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8 Contemporary Jewish education

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Learning and teaching have been central to the Jewish tradition since its early beginnings.[1] Deuteronomy 6:6–7 states the following: "These words, which I myself command you today, are to be upon your heart. You are to repeat them with your children and are to speak of them in your sitting in your house and in your walking in the way, in your lying down and in your rising up." Building on this dictum, the tradition held that Jewish study was both a *mitzvah* (commandment) in its own right and a prerequisite for the observance of all other *mitzvot*. The Talmud abounds with legends and sayings emphasizing the power and importance of education; later rabbinic authorities, such as Maimonides, included communal expectations about learning in their codes of Jewish law.

With the Emancipation, as European Jews entered more fully into the larger society, the value of Jewish learning began to recede while the value of secular learning increased. Schools in Western Europe in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries strove to offer the right mix of traditional text study, Hebrew language instruction, and secular subjects; not surprisingly, each educator's view of the correct proportions of these elements varied with his (they were all men) religious and political ideology.

As Jews immigrated to North America, the process of adapting to the values of secular society accelerated. The earliest immigrants took care to provide for the Jewish education of both their own children and the indigent children of the community; there was even a brief period, from about 1845 to about 1865, when Jewish day schools sprouted in eighteen cities. By 1870, when public schooling became the norm, Jewish parents enthusiastically enrolled their children in public schools, and Jewish education was relegated to supplementary settings. Jewish schools sponsored by congregations and communal agencies met anywhere between one and four times per week; in addition, private classes and tutors were widely available. Early on, most of these institutions were perceived to be problematic, plagued by undereducated and unskilled teachers, poor discipline, a paucity of curricular

materials, and a lack of parental support. In 1880, Professor B. A. Abrams wrote in the Milwaukee Jewish paper:

> It is a strange fact that parents who take great care to see to it that their child attend public school regularly and punctually keep the very same children at home for nonsensical reasons, since it is only Sabbath School that they are missing.[2]

Twenty years later, a survey of Jewish educational establishments in the New York area came to this conclusion:

1. The demand for Jewish education is comparatively small.
2. Small as the demand is, the means and equipment which we possess at present are far too inadequate to meet it.
3. Wherever that demand is met there is a lack either of system or of content.[3]

Though communal leaders continued to pay lip service to the value of Jewish education, they were, in truth, preoccupied by other, more immediate, causes. Immigrants were concerned, above all, with their economic survival; more established groups were concerned with the welfare of new immigrants and fighting anti-Semitism. In the twentieth century, the attention of the organized Jewish community focused, in turn, on rescuing European Jews, assisting Holocaust survivors, founding and supporting the State of Israel, and helping Jews in crisis from diasporic countries such as the Soviet Union and Ethiopia.

Out of the spotlight, quiet but significant changes in Jewish education were underway during the second half of the twentieth century. While the primary form of Jewish education for the vast majority of Jewish children remained the supplementary school, day schools, Jewish summer camps, Jewish early childhood education, Jewish family education, and educational trips to Israel flourished. In a 1988 article on the state of Jewish education, Professor Barry Chazan of the Hebrew University saw a great deal of promise in these new forms of education. Nonetheless, he bemoaned this fact:

> The Jewish educational community has been thirsty for vision.... During the past decade, the Jewish educational community... has devoted most of its energies... to solving immediate problems (funding, staff, programs).... While Jewish education seems to be a mature and relatively well-equipped ship, it is not always clear where it is sailing or who is its captain.[4]

By the 1990s, the need to provide more intensive and effective Jewish education of higher quality to a larger percentage of the Jewish population

assumed greater urgency. While communal leaders were steadfast in their concern for the State of Israel and diasporic communities in need, they realized that a different kind of danger lay at home. As anti-Semitism receded and America became more hospitable, Jews were losing their connection to the Jewish tradition and the Jewish people.

A stunning realization of this problem came with the publication of the 1990 National Jewish Population Study (NJPS), which found an alarming rate of intermarriage (52 percent). The rate of intermarriage was not the only problem identified by the NJPS and other demographic studies. For example, only 32 percent of NJPS respondents were members of a synagogue, less than 20 percent lit Shabbat candles on a regular basis, and only 40 percent gave to a Jewish cause.

One hopeful finding among all this bad news was that higher levels of Jewish education were correlated with more active participation in Jewish life. The more intensive the Jewish education of NJPS respondents, the more likely they were to join a Jewish organization, give to a Jewish cause, marry a Jewish partner, and practice Jewish rituals.[5] As leaders of the Jewish community searched for positive steps they could take in response to this study, their catchword became, "Jewish education is the key to Jewish survival."

As Jack Wertheimer notes, "NJPS and other demographic studies... did not invent the issue of 'continuity'; rather, they dramatized the dire nature of the problem and impressed upon the wider Jewish public, including its lay leaders, the need to develop a strategy to confront the serious issues."[6] While previous studies pointing to the correlation between Jewish education and active participation in Jewish life had gone largely unremarked on, the alarm raised by the 1990 NJPS led people to focus on Jewish education as they never had before. As stated in a 1991 report, "The responsibility for developing Jewish identity and instilling a commitment to Judaism... now rests primarily with education."[7]

Suddenly, the spotlight was aimed at the heretofore unheralded successes of the 1980s and 1990s: preschools, day schools, Israel trips, and innovations in family education. The Commission on Jewish Education in North America (an independent national entity funded by the Mandel Associated Foundations) spawned dozens of local "continuity" commissions.

The result has been a decade of sustained concern and support for Jewish education that is without precedent in American Jewish life. Each of the denominations has issued new curricular frameworks, produced new curricular materials, and provided increased opportunities for professional development. Umbrella organizations such as the Jewish Education Services of North America and the Coalition for Advancement of Jewish Education have served as catalysts for new initiatives, convened task forces and

conferences, and sponsored research and publications. New foundations, such as the Covenant Foundation and the AVI CHAI Foundation, have been established, and existing foundations have increased their funding for educational projects.

