# FORUM III

# Writing for *Sesame Street,* Directing Traffic, Marketing a Product, and Saving Souls: Jewish Family Educators Describe Their Practice

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Over the last several years Jewish family education has become a popular endeavor. Family education programs, professional positions, think tanks, and conferences have been developed and sponsored. Although there has been some discussion of the goals and purposes of the endeavor and considerable programmatic activity in the schools, there is little written documentation from the practitioners' perspectives of what actually happens in these programs or about the challenges they face when working on them. As programs and positions proliferate, the practitioners' skills and abilities are being tested daily. If they do not work effectively, the Jewish family education enterprise, no matter how promising, will fail. Yet, we do not know what working as a family educator entails or how to define its effectiveness.

This research was undertaken to provide (1) information about how family education practitioners understand their own work and (2) descriptive data about their experiences in supplementary schools. Uncovering the complexities of the work, as seen by those doing it, provides a view of the skills, competencies, and perspectives needed, as well as of the obstacles and challenges faced, by Jewish family educators.

## METHODOLOGY

Because there has been a tremendous surge of Jewish family education programming in the Boston area, it is a setting in which these issues could be meaningfully pursued. A few school principals had already been experimenting with family programming when in early 1988 the Combined Jewish Philanthropies, the local federation, announced the availability of grants to supplementary schools for family education and funded a half-time family education position at the Boston Bureau of Jewish Education. Between the 1987–88 and 1990–91 school years, 72 grants totaling $197,880 were awarded to 40 different programs spread among 33 schools (Kaye, 1990). In 1989, 62% of Boston area schools reported that they offered some type of family education (Shevitz, 1991). After 4 years of funding, the number of educators in the area with significant experience in Jewish family education is sufficient for an examination of the practice of family education.

The study was conducted from April through December 1990. Conceived as a grounded, exploratory study, the research team had only some general assumptions about the content of the discussions it would facilitate and analyze.

Four focus groups[1] were convened—two of teachers and one each of principals and rabbis—with the explicit purpose of having practitioners discuss their work, the

1. The focus groups were convened by inviting the principal of each school that had received a family education grant by 1990 to participate. When asked to identify their staff members involved in family education, some principals stated that their entire staffs were involved; some mentioned two or three classroom teachers with additional, specific family education responsibilities; some supplied the names of only those staff members specifically hired to work with families; and two principals entered into lengthy discussions as to the definition of a "family educator." All identified staff were invited to participate in a focus group.

*Table 1.*
CATEGORIES DEVELOPED FROM DATA

| Code Number | Category |
|---|---|
| 10 | References to Judaic Sources, Texts, Values, Life-Cycle Events |
| 20 | Interpersonal Skills |
| 21 | Group Dynamics |
| 30 | Knowledge of Human Development |
| 40 | Knowledge of Parent/Child Dynamics |
| 41 | Fear of Adults/Questions of Classroom Control |
| 42 | Discomfort with Children |
| 43 | Meeting Needs of Parents/Children Together |
| 44 | Family Interaction |
| 50 | Community Formation Skills |
| 60 | Pedagogic Skills |
| 61 | Flexibility: Ability to Switch Gears |
| 62 | Ability to Set Forth and Attain Program Goals |
| 63 | Use of Specific Talents/Creativity |
| 64 | Use of Self |
| 65 | Curriculum Design/Content/Program Planning |
| 70 | Administrative/Organizational Skills |
| 71 | Time Management |
| 80 | Communication Skills/Marketing/Planning/Knowing Needs of Community |
| 81 | Principal/Teacher/Rabbi Relationships |
| 82 | Empowerment/Involvement of Teachers |
| 83 | Empowerment/Involvement of Parents |
| 90 | Training Skills |
| 91 | Traits of Family Educators |
| 92 | Interventions (Psycho-Social in Families) |

obstacles they face, and the skills or perspectives they draw on and need. The groups were taped and transcripts prepared; these were coded so that the research team could discern when the speakers were from the same school without knowing the identity of the individual speaker or school.

