school pupils must be freely intermingled with regular public school pupils in all instruction and other activities provided for them by public schools.

3. All such instruction must be given solely by public school personnel, on public school premises, during regular school hours.

4. All decisions regarding books, materials, curricula, schedules and homework, as well as any other administrative decisions customarily

*These would include such courses as mathematics, science, industrial arts, home economics or physical education, which would ordinarily be included in the regular public school curriculum. Other subjects which have religious content would continue to be taught in parochial schools.

made in connection with classes and other activities in the normal operation of public schools today, must be under the exclusive control of public school authorities.

5. There shall be no religious tests for teachers or other personnel in the public school system.

6. No public school classes may be cancelled or curtailed because of the needs of any religious group, nor may any other accommodation to any religious group be made by public school authorities as a result of "shared time" programs, other than those accommodations normally made to pupils in the interest of the religious liberty of pupils.

7. Provisions must be made within the public school system to oversee the implementation of each "shared time" program on a continuing basis and to evaluate its compliance with the safeguards cited above.

The Dual Enrollment concept is reflected also in our endorsement above (page 15) of diagnostic and remedial services for educationally disadvantaged non-public school pupils in public facilities.

Released Time

Many communities have adopted the practice of released time, whereby children are excused from school with the consent of their parents in order to receive religious instruction. When conducted off school premises and without pressure on children to participate, this program has been held to be constitutional.* Nevertheless, released time is opposed for the following reasons:

—It threatens the independent character of the public school. Since part of the compulsory school day is "released" by the state on condition that the participating student devote

---

**Zorach* v. *Clauson*, 343 U.S. 306 (1952).

this time to sectarian instruction, the state accomplishes by indirection what it admittedly cannot undertake to do directly—it provides a governmental constraint in support of religion.

—It is a mechanism for divisiveness which is repeated at weekly intervals throughout the school year. Even when most carefully administered, the program's inherent abuses become evident: Subtle sectarian pressures are exerted by overzealous teachers; non-participating children are frequently embarrassed.

—The normal school program is disrupted. Because classroom activities generally remain static during the released time period, children who do not participate suffer an unnecessary loss of school instruction.

—The available data indicate that some children simply do not reach their religious centers. Where such unexcused absences occur, the program contributes to truancy.

Federal and State Aid to Higher Education

The American Jewish Committee is not opposed to government aid to church-related higher educational institutions where their central purpose is other than to promote religion. Concerns about religious indoctrination in colleges and universities are not the same as in elementary and secondary education. Education beyond high school is not a required state function nor is attendance mandated. Moreover, most students are better equipped and more inclined to evaluate critically the teaching and values of colleges and universities. College students may be considered mature enough to resist those limited attempts at religious indoctrination that may well occur at institutions of higher education which receive government funds.

The mere fact that an educational institution is affiliated with or sponsored by a church or a

religious sect should not necessarily bar it from access to public funds. It is important rather to examine the particular institution as a whole and to determine, in the light of its total program and activities, whether or not its central purpose is to promote religion, i.e., whether it is pervasively sectarian. Generally speaking, a college may be considered to be "pervasively sectarian" if it meets one or more of the following criteria:

—Faculty members or students are required to subscribe to a particular religious belief as a condition of employment, admission or graduation.

—Students are required to attend religious programs or observances of one particular faith.

—Students are required to register for courses or to attend classes designed to foster a particular religious doctrine (in contrast with objectively presented courses in comparative religion or the history of religion).

—Students are subject to disciplinary measures based solely on religious grounds.

Government aid to higher educational institutions that are "pervasively sectarian," according to the criteria set forth above, is opposed. However, for those church-related institutions of higher education that are not "pervasively sectarian," government aid should be permissible to advance the secular purposes of such institutions.

Closing of Public Schools on Jewish High Holy Days

Whether or not public schools should be closed on Jewish High Holy Days is an administrative question to be decided by school authorities in the light of their own judgment as to the advantages or disadvantages involved. In some communities, the public school authorities might find that the large number of

absences of Jewish children and teachers makes it difficult to engage in any fruitful educational work and therefore justifies keeping the schools closed in the interests of economy and efficiency. In other communities, public school authorities may reach a different conclusion. The decision is one to be made by the authorities. From the standpoint of the Jewish community, what is important is that where the schools remain open, no Jewish child or teacher shall be penalized for remaining away from school on a Jewish religious holiday.

Baccalaureate Programs

When exercises or programs marking graduation from public school and conducted under the auspices or with the participation of the public school authorities (popularly called baccalaureate programs) are religious in their nature or contain religious elements, they violate the principle of separation of church and state and therefore must be opposed.

Such school-sponsored exercises or programs are a violation, whether they take place on or off public school premises and whether during or after school hours; nor is it material that attendance at such programs may be declared to be voluntary. Since the education provided in the public schools must not be religious, the ceremony conducted by the public school authorities marking the termination of the period of education likewise must not be religious. Non-religious commencement or graduation exercises are perfectly acceptable, of course, but they should be held either in the school or in a place other than a church or synagogue, and either during school hours or at some other time not conflicting with the religious requirements of any of the school population, so that there may be no bar to attendance by any of the graduating body.

IN CONCLUSION

Religion has flourished in this country, hand in hand with the American tradition of separation of church and state, which has served as a bulwark of religious liberty. And the public schools themselves have served as a great unifying force in American life—welcoming young people of every creed, seeking to afford equal educational opportunity to all, emphasizing our common heritage and serving as training grounds for healthful community living. Thus, the schools have performed an indispensable function, and any proposed departure which threatens to prevent them from fulfilling this traditional role must be weighed with the greatest caution.

Experience indicates that public consideration of church-state issues often engenders community tensions. Deep religious loyalties and antagonisms are stirred, and extreme reactions sometimes displace calm and objective debate. In discussing these problems, community groups therefore have a responsibility to guard against provoking inter-religious tensions.

It is hoped that this Statement of Views will stimulate thoughtful discussion, and help to keep the public schools free of sectarian strife.

ajc

THE AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE

Founded 1906, pioneer U.S. human relations agency, protecting civil and religious rights of Jews, advancing cause of freedom everywhere. Its funds are raised through nationwide Appeal for Human Relations.

Institute of Human Relations, 165 East 56 Street, New York, N. Y. 10022

Revised edition
May 1978

33