Much has been accomplished, though much more remains to be done. Fortunately, the interest in Jewish education shows no signs of abating. This article, then, should be considered an interim report on a work in progress. It focuses on six key points:

1. Jewish education is now seen as a lifelong endeavor. The spectrum of educational activity has been extended at both ends to include early childhood, late adulthood, and everything in between.
2. Increasingly, Jewish education is seen as encompassing an array of activities and programs beyond formal schooling, including family education, camping, youth groups, and trips to Israel. It is now conventional wisdom that a complete Jewish education requires a variety of different experiences in a variety of different settings, throughout one's life.
3. It is difficult to predict whether the growth of day schools, particularly in the non-Orthodox world, will continue. Even at their current level, day schools are now de rigueur for the Orthodox and have transformed sectors of both the Conservative and Reform movements.
4. Despite the growth of day schools, it seems likely that the majority of Jewish children will continue to receive a much less intensive education in congregational religious schools; however, new initiatives have led to dramatic changes in congregational education.
5. All these new programs require staff that is knowledgeable in Judaica and versed in educational theory and practice. To address this need, a variety of new programs has been created for the preparation of Jewish education professionals. Nonetheless, the field faces a tremendous shortage of personnel.
6. Finally, the cost of Jewish education, to both the sponsoring institutions and the individual consumers, is rising. One can only hope that the Jewish community will be able to meet these costs.

1. JEWISH EDUCATION IS A LIFELONG ENDEAVOR

The injunction "to repeat them with your children" is only the first part of Deuteronomy 6:7. In addition, the Torah enjoins us, "to speak of them in your sitting in your house and in your walking in the way." *All* Jews are expected to continue learning throughout their lives. In contrast with

secular education, which focuses on the mastery of subject matters, Jewish education sees learning as an end in itself. Thus, while no one would expect to have to return to sixth-grade math or tenth-grade American history, Jewish learning is centered on the repeated reading, year after year, of the Torah. Commentaries on, and further elaborations of, the laws of the Torah are also considered Torah in a larger sense. The *siddur* (prayer book) speaks of study as a mitzvah, and the study of selected biblical and rabbinic texts is an integral part of the morning prayer service.

In their concern first with economic survival, and then with assimilating into American society, American Jews neglected this obligation to study Torah. Their interest in Jewish learning was limited to the education of their children; and, in keeping with the Western paradigm, the education of children focused more and more on achievement, particularly their performance in the *bar* or *bat mitzvah* ceremony at the age of thirteen. In contrast, one of the most significant developments in Jewish education today is that it is, increasingly, seen as a lifelong activity.

Early childhood programs

As more women have entered the workforce and as American society has placed a higher value on preschool education (without providing many publicly funded venues for this education), it is not surprising that programs for young children in Jewish settings would increase. Early childhood programs (primarily preschools, but also day care for infants and toddlers, and family programs such as Mommy and Me) are commonly found in both synagogues and Jewish Community Centers (JCCs). In 1990, it was estimated that 50,000 children aged eighteen months to five years were enrolled in Jewish early childhood programs[8]; by 2002 the number had doubled. In that year, 20 percent of Jewish two-year-olds, 25 percent of three- and four-year-olds, and 41 percent of five-year-olds spent between thirty and forty hours per week in Jewish early childhood centers. Summarizing research on this area of Jewish education, Wertheimer writes the following:

> A limited amount of research has substantiated the claim that family observance of Jewish religious rituals increases when parents enter their children into child-care programs rich in Jewish content. One study found greater observance of home rituals, such as lighting Friday-night candles and reciting the *kiddush*, and even increases in the number of Jewish friendships reported by parents.[9]

Wertheimer argues that there is considerable pent-up demand for these programs but that their expansion is limited by the severe shortage of teachers (a topic to which we will return in Section 5). Similarly, there are relatively few

Jewish day care programs for children under the age of two, and existent programs have long waiting lists.

The education of adolescents

For decades, most marginally identified Jewish parents have viewed Jewish schooling as bar or bat mitzvah preparation; it is no surprise, then, that the dropout rate after bar or bat mitzvah has been, on average, 50 percent.[10] As the Jewish community has focused more intently on both Jewish continuity and Jewish education, it has come to realize the critical importance of the high school years, and it has redoubled its efforts to create compelling programs for teens. Attracting participants, however, continues to be a challenge. A survey of thirteen- through seventeen-year-olds conducted by researchers at Brandeis University in 2000 found that these teenagers' time out of school was taken up with homework, extracurricular activities, and after-school jobs, which left little time to participate in Jewish activities of any kind. More sobering still was the finding that few teenagers viewed Judaism as an important part of their lives: "As expected at this developmental stage, three-quarters of the teenage respondents were preoccupied with a search for meaning in life. Among these, only 40% thought it important to find that meaning through their Jewishness."[11] With these findings in mind, efforts are underway to help Jewish teens stay connected to the Jewish community. Many of these efforts have utilized informal venues – including camping, youth groups, and especially Israel trips – and these are discussed in the next section.

College Judaica courses

Prior to the 1960s, it was rare to find a Judaic studies course of any kind at a college or university. Today the situation is reversed, as it is rare to find a major institution of higher learning that does not offer at least a few Judaica courses. According to Hillel: The Foundation for Jewish Campus Life, over 400 college-level courses in some aspect of Jewish studies are offered annually.[12] A 1991 study of Jewish adults in the New York area under the age of 40 found that 18 percent of them had taken at least one such course.[13]

Among the Orthodox, it has become common for high school graduates to study at a *yeshiva* in Israel for a year or two prior to attending college. By the mid-1990s it was estimated that 3,000 students (well over half of both male and female high school graduates of Orthodox day schools) were studying in Israel for at least a year.[14]

Adult learning

Most dramatic of all has been the growth of adult Jewish learning. Once limited to synagogues and JCCs, programs for adult learning are now offered

by a panoply of institutions in a variety of settings. The most ambitious and fastest growing of these is the Florence Melton Adult Mini-School, the first branch of which opened in 1986. Students enroll for thirty weeks per year, two and one-half hours per week, over a four-year period. The course of study, which is the same for all branches, deals with Jewish history, Jewish texts, Jewish ethics, and the Jewish life cycle. In an effort to attract a range of students, both daytime and evening classes are offered. In the summer of 2002, the school claimed over 20,000 graduates and had sixty branches in cities throughout North America. A majority of its students are either retirees or women with school-aged children, but other sectors of the Jewish community are also represented.