The transcripts were first analyzed for general themes. Each member of the research team then derived a preliminary set of categories that seemed to cover the transcripts' content. From these, a single list of categories with operational definitions was developed. This was repeatedly tested and refined until it was agreed that the categories captured the range of the remarks, as seen in Table 1.

Each transcript was then coded individually by at least two members of the research team and was validated by the entire team.

In analyzing the data, the concern was for the frequency and distribution of different themes. For example, how often was a subject discussed? By how many different participants? Did this vary according to program type? The speaker's viewpoint was also of concern. From what perspective did each practitioner view the family education efforts? Preliminary findings were presented to a group of principals and a group of teachers in December 1990 for their interpretive feedback.

### Study Participants

Three of the focus groups involved 32 practitioners from 14 different supplementary schools (analysis of the group of rabbis is not included in this article). Eight of the 14 schools were represented by the principal and at least one other family education practitioner. Characteristics of the participating schools are summarized in Table 2.

Twenty-one teachers participated in the two groups of teachers. The number of years working in the school ranged from 1 to 22 years, with a median of 2.25. Most

*Table 2.*
CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOLS REPRESENTED IN THE FOCUS GROUPS

| Number of Students | Reform | Conservative | Community/Independent |
|---|---|---|---|
| 300 + | 3 | — | — |
| 200–299 | 4 | — | — |
| 100–199 | 1 | 4 | 1 |
| <100 | 1 | — | — |
| Principal | | | |
| Full-time | 7 | 3 | 1 |
| Part-time | 2 | 1 | — |

of the teachers have been engaged in family education for 1 to 2 years.

Eleven principals participated in the principals' group. They have worked in their schools for a median of 5 years and have been engaged in family education for a median of 2 years. Other background characteristics are summarized in Table 3.

## FINDINGS

Three themes emerge from the participants' comments: family education is designed to follow existing school structures (division by age/grade, assembly-like programs for large groups); educating families is much more complex than dealing solely with children; and for these educators, family education always includes Jewish content.

### Program Design Is Based on the Traditional School Structure

Participants represented a range of supplementary school-based programs, including students and parents in parallel learning settings, parents and students in the same class or program, whole family programs, and grade-wide and school-wide activities. What is meant, in a programmatic sense, by Jewish family education programs in the supplementary school is most often *specified program(s) for the parents (with or without the children) of students of a particular grade or grades of the school. They are infrequently geared to whole families.* The school population is rarely divided into subpopulations with special interests or needs, such as single-parent, Hebrew-speaking, and intermarried families; and parents whose second or third child is entering school, etc. Few practitioners had detailed information about the subgroups that might be a part of their school population.

*Table 3.*
CHARACTERISTICS OF PARTICIPANTS IN THE STUDY GROUPS

| Academic Training | Percent of Principals (n = 11) | Percent of Teachers (n = 21) |
|---|---|---|
| College-level Judaica | 73 | 67 |
| Undergraduate or graduate degree in Judaica | 27 | 38 |
| Undergraduate or graduate degree in education or communal service | 36 | 67 |
| Continuing education courses | 81 | 90 |

### Family Education Is a Complex Endeavor

Another finding concerns the complexity of the family education enterprise. One unexpected benefit of the research was that the groups really enjoyed talking together about their work; there was a sense of relief that others found it hard and a sense of exhilaration that they were the "pioneers."

Many aspects of the work are new and challenging: assessing the interests of diverse groups, obtaining enough information about a community to plan and market programs sensibly, teaching adults or adults and children together, becoming less formal in approach, dealing effectively with complex family and interfamily relationships, and developing appropriate activities. These are particularly difficult because the teachers are often uncertain about their school's family education philosophy and goals or how they complement the overall school program. In fact, one of the teachers' groups spent much of its time puzzling out personal and institutional philosophies of family education.

