

Jewish Education in the United States: Three Comments

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Conventional wisdom and learned aphorisms from classical literature provide us with conflicting signals concerning change and human progress. Ecclesiastes' observation that "that which hath been is that which shall be and there is nothing new under the sun" (*Eccl. 1,9*) is counterbalanced by the Talmudic assertion "that there can be no academy without some *hidush*" (innovation) (*Hagigah 3,6*).

Reading Professor Ackerman's essay, "Strangers to the Tradition: Idea and Constraint in American Jewish Education" I found myself caught in a tension between complete agreement with his assessment of Jewish educational realities in America on the one hand, and the claims of other perceptions and perspectives, whether derived from varying interpretations of the same phenomena or from a different vantage point in time. (Ackerman's essay was completed in 1981 and most of the references date back to the 1960s and 1970s).

My comments will address issues raised by Ackerman and will be presented under two rubrics: different interpretations of the same phenomena and some *hidushim* based on more recent phenomena.

The title of the essay clearly expresses the author's commitment to the Jewish tradition of learning – a lifelong pursuit of *Torah l'shema* which is absent in most American Jewish schools. It must be pointed out, however, that the second half of the title, "Idea and Constraint," is valid only from the sociological point of view. There is constraint (defined as "repression of natural feelings and impulses") if one accepts the overriding power of social factors. Happily, the more coercive aspects of constraint, political rather than sociological, are not part of Jewish realities in America, and those segments of Jewish society that are willing to free themselves from the shackles of

social pressure can pursue the idea of Jewish education to its logical conclusion, that is to say, to fully embrace the tradition of Jewish learning.

Ackerman begins with an accurate analysis of the genesis of the different types of Jewish schools in America, tracing their beginnings to their European-Jewish or American-general antecedents (the early Jewish day school paralleled the academy in the larger society, the Jewish Sunday school was modelled after its Protestant counterpart and the Talmud Torah/Congregational school was adapted from an earlier East European version). In this analysis, however, Ackerman does not go far enough. If his logic is pursued, one can explain most of the realities of present day Jewish education, particularly in the non-day school sectors, by the de-schooling and de-intellectualizing tendencies in American society, and by the inexorable effects of mass acculturation, typical to children of second and third generation Americans. Arthur Hertzberg's studies of French Jewry (Hertzberg, 1968), notably on the communities of Alsace-Lorraine, offer both elements of contrast and similarity to the evolution of a post-emancipation Jewish community in any setting. Viewed from this perspective, the Americanization of Jewish education explains the present moment in Jewish education. There is no tradition of *Torah l'shma* because American society, in general, is plagued by anti-intellectual, utilitarian tendencies, as witnessed by the current nadir in the study of the humanities in the United States. The cultural dissonance between the typical suburban Jewish home and the Jewish school has, *mutatis mutandis*, its counterpart in the relationship between school and home for many segments in American society. To the extent that we accept Ackerman's definition of education as "the transmission of a culture across generations," one would have to conclude that neither the Jewish school nor the American school itself is adequate for this task, given the present climate of opinion in America.

As is the case in general education where only a small percentage of high schools offer programs of rigorous studies, a limited number of Jewish schools, overwhelmingly day schools, have opted for the tradition of learning. The other 'non-learning for learning's sake' approach expresses itself in general education in the ever changing fads of 'education for life adjustment,' 'self-actualization' or 'career education,' and in Jewish education in the current vogue of identity formation. One must agree with Ackerman that where primacy is given to the development of personal identity, the values of the group recede to lesser significance. Absence of a social-political ideology in education is as American as apple pie; few Jewish educators would, therefore, have the courage to make their schools *engagé* (committed), in Sartrean terms, by adhering to an overriding ideology ("self fulfillment realized only through group membership").