The Melton Mini-School shattered two of the prevailing preconceptions about Jewish adult learning: (1) that adults were interested only in short-term courses or one-shot lectures and would not enroll in a sustained program; and (2) that adults were more interested in trendy topics than a basic, integrated curriculum. With these limiting assumptions challenged, the field was open to a variety of different programs: the Wexner Heritage Program, a national program for young adult leaders; Boston's Me'ah program, in which students study for 100 hours over a two-year period; and a variety of others.

Other models of innovative adult learning have also been developed. The San Francisco Bay Area's Lehrhaus program is famous for its wide-ranging course offerings. The Union for Reform Julaism's summer Kallah offers a week of intensive learning with Judaic scholars in a retreat-like setting. The adult education opportunities within JCCs have also increased dramatically. Many JCCs now have at least one Jewish educator on staff. A 1994 survey found that all offered some adult learning opportunities, and over half offered an introductory Judaism class. Three-quarters sponsored some form of family education, and one-third sponsored educational trips to Israel.[15]

A small but growing number of synagogues also have an adult educator on their staff, which enables them to offer a range of learning opportunities: courses of varying length and duration; day-long Hebrew marathons; weekend retreats; parallel learning for parents of school-aged children; and ongoing family education, in which parents and children study together (learning opportunities for parents of religious school children are discussed at greater length in Section 4).

These new programs are attracting new audiences, many of whom have little prior experience with Jewish learning of any kind. As widespread and successful as these programs are, many Jewish adults have yet to be reached. A 2001 national survey by Steven M. Cohen and Aryeh Davidson found that

"about half have never participated in a Jewish study group, about half have never studied Jewish texts on their own, and about half have never even taken a class with a Jewish theme."[16]

2. THE CONFLUENCE OF FORMAL AND INFORMAL EDUCATION

It is by now a truism that a single summer in a Jewish camp can teach campers more Hebrew, more Jewish prayers, and more Jewish concepts than several years spent in an afternoon supplementary school. What is more important is that Jewish camps have a strong affective component; they create intense Jewish communities with their own culture, which can exert a strong influence on the camper's Jewish identification. Similarly, a summer or a semester spent on an Israel trip can have a profound effect on a heretofore uninvolved Jewish adolescent:

> When compared with other studies of Jewish adolescents ... research indicates that there is no other Jewish experience that is as positively regarded by Jewish teens as the Israel Experience. No less important is the finding that for many Jewish teens the Israel trip ranks among the most positive life experience of any kind – Jewish or general – that they have had.[17]

Not surprisingly, then, Jewish educational experiences that were once viewed as ancillary are now considered to be of critical importance. It is now conventional wisdom among Jewish communal leaders that a complete Jewish education requires a range of different experiences, formal and informal, throughout one's life.

Unfortunately, the conventional wisdom of the leadership has not yet reached *amcha*, "the ordinary people," as no more than 55,000 children between the age of eight and seventeen attend a Jewish summer camp of any kind, out of a total population of 600,000.[18] It seems likely, however, that the demand for summer camps is greater than the supply. Though expensive (with an average fee of $625 per week, according to a 2002 study), the average Jewish camp is filled to 96 percent capacity; in some, parents pay a deposit in August to ensure a place for their child the following summer.[19]

From 1992 to 1996 (years of relative peace and stability in Israel), only 14 percent of Jewish teens between the ages of thirteen and nineteen (a total of 36,500) went to Israel on an organized educational trip.[20] In an attempt to maximize the educational potential of the Israel Experience, philanthropists

Charles Bronfman and Michael Steinhardt created "birthright israel," a program aimed at bringing 100,000 young adults (aged eighteen to twenty-six) a year on a ten-day trip to Israel. During its first two months (December 1999 to January 2000) the program had 6,000 participants. Unfortunately, continuing political unrest in Israel has made it difficult to recruit large numbers of additional participants, especially those who had not previously been to Israel. As of January 2002, a total of 20,000 young adults had participated in the program.

Family education

In the early decades of the twentieth century, Jewish education professionals looked to the public school as their model for a modern Jewish education. They assumed that their students were observing basic Jewish rituals and practices at home and that they did not need to attend a Jewish school to learn about the Jewish holidays or to gain a sense of Jewish identification.[21] The schools established in this era saw their primary goal as instruction in such subjects as modern Hebrew, Bible, and Jewish history.

Today, many educators espouse a model in which instruction is just one part of the overriding goal of enculturation, the induction of children into a culture. In families that live active and rich Jewish lives, enculturation occurs gradually over the course of a child's upbringing. Children in these families do not need to be taught the *kiddush* (the blessing over wine on Shabbat) or the *motzi* (the blessing over bread); they absorb these and many other rituals, customs, and values over the course of their childhood. As demographic studies in the past three or four decades have shown, however, the majority of non-Orthodox families (and a minority of Orthodox ones) do not live life in a Jewish rhythm, practicing few rituals and participating only marginally in synagogue life.

In the absence of enculturation, instruction in Hebrew, Bible, or Jewish history is as alien as instruction in Japanese, and a good deal more foreign than instruction in math. Slowly, over the course of the twentieth century, Jewish educators began to adapt their goals to the changing population, focusing, first and foremost, on enculturation.

It was not long before educators took this shift in goals a step further, viewing parents as part of their target audience because parents are the most powerful agents of enculturation. If a child's parents embrace the goals of Jewish education, she or he will bring a more positive attitude to the Jewish school. If Jewish rituals become incorporated into a family's weekly and yearly rhythm, the children will come to school with a wealth of knowledge, both tacit and explicit. If, in addition, the parents are studying the same

Torah portion (or Talmudic legend or period of history) as the child, they can not only reinforce what the child has learned but also serve as role models without parallel. No wonder, then, that Jewish educators began in the 1970s to focus more of their energies on the family as a whole. From modest attempts (holding an annual family day) to more ambitious ones (creating a track for parents or an entire "family school"), educators have spent the past few decades experimenting with a wide range of family education modalities. Communal agencies and foundations have championed this notion and have supported it financially. For example, the Combined Jewish Philanthropies of Greater Boston has created the Sh'arim Family Educator Initiative, in which congregations, day schools, and Jewish community centers receive funding to hire a family educator. Similarly, the AVI CHAI Foundation has funded family education programs for day schools. The Whizin Institute of the University of Judaism has pioneered the training of congregational and day school teams to introduce family education in synagogues and schools. The teams include educators, rabbis, and significant volunteer leaders.