Teachers especially noted the challenging aspects of their work—engaging adults on different levels and planning different activities for the same grade level, so that parents participating with their second or third child would not find the programs to be repetitive. Similarly, teachers must cope with new demands posed by inter- and intrafamily dynamics, heterogeneous groups, and heightened expectations of the parents. Many teachers were especially

attuned to parent-child interactions and pondered how, as the other adults in the setting, they should respond:

> As a teacher you have control. . . . Even though the parents see you in control of the class, there is a parent and child and the parent is wondering how his child is behaving and there are all kinds of other things going on too and you give up some control when another adult is there.

> [I need] something like negotiation skills. . . . I'm getting problems that are not strictly education problems.

Seemingly small issues were significant. One teacher somewhat humorously confided that "it is disgusting that although I'm working with families, I can't even get to know their names" because the meetings are too infrequent. This frustration is symbolic of the larger dilemma that practitioners face: they believe that the family education enterprise is of great importance, yet there may not be enough time or resources to master its complexities.

### Family Education Means Jewish Family Education

When the practitioners describe what they do, it is clear that their goal is to impart some Jewish experience or content to families. The category of Judaic content (#10) received the second highest number of responses from both principals and teachers; most responses concerned Jewish holiday or life-cycle activities, such as a Shabbat kit, a Passover seder, or a Bar/Bat Mitvah class. Two sources of tension were apparent in this area: how much Judaica to provide to parents and how "serious" this content should be. Teachers expressed the sense of "walking on a tightrope" in providing just the right amount of adult study. Principals and teachers know that adults demand "solid" materials, yet it is clear that almost all programs described are designed for entry-level participants. One teacher spoke of her empathy with parents who had to learn basic Jewish concepts:

> I remember for many years in my life feeling like I never knew enough Jewishly . . . and I never liked that feeling of people who let you know that they knew more than you. . . . I feel acutely sensitive to people who didn't have the opportunity to learn Jewish things and I don't think that anyone should ever be made to feel stupid because they didn't have the opportunity growing up for some reason or another to learn Jewish life and feel comfortable with it.

All of the 38 references to the Judaic content of the programs talked of helping the least knowledgeable and/or most doubting adults. There was less explicit awareness of the needs of parents with more knowledge and less ambivalence.

A few teachers and principals spoke explicitly of the integration of Judaica and family life:

> If it's a celebration of a holiday, they need to know: where does this holiday come from, what is the meaning of the holiday, what does it mean to us? And then it's teaching them how they can take that observance into their home, capitalize on what their children know and together as a family make up an important Jewish memory for their children.

> I see it as a way of bringing the family together under the umbrella of some Jewish structure . . . so that they can interact about something Jewish as a family. It's more than just giving them information.

Table 4 summarizes the content of the teacher and principal discussions.

The most frequently mentioned categories by teachers were 43 ("Meeting Needs of Parents/Children Together"), 10 (Judaic references), 80 ("Communication Skills/Marketing/Planning/Knowing Needs of Community"), and 83 ("Empowerment/Involvement of Parents"). The most frequently mentioned topics for principals were 83, 10, 65 ("Curriculum Design/

*Table 4.*
PRACTITIONERS' RESPONSES BY CATEGORY

| | Total Number of Responses | | Percentage of all Practitioners | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Category | Teachers (n = 21) | Principals (n = 11) | Teachers | Principals |
| 10 | 23 | 15 | 76 | 73 |
| 20 | 15 | 4 | 48 | 27 |
| 21 | 13 | 2 | 52 | 9 |
| 30 | 14 | 3 | 57 | 27 |
| 40 | 15 | 4 | 71 | 27 |
| 41 | 15 | 1 | 71 | 9 |
| 42 | 1 | 0 | 5 | 0 |
| 43 | 24 | 8 | 62 | 36 |
| 44 | 2 | 5 | 10 | 36 |
| 50 | 7 | 7 | 33 | 45 |
| 60 | 5 | 0 | 24 | 0 |
| 61 | 9 | 2 | 48 | 18 |
| 62 | 2 | 0 | 10 | 0 |
| 63 | 3 | 4 | 14 | 36 |
| 64 | 12 | 3 | 43 | 18 |
| 65 | 3 | 9 | 14 | 64 |
| 70 | 7 | 8 | 24 | 64 |
| 71 | 4 | 3 | 14 | 27 |
| 80 | 21 | 3 | 62 | 27 |
| 81 | 6 | 3 | 33 | 27 |
| 82 | 1 | 6 | 5 | 45 |
| 83 | 20 | 22 | 52 | 82 |
| 90 | 1 | 3 | 5 | 18 |
| 92 | 1 | 4 | 5 | 18 |