A few additional issues raised by Ackerman can benefit from a somewhat different interpretation. Egon Mayer's more recent studies on children of

intermarried couples are somewhat more optimistic than the findings about children of intermarriage by Fred Massarik (Mayer, 1983), quoted by Ackerman. In like manner, the crisis in Jewish teaching personnel cannot, and should not, be treated in isolation from the current crisis in teaching in America in general (decline in status, poor salaries, lack of job satisfaction, only the least academically able go into teaching, etc.). A significant omission, however, in Ackerman's analysis of the American Jewish educational scene is his silence about the acceptance of Jewish education as the prime instrument for Jewish survival at the highest level of Jewish communal leadership (e.g., statements by Martin E. Citrin, past President, Council of Jewish Federations).

While the level of funding, or even the degree of personal commitment of Jewish communal leaders does not always match the enthusiasm of verbal assertions, the climate of opinion in the councils of communal decision-making is now supportive of the Jewish educational endeavor.

So much for different interpretations of otherwise very accurately described phenomena. Now a few recent developments:

1. Ackerman is correct in asserting that "meaningful control and direct influence [on schools] are possible only when a bureau or national agency contributes directly to the funding of a project or program". However, there has been some movement precisely in this direction. The Miami model, according to which all federation allocations to schools must be validated by the bureau, is a good example. Other communities, too, have introduced some modalities of the stick-and-carrot variety. With the current vogue for accountability in general education, we may see significant changes in the direction of some influence, if not control, by bureaus on their affiliated schools.

2. New social conditions (two-career families, single parent families) have made it necessary for Jewish schools to cooperate more closely with other Jewish institutions, notably the Jewish Community Centers (for afternoon activities, child care programs, etc.) and the Jewish Family Service (for counselling and guidance, etc.).

3. Increasingly, intergenerational programs are becoming a part of the Jewish educational scene. To mention but a few – *havurot* retreats for the entire family, coordinated programs for parents and children (United Synagogue's PEP program, etc.), and the highly successful Home Start Program developed by the Baltimore Bureau of Jewish Education.

4. The day school is still growing, contrary to all projections, and now embraces close to 30% of the Jewish children (about 100,000 students) receiving a Jewish education.

5. In the curricular dialectic between "what the learner wants to learn and what he should learn," we are witnessing a return to a middle-of-the-road balance, particularly on the high school level. The smorgasboard approach of

disparate electives is being replaced by a more judicious balance of requirements in sequence and content, with adequate provisions for electives and individual choice.

6. There is significant stabilization of the teaching of the Holocaust. The flood of Holocaust courses, which must have peaked in 1978 around the time of NBC's airing of its series *Holocaust*, seems to have receded. A recent mini-study (Nadel and Frost, 1981) found only two principals, out of a total of 34 respondents, favoring the teaching of the Holocaust in elementary grades, and only four accepted techniques of dramatization and role-playing as suitable. Generally, the Holocaust is taught in grades 8 through 11, as a mini-course, or in connection with history or Jewish thought. All schools, however, reported *Yom Hashoah* (Holocaust Day) observances.

7. Israel and Zionism are taught in some fashion in all but the most right-wing Orthodox institutions. The problem is now one of methodology, underlying ideology, and suitable material.

8. Funding of congregational schools, through outright subsidies or special grants for projects, is increasing. Recently, in response to requests by federations, JESNA (Jewish Education Service of North America) published a set of guidelines to assist communities considering programs for support of synagogue affiliated schools (JESNA, 1983a).

The agenda of unfinished business in Jewish education is long, onerous and challenging. If I were to list three items which, by their seriousness, contain the essence of our educational ills I would, without hesitation, point to:

- the need to lengthen the Jewish child's stay in the Jewish school, in line with the findings of Harold Himmelfarb and Geoffrey Bock;
- the need to restore educational credibility to the supplementary school;
- the need to address our personnel crisis in Jewish education.

All three require imagination, funds, perseverance, and faith, and have no easy solutions. Yet, each of these needs can be 'tackled' if the requirements of "imagination, funds, perseverance and faith" are taken seriously.

The Himmelfarb and Bock studies posit a minimum requirement of 3,000-4,000 hours of exposure to Jewish education for it to have a meaningful impact. This minimum is easily met by day school students. Orthodox day schools offer a Judaic/Hebraic program of 15 hours weekly which, in a 40 week school year, totals 600 classroom hours. Grades 1 through 6 alone accommodate 3,600 hours of Jewish schooling. The equivalent figures for the Solomon Schechter network of schools (Conservative) are 12 hours of Judaic/Hebraic study weekly which yields, for a school year of 40 weeks, a total of 480 hours yearly. The magic figures of Himmelfarb and Bock therefore, are attainable.