Even when an outside source of funding is available, incorporating family education into a school can be challenging. Parents accustomed to dropping off their children at the parking lot may be resistant to the notion that they attend themselves. The institution's most senior and influential leaders (both lay and professional) must signal their support for family education and explain why it is so important; if the programs prove to be engaging, the school's culture will change over time and parent participation will come to be taken as a given. To be engaging, family programs must have staff members who can work with both children and adults; in addition, the programs must be structured to accommodate a variety of participants, from those with little or no Jewish education attending for the first time to those with an excellent Jewish education attending with their third child. The ways in which family education has transformed the congregational school will be discussed in section four.

The programs discussed in this section offer a glimpse of the many ways that formal and informal Jewish education, which in an earlier era were seen as separate entities, have, in recent years, informed and enriched each other. Programs such as the Institute for Informal Jewish Education at Brandeis University have begun to raise the level of professionalization among those who work in informal settings; as a result, professionals in these settings have begun to curricularize their offerings and borrow methodologies from formal education. For their part, formal institutions have benefited from importing techniques and learning modalities that had heretofore been the province of informal educators.

3. THE GROWTH OF JEWISH DAY SCHOOL EDUCATION

Over the past few decades, Jewish day schools have come to occupy a central place among the options for Jewish education. A day school provides a complete secular education in line with the requirements of the state in which it is located, along with a Jewish education consistent with the institution or organization that sponsors it. The most significant development in the past decade has been growth in the number of such schools and in the number of students who attend them, and a broadening of the spectrum served by the schools, including Jewish affiliation and student age group.

In the nineteenth century, Jewish day schools developed in almost every city in the United States large enough to support a school. Since most of the Jews who lived in the United States before 1880 were of central European origin, these schools combined a basic Jewish education with numeracy (basic arithmetic skills) and reading and writing in English and German. These schools often bore names such as the Hebrew English German Academy, signaling their commitments to help students develop a basic working knowledge of Jewish worship, to prepare students for life in the United States, and to familiarize students with high culture (for these immigrants, German culture). As free universal public education became the norm throughout the United States in the 1870s, as public schools reduced the overtly Protestant teaching that characterized their early days, and as some public schools in neighborhoods heavily populated by immigrants from Germany offered German language electives, the Jewish day schools closed their doors one after another.[22] By 1870, all these schools had closed, and Isaac Mayer Wise, a leader of the American Jewish community, reported this to the U.S. Commissioner of Education:

> It is our settled opinion here that the education of the young is the business of the State, and the religious instruction, to which we add the Hebrew, is the duty of religious bodies. Neither ought to interfere with the other. The secular branches belong to the public schools, religion in the Sabbath schools, exclusively.[23]

The first Orthodox *yeshivot*, Yeshibath Etz Chaim and Yeshibath Rabbi Yitzchak Elchanan, opened several decades after the closing of the last nineteenth-century day schools (1886 and 1897, respectively). These schools were Orthodox in orientation and patterned after yeshivot in Eastern Europe, but they added secular studies "from four in the afternoon [for] two hours."[24] Twenty-eight additional yeshivot opened by 1939, but the "era of expansive growth" of Orthodox day schools started after World War II and the

destruction of European Jewry and European centers of learning. The Torah Umesorah movement fanned out to establish schools wherever modern Orthodox Jews moved, and they were so successful that by 1963 there were 308 such schools.[25] These modern Orthodox day schools put into practice the philosophy of Samson Raphael Hirsch, the European founder of modern Orthodoxy: Torah U'mada, Jewish studies alongside modern secular studies.

Beginning in 1958, other segments of the Jewish community began opening day schools of their own to provide Jewish education in a full-time environment. The Solomon Schechter Schools of the Conservative movement blazed the way for others and were soon followed by pluralistic "community day schools." The last segment of the organized Jewish community to establish day schools was the Reform movement. The first two Reform day schools opened in 1970, but the official approval of the movement did not come until 1985.[26]

During the 1998–99 school year, 185,000 children were enrolled in Jewish day schools. Eighty percent of this enrollment was in Orthodox day schools. Virtually all Orthodox children of school age attend day schools, identified as Centrist Orthodox, Chabad, Chasidic, Immigration and Outreach, Modern Orthodox, or Yeshiva.[27] Most Jewish communities where Orthodox Jews live are home to at least one elementary day school, though often children must go to other cities (notably New York and Chicago) for an Orthodox high school education.

The growth in day school enrollment in the 1990s was dramatic, increasing by approximately 20,000 to 25,000.[28] In terms of numbers, the largest growth was in Orthodox day schools of various affiliations, primarily because of the high fertility rate among Orthodox Jews. In terms of percentage growth, non-Orthodox day schools (Conservative, Community, and Reform) increased more dramatically, growing by some 20 percent (reaching 37,000) between 1992 and 1998. As the enrollment in day schools has grown and as the number of schools has increased, day schools have banded together in associations either because their founding was spearheaded by a national movement (Chabad, Satmar Chasidic, or Torah U'mesorah) or the schools shared a common ideology (Schechter–Conservative, Ravsak–Community, and PARDeS–Reform). In recent years, day school growth was fueled by the Partnership for Excellence in Jewish Education, which offered challenge grants to local community groups contemplating the establishment of new elementary day schools or expanding existing elementary schools into middle schools. The AVI CHAI Foundation also stimulated the growth of day schools through its building loan program and its many funded programs and projects aimed at developing curriculum, providing continuing education for personnel, or enhancing the Jewish culture of day schools.