Content Program Planning"), 70 ("Administrative/Organizational Skills"), and 43. Although the number of references to the top four teacher categories were very close (24 references to priority #1 [43] versus 20 for priority #4 [83]), the principals were overwhelmingly concerned with their top priority of empowering parents.

The number of *different* practitioners who discussed each topic indicates that about three-quarters of all teachers and principals referred to Judaica in the discussions. Here the similarity ends. The data show that, as groups, principals and teachers generally view their work differently. This did not vary according to types of family programming offered.

Principals, whether their schools offered parallel, school-wide, or parent-child activities, tended to focus on planning issues, such as empowering/involving parents (82%) and administrative/organizational skills and curriculum design (64%). Teachers, no matter what type of programs they implemented, had a different set of priorities. Most talked of parent/child dynamics and anxiety about adults (71% each) and meeting parent/child needs together and communication/marketing skills (62% each). It is also important to note here that not only did teacher and principal groups reveal different perspectives but they were also generally unaware of each other's views, despite the fact that they both talked of working well together.

### Principal and Teacher Concerns When Adults Enter the School

Bringing adults into the school or classroom elicits different responses from principals and teachers. Both groups expressed concern about meeting the needs of this new population, but from different perspectives.

Principals focused on efforts to involve parents in both planning and carrying out programs. They talked of the need for "serious content" and a sense of purpose. Teachers, however, expressed concern about dealing with adults and children together. One-quarter of their discussion related to this concern (categories 40–44), particularly anxieties about having adults in their classrooms, parent-child dynamics, and their struggles with finding materials and activities appropriate to the wide range of intellectual and emotional levels suddenly present in the educational setting. Principals shared with the teachers only the last of these concerns.

In addition, teachers were more concerned than principals about human development and group, family, and interpersonal dynamics. In discussion, they cited numerous examples when that knowledge would have been helpful to them in practice.

### Meeting Needs of Parents and Children Together

Principals and teachers both talked about the difficulty of meeting the needs of both adults and children, or as one teacher put it,

> You have students and parents on totally different planes and you are trying to appeal to both of them at the same time. The anecdotes . . . are about kids, but they are also involving adults so everybody can sort of plug in wherever they are at.

Another teacher expressed the dilemma of many of her colleagues when she used the metaphor of the television series, *Sesame Street,* which tries to captivate children while also interesting their parents. Unlike the *Sesame Street* creators, however, she had no team of writers and researchers to provide her with material to develop such an approach.

To cope with these demands, teachers and principals focus on skills that are basic to any teaching situation: categories 60–65. Within this area, however, principals' overriding concern is with curriculum design and program planning (50% of the responses), whereas for teachers it is use-of-self (35%) and flexibility (26%). As the people who are "on the line," the teachers rely less on development of materials and more on personal resources. Since much of the work is innovative, it is often hard to anticipate what will go wrong. When confronted with a problem in a program, the need to act quickly is acute. Teachers fear that parents will lose confidence if a program does not meet their expectations. Yet, because they do not have much experience teaching adults or adults and children, teachers do not have a repertoire of responses to use if a problem does occur.

### Teachers Are Concerned About Marketing the Product to the Community

Seven teachers, representing seven different schools, talked about the need to learn about a community in order to market the family education "product." From their perspective, there are several related steps to family education: (1) learn what is needed, (2) reach out to parents, and (3) develop responsive programs.

They first need to find out about their communities:

> In our community people tend to fancy themselves as intellectuals, so there needs to be some kind of substance.

They discussed attempts to learn about people's needs, ranging from scheduling problems (e.g., the Saturday soccer league) to psychosocial and spiritual issues. Spiritual concerns were frequently related to the needs of interfaith families.