Not so in the supplementary school. Operating generally on a maximum of 6 hours per week, and usually on a curtailed school year of 36 weeks, the annual yield in classroom hours is no more than 218 per year. For a typical

elementary supplementary school, with a five-year program, the students would accumulate only 1,080 hours of instruction.

Supplementary high schools generally offer four hours a week. A four year high school program would thus yield only 576 hours annually which, even added to the elementary years total, still falls short of the required minimum needed for 'impact'.

With imagination and perseverance, this difference can be made up substantially by *shabbatonim* and retreats in the course of the school year and by structuring educational camping experiences and trips to Israel for the vacation period. It is now estimated that national high school enrollment in supplementary schools is 35,000. Teen camping and Israel trips are, likewise, on the increase.

The supplementary school has surfaced as an issue of concern to the community at large and it would be fair to say that this concern is due not only to increased pressures for community funding. Calls for realistic goals, learning accountability, curricular overhaul, etc., in the supplementary school domain are heard throughout the land. This has been translated into a heightened consciousness of the needs of the supplementary school. Thus, *Jewish Education* devoted a full issue (Winter 1982) to the supplementary school; in 1983, JESNA ran a series of regional conferences on the "Viability of the Congregational School" and devoted its Board Institute to this issue (JESNA, 1983b).

It is difficult and too early to assess whether this incipient rise of concern about the supplementary school has developed practical and successful models of learning-oriented, goal-directed supplementary schools. Yet, the heightened consciousness about the need for revitalizing this schooling instrumentality, coupled with the rising interest in mergers of smaller institutions (if not outright communalization of supplementary schools in smaller communities), bode well for those who view the restoration of educational credit in the supplementary schools as a prime necessity.

Far more difficult is the crisis in Jewish school personnel, particularly Jewish teaching personnel. Supply is short, salaries are low, status is non-existent. With the exception of the day school which still, by and large, employs the elite of the teaching corps in terms of credentials and teaching skills, most of the classes in our supplementary school system are staffed by non-professionals (or paraprofessionals) with varying degrees of under-qualification.

Smaller isolated communities have awakened to this crisis sooner than the larger concentrations of Jewish population. Thus, in Omaha, Nebraska, the community instituted a communal hiring system. Hebrew teachers are engaged by the community and, under proper arrangement with front line institutions, are assigned to serve in several schools, day and supplementary.

The result is that the community attracts teachers who are offered a living salary, fringe benefits, and some status as communal employees. A similar plan for a pilot program in communal hiring of Jewish teaching personnel is currently awaiting approval in a larger eastern community. These are hardly world shattering developments, not even significant beginnings unless this trend mushrooms. The major breakthrough, a serious country-wide resolve to upgrade and professionalize Jewish teaching is, at this writing, a combination of dream and hope.

We have, however, a heightened awareness of this crisis. Upper echelon Jewish education officialdom, heretofore unparadonably neglectful about the concerns of teachers, have at long last awakened to the need for action. Thus Miami, via its bureau, offers a wide array of fringe benefits to licensed full-time Hebrew teachers; Baltimore introduced incentive grants for professional growth; New York, through the Fund for Jewish Education, allocates a considerable amount of money for several programs falling under the rubric of educators welfare (health insurance, life insurance, etc.)

To repeat: the unfinished business in Jewish education is long, onerous and challenging. Only a combination of imagination, funds, perseverance and faith will provide the beginning for serious renewal.

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Alvin I. Schiff

Any attempt to provide within the pages of a single essay an all-embracing analysis of the multi-faceted nature of a complex social-cultural-religious communal enterprise developed over a period of 250 years is fraught with the dangers of oversight on the one hand, and over-emphasis on the other. Nevertheless, Walter Ackerman has succeeded in presenting a comprehensive, insightful and objective treatment of a difficult subject.