The most recent area of growth in day school education is the expansion of community (all-day) high schools. A handful of such schools that were firmly rooted in their communities for many years (notably Akiba in Philadelphia and Charles E. Smith in Rockville, Maryland) were joined by the Milken Community High School of Stephen S. Wise Temple in Los Angeles (the only community high school sponsored by a Reform temple, which attracts significant numbers of Reform and Conservative children) and the New Jewish High School in Boston. These schools were followed by a spate of smaller schools in cities across America.

The impact of day schools on the children who attend them and on their families is well established and widely accepted among leaders of synagogues, federations, and foundations. The 1990 NJPS indicates that day school graduates are more likely to join a synagogue or other Jewish organization, give to a Jewish cause, marry a Jewish partner, and practice Jewish rituals.[29] These factors led many in federations and foundations to see day schools as "the answer to the continuity crisis" and to increase financial support to unprecedented levels. As the 1990s came to a close and the twenty-first century began, this conventional wisdom was shifting toward the view that day schools can have a significant impact – perhaps even the most significant impact – on the future Jewishness of their students, but that Jewish education has its greatest impact when children participate in a variety of types of Jewish education – including youth groups, camps, and Israel trips – in addition to day school education. As one educator explained, "Day school teaches their minds, but we need camps to touch their hearts."[30]

The greatest challenge facing all day schools is financial. Tuition can be as high as $18,000 per year, and these schools must rely heavily on nontuition income to sustain their programs. They also face the personnel problem that is ubiquitous in Jewish education, including the challenge of providing benefit packages that would attract educators to choose to teach in a day school.

Educationally, day schools face the challenge of providing an answer to the question historian Jonathan Sarna says all schools must address:

> Schools serve as a primary setting, along with the home, where American Jews confront the most fundamental question of American Jewish life: how to live in two worlds at once, how to be both American and Jewish, part of the larger American society and apart from it. This question ... is what Jewish education in America is all about.[31]

How a school arranges the relationship between Jewish studies and general studies represents a day school's response to Sarna's question, whether explicitly, self-consciously, or both.

Many schools, notably the yeshivas and other Orthodox day schools not considered modern Orthodox, see their task as providing a complete Jewish education, focusing on rabbinic texts and providing the minimum secular education required by the state. Their mission is to prepare their students to live as educated Jews and to take their place in a literate, traditional, often separatist Jewish community.

Modern Orthodox, Conservative, Community, and Reform day schools all provide an education in which general and Jewish studies are brought into relationship with one another. While "integration" of general and Jewish studies often functions more as a slogan than a guiding educational principle, beginning in the late 1970s integration was carefully researched and thoughtfully planned as a way to prepare children to see the relationship between their identities as Americans and as Jews.[32] Often the goal of integration is to reinforce the "coalescence" of values that Sylvia Barack Fishman sees as pervasive in American Jewish life: "The 'texts' of two cultures, American and Jewish, are accessed simultaneously.... These value systems merge, or coalesce."[33] There are other modern Jewish thinkers and educators who argue that "the notion of the 'melting pot' that fostered the model of 'integration' (the notion that there is a comfortable synthesis between the teachings of Judaism and the values of the West) no longer seems compelling."[34] In response, these advocates of "interaction" present a different view of the role of schools in preparing children to live as Jews in America: "By creating schools, and providing a model of Judaism that is not identical, but interacts, with the larger world of values and culture of which we are a part, Judaism may make its greatest contribution to individual Jews and our larger society."[35] Thus, the structure and content of a day school's curriculum presents a unique message about what it means to live as a Jew in America.

4. FROM THE AFTERNOON RELIGIOUS SCHOOL TO THE CONGREGATION OF LEARNERS

Although much of the publicity surrounding Jewish education has focused on day schools, Israel trips, and family education, significant change has also come to the supplementary congregational school, the institution that enrolls the largest number of Jewish students – nearly three-fifths of those who receive any Jewish education. In the nineteenth century these schools were modeled after Protestant Sunday schools, and in the twentieth century after public schools. While their curricula changed gradually over time (for example, prayer Hebrew replaced modern Hebrew, and the study of Jewish holidays replaced the study of Jewish history), their structure remained essentially the same for nearly a century.

By the 1970s the failures of congregational schools were universally acknowledged. Their problems ranged from a chronic shortage of qualified teachers,[36] to lax discipline on the part of teachers and disruptive behavior on the part of students,[37] to a low level of student achievement[38] and a dropout rate of approximately 50 percent after bar or bat mitzvah.[39] A 1977 task force convened by the American Jewish Committee (AJC) observed that supplementary schools "produce graduates who are functionally illiterate in Judaism and not clearly positive in their attitudinal identification.... [M]ost graduates look back without joy on their educational experience."[40]

In the same vein, a 1989 study of thirty-nine supplementary schools in the New York area, conducted by the Board of Jewish Education of Greater New York, concluded, "Schools do a very poor job in increasing Jewish knowledge in all subject areas; they show no success in guiding children towards increased Jewish involvement; and they demonstrate an inability to influence positive growth in Jewish attitudes."[41]

During these decades, many educators chose to ignore the problems of the religious school, focusing their attention on settings they deemed more effective, such as day schools and Israel trips. Others attempted to improve supplementary education by developing new curricula and creating new textbooks. As the theory and practice of family education assumed greater currency and as the goal of enculturation, rather than instruction, was embraced, an increasing number of educators concluded that what was needed was a paradigm shift from the supplementary religious school to a Congregation of Learners.[42]

A famous dictum from Pirkei Avot (Ethics of the Fathers) says, "the world stands on three things – on Torah (learning), *Avodah* (worship) and *G'milut Hasadim* (good deeds)." A Congregation of Learners is a congregation that lives by this dictum – a congregation in which learning is seen as being on a par with worship, community building, and *tikun olam* (the repair of the world). In a Congregation of Learners there is a prevailing expectation that everyone, not just children in the religious school, should be learning. If this ideal is to become a reality, then active, engaging learning must be built into as many synagogue activities as possible. Rather than listening to a sermon at every service, worshippers might be divided into small groups to study the weekly Torah portion. Rather than a two-minute *d'var torah* at the beginning of a meeting, a portion of the agenda might be devoted to the study of a relevant Jewish text. Synagogues aspiring to become Congregations of Learners have found ways of incorporating learning into Mitzvah Day, the new members' orientation, and similar congregational gatherings. They have increased the variety of study opportunities for adults and have recruited

and trained congregants to become part of the teaching staff in the religious school.[43]

Most dramatically, congregations espousing the ideal of a Congregation of Learners have begun to reenvision and restructure their religious schools, creating some exciting new models. Among them are the Shabbat community, in which parents and children come together to worship and study on either Shabbat morning or Shabbat afternoon; congregation-led experiential education, in which the entire student body focuses on the same topic, taught by members of the congregation who have, themselves, studied the topic in depth; and a home-schooling *havurah* model, in which family *havurot* worship and celebrate together, hold book discussions, engage in tikun olam projects, and undertake independent Torah study.[44] While relatively few congregations have adopted these models in their purest form, many have adapted aspects of these programs to enrich their existing model.