> My assumptions were that if your kids were in Hebrew school, you were Jewish. That's not the case where I'm working now. Kids behave and practice differently and now you have to take into consideration the make-up of the family, more specifically, their religion.

A major concern was how to recruit people to attend family programs. Teachers tended to define a program's success in terms of numbers and expressed frustration over not being able to predict whether a program would attract participants. Many were convinced that the only way to attract adults was through individual contact, whether in person or by phone. As one teacher revealed,

> I always love the phone. Sometimes I think it's an extension of my arm . . . getting on . . . talking to people, listening to people, finding out what their needs are so that you can find out what that product should be and mold it.

Both teachers and principals talked of the need for excellence in programming for adults. Unlike the captive student audience, adults will only return if they feel they are receiving some benefit. One way to encourage such participation is by giving the adult a stake in the program:

> You have to inspire them with something, throw out some kind of bait, some ideas, see what they nibble on. Once they do, ask them for their opinion, get them on a committee. People who get involved have to feel they are getting something out of it.

The term "marketing" created a certain level of discomfort among the teachers. "It bothers me" and "it makes me nervous" were typical comments, despite the fact that they do follow marketing procedures. Several teachers expressed the conviction that believing in what you do, enthusiasm, and warmth were qualities that would attract adult audiences, thus obviating the need to resort to the techniques of the business world. Unlike the teachers, principals displayed little interest in marketing to the families. However, marketing family education programs to the congregation in order to obtain financial support for them was mentioned by one principal who described strategies for influencing the board.

#### Teacher Anxiety

Teachers were vocal about their anxiety about dealing with adults. This was especially surprising since each teacher functioned well in the adult world. They included several social workers, graduate students, a dentist, and public schoolteachers. There was a noticeable sense of relief when an individual started telling about how hard it was to face adults rather than children in an educational setting. Seventy-one percent talked openly about their discomfort. As one revealed,

> I'm getting more nervous . . . . I'm definitely more uptight . . . . Some of them are professors; that really makes me nervous. Some of them are expecting something wonderful because they came there, they are sacrificing to do this and you want this to be really worth it.

Another teacher described the way she coped with the uneasiness of having parents in her class:

> I had 5 years of teaching experience before I began, and my first class I thought I would never make it. I knew some of these parents, somebody's a doctor . . . and this and that . . . . I was not relaxed. I overplanned because I did not want a minute to spare to have to stand there with these people watching me!

There is no indication, however, that principals recognize the depth of teachers' fears and their search for coping mechanisms. Principals referred only once to category 41 ("Fear of Adults") and in later discussions were surprised when the finding about teachers was mentioned.

#### Understanding and Responding to Parent-Child Dynamics

Several teachers talked of watching parents and children interact in the classroom and wondering whether to intervene. One de-

scribed a parent who took over a project from a child to ensure that it would be done properly. Another wondered how to discipline a child when the parent seemed unconcerned with the misbehavior. The appropriate roles for parents and teachers remain a puzzle.

Another teacher noted the variety of family styles and the families' different ways of engaging in a task. To her, family education "is traffic going in every direction. Sometimes it's one parent and child . . . sometimes it's an entire family. . . ." Her role is to direct the traffic by finding the right structures and networks for different families.

### Views of the Parents' Role in the Educational Process

If one were to view parent interaction with the school on a continuum, with involvement in their child's education at one end and empowerment as Jewish teachers for their children at the other, most teachers' responses would place parents closest to the first position. Parents are often seen as supplementing the work of the teacher. They can show interest, help with administrative details, reinforce what is taught, be a resource in dealing with a difficult child ("I'd like to be able to say to the father, 'How do you deal with your child? How can we work on this together?' "), and extend what is taught into the home. *The focus is on the child's education and the need for parental support in making that education effective.*

For the minority of teachers who place parents at the other end of the continuum, parents are seen as having a major role in the enterprise. If parents are to be role models and Jewish teachers to their children, their need for knowledge has to be addressed. As one teacher put it,

> My job is finding ways to help parents feel empowered, so that I can teach them, give them information that would help them to feel that they can have a Jewish home . . . . I want parents to feel like they are Jewish authorities for their kids at home.