The comments that follow provide some thoughts from a fellow sojourner whose background and experience in some ways parallel Ackerman's, and in others, differ. These remarks will serve as a footnote to Ackerman's fine presentation.

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From the very beginning, American Jewish education was confronted with the impossible task of relating the Jewish school to the development of American Judaism and to the larger American setting – transmitting and vouchsafing Jewish life while the Jewish community was adjusting to the open society.

The enormity of the task was confounded by two realities:

- the shift of interest and passion of the acculturating Jews from Jewish learning to secular learning (witness the Jewish talent on university campuses and the success of Jews in the professions); and
- the voluntary nature of fiscal support for Jewish education.

These two realities combined to deprive Jewish education of the necessary resources to insure its full effectiveness. Neither the human nor financial resources necessary for maximum effectiveness were available to Jewish schooling.

Despite this condition, several valiant efforts were made over the years to provide effective Jewish schooling. The yeshivoth and day schools are prime examples of swimming against the tide. As Walter Ackerman correctly points out in his essay, the indefatigable efforts of a small group of committed Orthodox leaders against the strong opposition of most segments of the community actually changed the face of Jewish education in North America.

This phenomenon deserves wider treatment in a comprehensive essay. Moreover, some of the statistics relating to the day school movement need updating. In 1984 some 130,000 students were enrolled in yeshivoth and day schools in North America. The per capita costs ranged from \$1,200 to \$6,500 and the tuition fees – while generally not reflecting the full cost of instruction – varied accordingly (JESNA, 1984). The average cost per pupil for elementary school is about \$3,000. For yeshiva high schools, it is approximately \$4,200.

Some 4,000 Jewish studies teachers and 4,500 general studies teachers are employed in Jewish day schools.¹ Their annual salaries range from \$8,000 to

\$30,000, averaging \$16,000 (Schiff, 1982). Most of the Jewish studies personnel have instructional loads in excess of twenty hours a week. The average day school is administered by three kinds of personnel – Jewish studies principals, general studies principals and fiscal-plant administrators. Their annual wages generally compare very favorably with their public and private school counterparts, ranging from \$15,000 to \$75,000 per year, depending upon size of school, location, administrative duties, hours of employment and length of service (Board of Jewish Education of Greater New York, 1984a).

The annual cost of Jewish day school education is about \$400 million, of which Federation support accounts for 7% (Council of Jewish Federations, 1984).² Interestingly, financial support from government sources in New York State (where two thirds of the yeshiva day school enrollment is found) in the form of lunch subsidies, surplus food, free bus transportation, per pupil textbook allotments and special grants made via Federal Chapter I and II programs (formerly Title I and Title IV programs) add up to more than \$25 million per year,³ equalling and even surpassing the total allocations to Jewish day schools provided by Federations throughout North America. Government support is essentially the result of the efforts of the Board of Jewish Education of Greater New York and the *Agudat Israel* of America, in collaboration with Catholic and independent organizations in New York State.

The phenomenon of the *kollelim* and *yeshivoth gedoloth*, in which thousands of teenagers and young men spend as many as 60 hours a week engrossed in Talmud studies, deserves more recognition and discussion. This is paralleled by the growth of *Beth Jacob* and other Orthodox girls' post-secondary seminars and teacher training schools.

Ackerman correctly notes that "the men who laid the theoretical foundations of American Jewish education eschewed the model of the parochial school". It must be added that, with rare exceptions, they changed their views later in life. In fact, Isaac Berkson, one of the vehement opponents of the Jewish day school idea, suggested in the late 1960s that the day school is the rightful heir of the communal Talmud Torah (Schiff, 1966).

There are about 2,400 Jewish schools in the United States, of which 25% are day schools and yeshivoth, which account for about one-third of the total Jewish school enrollment. The decline of supplementary school enrollment in the United States began in 1962. In New York, it commenced three years later. Thanks to the steady increase of Jewish day school pupil population which began in the early 1940s, by 1978 day school enrollment in New York exceeded supplementary school enrollment. By 1984, Jewish day school enrollment comprised 60% of the total pupils in Greater New York Jewish schools.