At their best, religious schools are only one element of a full program of congregational education. A congregation aspiring to become a Congregation of Learners should offer all its members a variety of learning experiences throughout their lives, including preschool, family education, adolescent programs, retreats, Israel trips, and adult classes, in addition to religious school. These programs should have as their overriding goal the enculturation of congregants of all ages – enabling congregants to encounter the richness of the Jewish tradition and to develop strong Jewish identities, commitments, and practices. In a saying popularized by Hillary Clinton, "it takes a village to educate a child" – the Jewish equivalent of this is "it takes an entire synagogue to educate a Jew."

5. THE SHORTAGE OF JEWISH EDUCATION PERSONNEL

The new developments described in this chapter are exciting and invigorating and have already begun to yield fruit – a sector of the Jewish community that is better educated, more involved, and more committed to Jewish life. All these new programs, however, face a common challenge, which is the shortage of qualified Jewish educators. This shortage is not new, as it goes back at least sixty to seventy years,[45] but its severity is now more keenly felt, as the Jewish community focuses greater attention on, and demands more of, Jewish education.

To reach their full potential – day schools whose graduates are literate, practicing Jews; religious schools whose students become fully enculturated into Jewish life; preschools that inspire parents as well as children; family

programs that change the culture of the congregation; camps and Israel trips that transform their participants – each of these institutions and programs must be led by at least one highly qualified professional and be staffed by well-trained teachers and counselors. The good news is that exciting part-time work and full-time professional opportunities are available and that administrative positions offer relatively high salaries.[46] The bad news is that the shortage of qualified personnel is as great, or perhaps greater, than ever. The following items indicate the depth of this problem:

1. A 1998 study of teachers in Jewish schools in three communities found the following:

   > Only 19% of the teachers we surveyed have collegiate or professional training in both Jewish studies and education. Another 47% have formal training in one field or the other but not both, including 35% with backgrounds in education and 12% certified in Jewish subjects. The remaining 34% of teachers in Jewish schools in the three communities lack collegiate or professional degrees in both areas.

   Even more shocking is the finding that 29 percent of supplementary school teachers had no Jewish education after the age of thirteen.[47]
2. The same study found that "more than half of early childhood teachers had no Jewish education beyond the age of 13, and nearly a quarter had received no Jewish education before age 13 either."[48] The Jewish Early Childhood Education Partnership Study found that over 30 percent of teachers are not Jewish.[49] Anyone familiar with the economics of Jewish preschools would not be surprised by these findings; it is universally acknowledged that preschool teachers are appallingly underpaid. Wertheimer writes this:

   > A survey conducted by the BJE of New York found in 1998–99 that nearly one third of *full time* early childhood teachers earned less than $20,000 a year and another 43 percent reported earning less than $26,000. 82 percent lacked health benefits and 83 percent received no pension benefits. In Detroit, early-childhood teachers earn around $16,000 per year with no benefits.[50]

3. Barry Chazan and Steven Cohen write that "many Jewish Community Centers still engage a high proportion of non-Jewish staff. Most Jewish staff remains Jewishly ignorant or modestly knowledgeable at best."[51]
4. A high proportion of education directorships in congregational schools in the Reform and Conservative movements are filled by individuals

without professional training, because there is a serious shortage of candidates with the appropriate credentials in education and Judaica.

5. Each year, day schools struggle to find administrators and teachers, often turning to executive search firms (head hunters) who work in the public education sector in order to fill these positions. The most dire needs are at the level of heads of school and teachers to teach the Jewish studies curriculum.

In response to this shortage, a host of new initiatives have sprung up – some aimed at teachers, others at educators. At the local level, a wide range of programs, usually under the auspices of a central agency for Jewish education, have focused on the recognition of excellent teaching, as well as the recruitment and training of new teachers for preschools, day schools, and congregational schools.[52]

The following are just some of the efforts that are more national in scope.

1. New graduate-level training programs for teachers and educational administrators have been established, bringing the total of these institutions to fourteen.[53] Most enroll both full-time and part-time students, though some accept only full-time students; some offer a distance learning component. Overall, enrollment in these programs has increased, but they are far from being filled to capacity.
2. A consortium of philanthropists created DeLeT: Day school Leadership through Teaching, a national fellowship program in which recent college graduates and midlife career changers combine study either at Hebrew Union College–Jewish Institute of Religion, Los Angeles or at Brandeis University with mentored internships in day schools in order to become teachers who see their primary identity as Jewish educators (whether they go on to teach general studies, Jewish studies, or both). Other recent teacher preparation efforts include Hashaa'ar, Jewish Teachers Corps/Eidah, and Maimonides' of Boston's school-based program. All these are designed to prepare teachers to teach Jewish studies in day schools.
3. The Day School Leadership Training Institute enrolls current day school administrators to prepare them for top leadership positions through summer courses at the Jewish Theological Seminary and other institutes and through year-round mentoring.
4. The Mandel Associated Foundations created the Teacher Educator Institute to prepare education directors and staff members of central agencies to provide more intensive and continuous staff development at school sites.[54]

5. The Covenant Foundation created the Covenant Awards to honor excellence in both teaching and educational leadership.
6. Jewish Education Services of North America (JESNA) and the Covenant Foundation established the Jewish Educator Recruitment/Retention Initiative, which aims to conduct research on existing practices, publicize "best practices" at the local level, and devise new recruitment strategies.
7. A number of important programs were created in Israel, including the Pardes/Hebrew University program for the training of day school teachers, the Melton Senior Educators Program,[55] and the Jerusalem Fellows.[56]