Principals (82% responded in this category) added another dimension to the idea of empowering parents: that of parents taking responsibility for their own (and, in some cases, their family's) Jewish education. In encouraging them to become Jewish teachers to their children, principals are interested not only in providing parents with new information but also with helping them gain access to the knowledge they already possess. One principal echoed the responses of several others when she said:

> The important thing that I've been focusing on is empowering parents to make use of the knowledge they have, because I think that people know a lot more than they think they know. They don't tap into it, because they don't see themselves as Jewish educators.

Principals are also concerned with administrative and programmatic empowerment: to what extent ought parents participate in defining and developing the school's family education approach? Some school heads have established a regular process of meeting with parent groups, listening to their needs, and planning programs based on their expressed desires. One principal, who has tried to include parents throughout the planning and implementation process, has found it difficult to determine how to share responsibility or to influence without controlling:

> You are stuck with the dilemma of what you are left with when you empower them and they have done this program and it isn't the way you want it to be.

In one case parents demanded more programs. In another, they had strong opinions, but did not follow through on their ideas. Principals with the most extensive family education programs are faced with finding an appropriate balance of responsibility.

### Teachers' Role in Designing Family Education Programs

Although both principals and teachers struggle with the issue of empowering parents, empowerment is not an issue between the principals and teachers. Teachers did not express any lack of involvement; they expressed only positive feelings for the support they receive from their principals, even when they had no role in defining the school's approach to family education.

Principals talked about training the teachers, but not about bringing them into the planning process. In almost every case, principals chose the grade level and (either in accordance with the parents or by themselves) the subject matter of the family education program. Teachers may have worked with the principal in developing the curriculum within these guidelines, but neither they nor the principals seemed to feel that teachers ought to play a part in the initial planning. Perhaps it simply does not occur to either party to incorporate involvement at this level. Or, perhaps actually running the family education programs is so demanding that teachers remain reluctant to assume greater responsibility. The problem is, however, that teachers do have a unique and valuable perspective about the endeavor that should inform the planning process.

### Despite Differences in Perspective, Many Teachers and Principals Try to Foster a Sense of Community

Teachers most often spoke of community as the group cohesion that occurs among the parents or families of a specific class. They hope it will develop, recognize when it occurs, and comment on it as a by-product of a planned activity. Three teachers from the same school talked about consciously trying to create a sense of community:

> I coordinated two programs simultaneously: a series of groups to bring people of like minds together, all of which were designed to build community.

> Here I was coming to teach at their synagogue, be part of their community, and all these people come together as if they've never seen each other in their lives. I felt rather inadequate in that I never figured out how to plug them back into some sort of community, or make them into a community.

The third teacher, herself a member of the congregation, wanted to help families find others with whom to gather in each other's houses on a regular basis and promote a sense of shared involvement in Jewish life.

Not surprisingly, principals viewed the issues of community formation from a broader perspective. One spoke of "linking the generations" through a program that included grandparents, as well as parents; another described "linking the whole community, as well as the parents and the students." Common to almost all the principals' comments was a vision of the synagogue as central and a sense of the vital importance of families being a part of it:

> The most important thing I'm doing is bringing whole families back into the temple where they feel comfortable. And where they come back the third time, and fourth time and they are smiling and feel this is their temple. And they know where things are and they feel good about taking part.

## IMPLICATIONS

The study yields a view of the concerns faced by family education practitioners. They are genuinely excited both by the potential that family education holds and by the enthusiasm generated by their programs. Yet, several important issues need to be addressed.

### Is the Child or the Family the Primary Focus of Schools Involved in Family Education?

There are two views held by both principals and teachers: in the first, educating the parent/family is a strategy designed to enhance the education of the child; in the second, the family itself becomes the educable unit. Most focus group participants firmly hold the former view, whereas others are tentatively approaching the latter. If more and more parents are excited by Jewish education, will they begin demanding resources that previously were allocated to children? As programming for adults makes increasing demands on the time and energy of the professional hired for the purpose of educating children, what additional personnel will be necessary?