Family support and complete association with the goals of the schools which their children attend is an earmark of the sectarian and Hasidic yeshivah and many modern Orthodox day schools.

In discussing the problem of continuation after elementary school, the difference in drop-out rate between supplementary school and day school must be demonstrated. From information available in Greater New York, about 90% of all yeshiva and day school graduates enroll in Jewish day high schools (Board of Jewish Education of Greater New York, 1984b).

Of the total New York day school enrollment 23% are secondary school students. Continuation outside of New York is substantially less prevalent because of the lack of high school facilities in many smaller and middle-sized communities. This lack is due in large measure to the low level of commitment by parents to Jewish all-day high school education.

It is true "that most Jewish schools in this country have not succeeded in imparting any kind of real Jewish knowledge to their students" and that ways must be found to develop "the minimum of intellectual competence required of the literate Jew." Ackerman correctly stresses the need for Judaic literacy. However, needed here is greater recognition of the importance of the affective domain, of the Jewish life 'processes' in and out of school. This is necessary to provide motivation for learning and to compensate for the lack of Jewish experience in the home.

Examples of summer camping as an effective educational tool in this mode should include yeshiva and day school camps, particularly Camp *Morasha*, sponsored by the Max Stern Community Services Division of Yeshiva University.

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While no definitive study has been made of the ineffectiveness of the supplementary school, one of the reasons – to use the words of David Seeley, former executive of the New York State Public School Association, in commenting on the ineffectiveness of public education –, is "undeliverable merchandise." The children don't want to learn what the parents do not consider important.

While, as Ackerman states, "American Jews join synagogues and send their children to Jewish schools because they are genuinely desirous of identifying themselves as Jews and want their children to remain Jews," synagogue membership does not guarantee or obligate Jewish commitment or religious observance.

The essentiality of the role of the family must be highlighted in any attempt to improve Jewish supplementary schooling. The influence of parents and peers is adequately demonstrated in the educational research litera-

ture. This basic ingredient of effective Jewish schools merits greater emphasis.

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Several studies show why Jewish parents do not send their children to Jewish schools.

In 1979, the Fund for Jewish Education in Greater New York sponsored a study to determine the factors involved in non-affiliation of Jewish parents and non-enrollment of Jewish pupils (Federation of Jewish Philanthropies, 1979). The findings of this study corroborate several informal surveys made previously by the Board of Jewish Education of Greater New York and can be classified into the following categories:

1. Alienation from religion. Families do not join synagogues. Congregational affiliation is not part of their lifestyle. Some parents simply "dislike the temple" or "dislike the rabbi." Many young adults "are proud of our Jewishness, but not of the Jewish religion." They do not see religion playing a role in their modern lifestyle. They feel comfortable associating themselves with other Jews and Israel, but not actively. Most parents have no quarrel with the quality of Jewish education, about which they admit they know very little. However, they do not appreciate what they think is the religious content of Jewish education.

2. Autonomy of children. Parental permissiveness with children is an important dimension of home life. When parents involve their children in the decision of whether or not to enroll in a Jewish school, the results are usually negative since the children's friends, Jewish and non-Jewish, do not go to a Jewish school. Also, the parents do not appreciate the "loss of free time after public school hours." Some parents themselves had negative personal experiences in Jewish education, and because of their unfavorable childhood memories, do not force their children to go to a Jewish school.

3. Assimilation and materialism. Parents feel that Jewish education is too expensive. Jewish education for their children is not important enough for them to part with their hard-earned money. By their own admission, most parents are materialistic. Paying for Jewish schooling leaves less money for social, recreational and family activities. They resent paying synagogue membership dues, since they do not believe strongly in synagogue affiliation. Were the synagogue fees nominal or nonexistent, some of them might join. Parents are not aware of the availability of financial aid or scholarships, if such help is needed. Furthermore, some parents may feel it demeaning to appear before a scholarship committee which is often made up of their peers.