6. THE RISING COST OF JEWISH EDUCATION

All the new initiatives described in this chapter add considerable cost to an already expensive educational system. Since Jewish educational institutions operate independently without any central coordination, it is difficult to know with any precision the total annual budget for Jewish education. A 2001 study estimated the annual cost of supplementary schools at $750 million (an average of $1,500 per student), of day schools at $2 billion ($10,000 per student), and of camps at $200 million ($4,000 per camper).[57]

As a voluntary, private endeavor, Jewish education does not receive public funding of any kind and is financed by a combination of tuition and charitable contributions. The proportion of the institution's budget that is covered by tuition, compared with that covered by donations, varies. In Conservative and Reform day schools, for example, tuition covers between 88 and 89 percent of the operating budget; in Community day schools that figure is only 68 percent. Orthodox schools, which constitute the majority of day schools, vary greatly, with anywhere between one-third and two-thirds of the budget being covered by tuition. It is more difficult to arrive at comparable calculations for congregational schools for several reasons: first, the number of hours that children attend these schools varies from two to six hours a week; second, a percentage of the school's staff serves in other capacities at the same synagogue; and third, many congregations charge little or no tuition above membership dues.

Periodically, articles in the Jewish press decry the "high cost of being Jewish." A recent study by the AJC found that a family with two children that belonged to a synagogue and a JCC; made a small gift to the federation (of $200); and sent its children to day school, day camp for two weeks, and residential camp for two weeks would be spending a total of $25,000–$35,000 a year on these expenses alone.[58] Demographic studies indicate that

the median income of American Jewish families with children is $80,000 a year.[59] Thus, over half of American Jewish families cannot afford to give their children a "complete" Jewish education without financial assistance. Even families whose income is well over the median must still consider whether they want such a large percentage of their disposable income devoted to Jewish education. The AJC report commented:

> Attention must be paid to the significant minority for whom cost is not a barrier but the desirability of the product has to be "sold." Naturally, the desires of most middle-class and upper-middle-class Jews are not focused only on Jewish matters. Those who formulate the cost of Jewish living cannot ignore the other expenses families face, including the need to save for college.[60]

Over and above what they receive in tuition, Jewish educational institutions may receive subsidies from federations or other communal agencies. Federations have tended to direct their funding to day schools, but the amounts given to each school vary widely. The federations of Baltimore, Detroit, and Cleveland, for example, all give between $25 and 30 million to day schools. In Baltimore (which has 5,400 students enrolled in day schools), the subsidy comes to only $280 per child. In Detroit (with 2,100 students), the subsidy is $810 per child. In Cleveland (with only 1,400 students), the subsidy is $1,362 per child.[61] In addition, foundations in western Massachusetts, Seattle, and Tulsa have made grants to day schools for the purpose of capping their tuition.

As the interest in Jewish education has intensified, the role of philanthropists and foundations has increased. The AVI CHAI Foundation, for example, has funded day school education in a variety of ways – from an experimental program that gave vouchers for four years of day school tuition to students in Atlanta and Cleveland; to family education programs in day schools; to Jewish Day Schools for the 21st Century, a project that helped liberal day schools reenvision and strengthen the Jewish component of the education they offer.[62] A national consortium of donors, the Partnership for Excellence in Jewish Education, makes substantial funds available for the founding of new day schools. In addition, nearly every day school is supported by large contributions from a handful of wealthy donors and smaller contributions from parents and members of the community.

We have already mentioned the creation of Birthright Israel, which provides free Israel trips to young adults. In comparison with day schools and Israel trips, educational institutions such as preschools, camps, JCCs, and supplementary schools have received much less attention and much less outside funding. Nonetheless, financial support from communal agencies, foundations, and philanthropists has gone toward teacher training, curriculum

development, and other innovative efforts in these settings. The JCC Association, for example, has developed a two-year course of study (including a subsidized trip to Israel) for preschool teachers in eighteen JCCs. A group of national and local foundations – including the Mandel Associated Foundations, the Nathan Cummings Foundation, the Koret Foundation, the Commission on Jewish Identity and Renewal of the UJA – Federation of Greater New York, and the Covenant Foundation – has funded the decade-old Experiment in Congregational Education, which helps synagogues become Congregations of Learners.[63]

7. IS THE GLASS HALF EMPTY OR HALF FULL?

As of the winter of 2005, the future of Jewish education looks much more promising than it did a decade ago. Clearly, however, significant challenges remain – high expenses, a shortage of personnel, the need for continual reevaluation and revitalization, and the need to convince its potential clientele of its importance. While acutely aware of the work that lies ahead, we are encouraged and inspired by the accomplishments of the past decade, by the dedication of so many lay leaders, and by the wisdom and talents of so many professionals. Jewish education is more than the key to Jewish survival; it is the bridge to a robust Jewish future.

Notes

1. We thank Beth Nichols and Dena Kahn for their research assistance and John Merriman for his editorial assistance.
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3. Mordecai M. Kaplan and Bernard Cronson, "A Survey of Jewish Education in New York City," reprinted in *Jewish Education in the United States: A Documentary History*, ed. Lloyd. P. Gartner (New York: Teachers College Press, 1969), 126.
4. Barry Chazan, *The State of Jewish Education* (New York: Jewish Education Service of North America, 1988), 14.
5. Sylvia Barack Fishman and Alice Goldstein, *When They Are Grown They Will not Depart: Jewish Education and the Jewish Behavior of American Adults* (Waltham: Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies at Brandeis University and the Jewish Education Service of North America, 1993), 7.
6. Jack Wertheimer, "Jewish Education in the United States: Recent Trends and Issues," *American Jewish Year Book* 99 (1999), 43.
7. The Commission on Jewish Education in North America, *A Time To Act* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1991), 15.
8. Ibid., 33.
9. Jack Wertheimer, "Jewish Education in the United States," *Year Book*, 74.
10. The dropout rate increases from the eighth to the tenth grade, and it varies tremendously from congregation to congregation and city to city.