### How Ought Teachers' Perspectives Influence Schools' Family Education Approaches?

A consistent finding in the study was that practitioners' views are defined more by their position in the school than by the type of family education programs they offer. Principals tend to share a concern for overall planning and programming issues. They have confidence that the teachers they have chosen will perform well. Although this institutional perspective is not surprising, it raises questions when contrasted with the teachers' views.

As a group, the teachers hold more diverse opinions than the principals. Most noticeable is their intense concern with the complicated dynamics involved when providing family education. It is not only that they see the details so important to a program, but they are candid about their dilemmas and occasional bewilderment. The breadth and richness of their concerns are inescapable: family dynamics, adult sensitivities, childhood needs, and curricular demands all confront them. This focus on the details does not occur because the teachers are novices; this is an experienced and educated group of teachers, and many have held important administrative responsibilities in the Jewish and general communities.

Principals are not very aware of the core dilemmas faced by teachers: anxiety dealing with adults, uncertainty about their responsibilities when parents are present, and the need for more information about human development and group dynamics. In turn, the teachers are unaware of the school's overall philosophy and goals. They are often uncertain about how their work relates to the larger mission.

This finding suggests that, when principals plan the schools' overall family education programs, they do not take into account all the constraints operating or recognize what may be needed for the program to succeed. Teachers' views ought to hold a central place in any planning process. To use teachers as technicians who will deliver but not define programs will reinforce a hierarchical service delivery structure and deprive planning efforts of a crucial exchange of information.

### How Is Family Education Considered?

These data suggest that schools' organizational structures to a large extent define family education. The grade-by-grade structure of the supplementary school and its curriculum usually determine family education initiatives. Despite rhetoric that talks of the responsiveness of family education to the changing Jewish population, it is the formal school structure and not the needs of families that almost always provides the framework for conceiving family education.

This dissonance between espoused theory and theory-in-use is of considerable interest. Is it because of the tremendous complexity of organizing and implementing family education—a theme heard repeatedly in the focus groups—that grade-level designations provide an administrative anchor for the program? Is it because of a planning limitation: detailed data about subpopulations are not known? Is it reluctance

to deal with the additional issues and needs of the subpopulations? Or, are there different explanations?

### How Can Family Educators Be Helped to Work Effectively?

Teachers are accustomed to creating relationships with the children in their classrooms. When parents are introduced, relationships must be created anew. Teachers grapple with changed realities and wonder about such questions as who is responsible for the behavior of a child whose parent is in the room? Who will be seen as the possessor of knowledge? Who is in control? They also express particular needs: organization, time management, and negotiation skills; knowledge of group dynamics and human development; and techniques to help people feel more comfortable. And, of course, the teachers are anxious about working with adults.

As schools consider family education programs, they ought also to consider how, over time, they will work with staff and help them develop new competencies and confidence. Practitioners' forthright discussions provide a view of how they experience the surprises, dilemmas, and satisfactions of their work. This study suggests that observational studies of selected practitioners and programs would yield a complementary picture that would help those eager to promote family education more fully understand what is needed for it to be effective. Adding family education to a teacher's responsibilities is insufficient; a well-conceived approach to staff is as important as a well-designed approach to families.

## CONCLUSION

The educators in these focus groups share a sense of mission and purpose about Jewish family education. Yet, although they are willing to go where it leads, they are expressing surprise about the field's demands. Family education asks of educators new skills, broadened perspectives, and expanded methodological repertoires. It asks of schools demographic data and institutional planning and an intimate understanding of a specific community's values and norms. Most fundamentally, it calls into question the standard way in which many educators operate. Jewish family education needs a sensitive blend of the more open-ended, community-building approaches often associated with social work, as well as the educator's content knowledge and ability to function as a role model for families. How ought we empower others? How might we become more responsive to people's needs? How can we deal more comfortably and competently with different ages and groupings?

In their own ways the practitioners have begun to identify elements of their work that are essential to its success. They are eager for the resources to help them understand and master these very elements.

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