A 1978 study by the American Association for Jewish Education on non-enrollment in Buffalo indicates the major reasons for parents not to enroll their children (Pollak, 1978):

- they were not interested in giving their children a Jewish education;
- none of the known schools provides the desired type of Jewish education;
- the cost of Jewish education is too high;
- the quality of Jewish schooling is not satisfactory;
- attendance at two schools would be too burdensome.

In 1980, under a grant made to the Lubavitch Youth Organization by the Fund for Jewish Education, a telephone survey was made of 400 Brooklyn families not enrolling their children in Jewish schools (Lubavitch Youth Organization, 1982). The reasons for non-enrollment revealed by this survey are: financial inability, transportation difficulties, "fear of conflict at home", "fear of segregation from peers" and single-parent families. The latter factor was found to be the most significant.

The significance of the role of intermarriage in non-enrollment is demonstrated by the findings of surveys made by the Board of Jewish Education of Greater New York in 1978 and 1979 (Schiff, 1979). These studies show that only three percent of the suburban supplementary school population were children of intermarrieds, whereas the level of intermarriage was estimated to be over 20% during the period 1958-1970, when the parents of these children were married.

The reasons for non-enrollment suggest the need for development of special outreach programs to unaffiliated families, to single parent families, to Jewish high school students in public schools and to the children of intermarried couples. Special efforts must be made to recruit children into early childhood education programs and to develop alternatives to synagogue-based supplementary school programs. Synagogues currently distinguish between formal and informal educational activities. Integrating these two kinds of programs would be helpful in encouraging continuation. Similarly, synagogues, community centers and YMHA's have to pool their efforts and staff resources in reaching and teaching teenagers. Finally, ways must be found to help make Jewish education available to parents who cannot afford the escalating school and synagogue fees.

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Some of the cogent points Ackerman makes that need to be stressed over and over again are:

- the need to upgrade the professional and economic status of teaching personnel;
- the need to attract talented administrative and supervisory personnel to Jewish education;
- the centrality and importance of Israel and Israel-centered activity to the Jewish education process;

- the need to remedy the lack of "reliable empirical evidence concerning the effectiveness of Jewish schooling when the criteria are the acquisition of knowledge or the development of skills";
- the need to improve the lack of understanding regarding "the relationship between what is learned and the investments involved";
- the need to understand the relationship of funding to "meaningful control and direct influence" in Jewish education;
- the need for long-range, cooperative community-wide planning to eliminate some of the partisanship polarizing the Jewish community.

Notes

1. Pupil enrollment estimates for 1983-84 obtained from the Jewish Education Service of North America (JESNA), New York, and the Office of Research, Board of Jewish Education of Greater New York, Inc.
2. Figure for annual cost of day school education obtained by multiplying number of students by average cost.
3. Based on information from the Departments of School Food Services and Government Relations, Board of Jewish Education of Greater New York.

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Michael Zeldin

Walter Ackerman's description of the development of American Jewish education and its current status is both comprehensive and insightful in its analysis of contemporary sociological and educational realities. It will not be my purpose here to disagree with his portrayal nor to refute any of the particulars of the situations he depicts. Rather, I will seek to identify some of the critical trends currently in their nascent stage which might influence the future course of Jewish education in the United States.

The major theme in the development of Jewish education in the United States is, as Ackerman points out, the full acceptance by American Jews of the public schools. From the 1870s through the middle of the twentieth century, the supplementary pattern of Jewish education was hardly challenged, but following World War II, the emergence of full-time Jewish educational settings marked a break from the American Jewish tradition. While the Orthodox pioneered in these efforts, by the early 1970s every sub-group within the Jewish community had some form of Jewish day school throughout America.

What is remarkable about the development of Jewish day schools over the past decade is their geometric rate of growth. Every year in communities all over America new day schools open their doors. Accompanying the rapid growth of Jewish day schools is the decline in enrollment of Jews in the public schools. Though no systematic empirical data are available to indicate the rate of attendance of Jews in public schools, it seems clear that Jewish attendance in public schools is declining, especially in large metropolitan areas.