11. Charles Kadushin et al., *Being a Jewish Teenager in America: Trying to Make It* (Waltham: Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies at Brandeis University, 2000), 74.
12. Steven M. Cohen and Aryeh Davidson, *Adult Jewish Learning in America: Current Patterns and Prospects for Growth* (n.p.: The Florence G. Heller/JCC Association and the Jewish Theological Seminary, 2001), 5.
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14. Jack Wertheimer, "Jewish Education in the United States," *Year Book*, 76.
15. Barry Chazan and Steven M. Cohen, *Assessing the Jewish Educational Effectiveness of Jewish Community Centers – The 1994 Survey* (New York: JCC Association, 1994).
16. Steven M. Cohen and Aryeh Davidson, *Adult Jewish Learning in America: Current Patterns and Prospects for Growth* (n.p.: The Florence G. Heller/JCC Association and the Jewish Theological Seminary, 2001), 8.
17. Barry Chazan, *What We Know About the Israel Experience* (n.p.: Israel Experience, n.d.), 2.
18. Jack Wertheimer, "Jewish Education in the United States," *Year Book*, 90.
19. Amy L. Sales and Leonard Saxe, *Limud by the Lake: Fulfilling the Educational Potential of Jewish Summer Camps* (New York: The AVI CHAI Foundation and the Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies at Brandeis University, 2002), 5.
20. Barry Chazan, *What We Know About the Israel Experience* (n.p.: Israel Experience, n.d.), 5.
21. As later research uncovered, this assumption was not altogether warranted. Many first-generation immigrants abandoned their Jewish practices shortly after arriving in the United States. Though their children were raised in Jewish neighborhoods, they were largely ignorant of Jewish customs and rituals.
22. Michael Zeldin, "The Promise of Historical Inquiry: Nineteenth Century Jewish Day Schools and Twentieth Century Policy," *Religious Education* 83, 3 (1988), 438–52.
23. Isaac M. Wise, "Jewish Education in Cincinnati," reprinted in *Jewish Education in the United States: A Documentary History*, ed. Lloyd P. Gartner (New York: Teachers College Press, 1969), 86.
24. Alvin Schiff, *The Jewish Day School in America* (New York: Jewish Education Press, 1966), 30.
25. Ibid., 49.
26. Michael Zeldin, *The Status of a Quiet Revolution* (New York: Union of American Hebrew Congregations Press, 1985).
27. Marvin Schick, *A Census of Jewish Day Schools in the United States* (New York: The AVI CHAI Foundation, 2000).
28. Ibid., 12.
29. Sylvia Barack Fishman and Alice Goldstein, *When They Are Grown They Will not Depart: Jewish Education and the Jewish Behavior of American Adults* (Waltham: Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies at Brandeis University and the Jewish Education Service of North America, 1993).
30. Helene Schlafman, private communication (Summer 1990).

31. Jonathan D. Sarna, "American Jewish Education in Historical Perspective," *Journal of Jewish Education* 64, 1–2 (1998), 10.
32. See Bennet Solomon, "A Critical Review of the Term 'Integration' in the Literature on the Jewish Day School in America," *Jewish Education* 46, 4 (1978), 4–7; Mitchel Malkus, "Portraits of Curriculum Integration in Jewish Day Schools" (Ph.D. diss., Jewish Theological Seminary, 2001); Michael Zeldin, "Integration and Interaction," in *The Jewish Educational Leader's Handbook*, ed. Robert E. Tornberg (Denver: A.R.E. Publishing, 1998), 579–90.
33. Sylvia Barack Fishman, *Negotiating Both Sides of the Hyphen: Coalescence, Compartmentalization, and American Jewish Values* (Cincinnati: Judaic Studies Program, University of Cincinnati, 1996).
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37. David Schoem, *Ethnic Survival in America: An Ethnography of a Jewish Afternoon School* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989); Samuel Heilman, "Inside the Jewish School," in *What We Know About Jewish Education*, ed. Stuart Kelman (Los Angeles: Torah Aura Productions, 1992), 303–30.
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41. Board of Jewish Education of Greater New York, *Jewish Supplementary Schooling: An Educational System in Need of Change* (New York: Board of Jewish Education, 1988), 119.
42. *A Congregation of Learners: Transforming the Congregation into a Learning Community*, ed. Isa Aron, Sara S. Lee, and Seymour Rossel (New York: Union of American Hebrew Congregations Press, 1995).
43. For additional examples, see Isa Aron, *Becoming a Congregation of Learners: Learning as a Key to Revitalizing Congregational Life* (Woodstock: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2000), chapter 3.
44. Isa Aron and Robert Weinberg, "Rethinking and Redesigning the Religious School," *Sh'ma* 32 (March 2002).
45. Susan Shevitz, "Communal Responses to the Teacher Shortage in the North American Supplementary School," in *Studies in Jewish Education*, ed. Janel Aviad (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1988), vol. 3, pp. 25–61.

46. Some teachers' salaries have risen, in response to the shortage, while others remain low. Unfortunately, the salaries of preschool teachers continue to be extremely low, as will be discussed.
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48. "Jewish Education in the United States: Recent Trends and Issues," *American Jewish Yearbook* 99 (1999), 75.
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53. Together, these fourteen schools have formed the Association for Higher Learning in Jewish Education.
54. Research in public education indicates that this model of professional development for teachers is the most effective.
55. This program is under the auspices of the Melton Centre for Jewish Education at the Hebrew University.
56. This program is under the auspices of the Mandel Institute in Jerusalem.
57. Jack Wertheimer, *Talking Dollars and Sense About Jewish Education* (New York: American Jewish Committee, 2001), 3–5.
58. Gerald Bubis, *The Costs of Jewish Living* (New York: American Jewish Committee, 2001), 16.
59. Ibid., 2.
60. Ibid., 26.
61. Ibid., 15.
62. Jewish Day Schools for the 21st Century (JDS-21) is a project of the Rhea Hirsch School of Education, Hebrew Union College–Jewish Institute of Religion, Los Angeles.
63. The Experiment in Congregational Education (ECE) is a project of the Rhea Hirsch School of Education, Hebrew Union College–Jewish Institute of Religion, Los Angeles. More information on this is available at www.eceonline.org.