It is equally clear that many Jews are disturbed by what they see as a decline in the quality of public education in America. Whether or not the schools are actually as mediocre as the spate of national studies on education conducted in the early 1980s seems to imply,¹ the important fact is that Jewish (and other) parents perceive the quality of educational experiences offered by the nation's public schools to be poor (Syme, 1983). For the Jewish community which has, as Ackerman notes, looked to the public school "as

the avenue which leads to success and status” and to “personal development and career opportunities,” this new perception represents a dramatic departure from the past. In the 1970s and 1980s, Jews have begun to “shop at the private school market”² as never before in American history in order to enhance their opportunities for future educational and occupational advancement. The public school, in the eyes of many though by no means all Jewish parents, is no longer the universal avenue to success; the private school is now seen as the road to continued upward mobility for Jewish children. Even those parents whose Jewish identification is marginal often select a Jewish day school for their children because it offers the best general education available (Kelman, 1978).

But as Jewish children leave the public schools, many of them select private schools other than Jewish day schools, so that in certain geographic areas, the private schools have a significant percentage of Jewish students. Since these schools are not forbidden from introducing religious instruction, it may be possible to include Jewish religious instruction (as an elective) within some of the programs. If the perception that the public schools do not and cannot offer quality educational experiences continues and expands, we can expect to see further growth in the private sector of American education, with a resultant growth both in Jewish day schools and in the number of Jewish children attending other private schools.

It is clear, however, that regardless of future growth in Jewish day schools, the majority of Jewish children will continue to receive their Jewish education in a supplementary setting. One of the most startling features of supplementary Jewish education in the last decades is the large number of educational options that have become available to parents to choose from. There was a time not too long ago when each synagogue offered only a single program of schooling for all students. The stereotypical view was that Reform congregations offered Sunday schools, Conservative ones provided afternoon Hebrew schools, and the Orthodox developed day schools. These sharp distinctions among the movements have become blurred in more ways than one. It is clear to most observers that Reform congregations have provided afternoon Hebrew schools and even a few day schools, that Conservative synagogues often have Sunday schools and occasionally day schools and that some Orthodox synagogues have educational programs other than day schools.

What has been less apparent is that even within a single institution the options are often numerous. School programs are offered at different times of day on different days of the week; they are designed for fast learners and slow learners, for children with handicaps and learning disabilities and for children with special psychological needs resulting from divorce or death in the family. Synagogues frequently offer educational options that move beyond the confines of the school. It is thus not uncommon for schools to incorporate

informal programs as options within the school, usually in the form of one or several weekend retreats away from the city, to supplement formal classroom learning. Trips to Israel and summer camp experiences may also be part of the synagogue's educational offerings, yet these are rarely coordinated in any formal way with the year-round educational program. At the high school and junior high school level, schools often substitute student electives for a fixed series of courses. The rash of new materials from 'cottage industry publishers,' especially 'Alternatives in Religious Education', often becomes the basis for an elective curriculum that explores topics of concern to teenagers from a Jewish perspective. It may be that the difficulty of maintaining smaller schools lies precisely in their inability to guarantee that a variety of educational programs are available from which children and parents can choose.

A second aspect of the proliferation of educational options has developed in response to demographic and other sociological demands. As the American population migrates from the midwest and northeast to the Sun Belt, new community profiles are emerging. In some communities, the overwhelming majority of the population is beyond the child-bearing and even the child-rearing age. The 'empty nesters' and 'senior adults' who populate these communities are demanding educational services from the synagogue and from the Jewish community as never before. These communities may have few children to populate the religious school but may have a vast reservoir of adults who are eager to participate in Jewish educational activities.

Other communities may be witnessing a 'baby boomlet' as the post-war baby boom generation begins to have children of its own. While this generation is having children at a lower rate than previous generations (giving rise to fears of reductions in the Jewish population in the future), nonetheless, this highly educated generation is producing a substantial number of children. Enrollment in kindergartens in many communities is double today than what it was ten years ago, indicating a possible growth in religious schools in the decade to come. Not only does this spurt in population suggest a trend toward increased religious school enrollment in these communities, but it also opens entirely new educational possibilities. Jewish programs for pre- and post-natal care, for infants and toddlers with their parents, for young parents, for nursery school children, etc., are provided as options in many communities. Young parents are flocking to hands-on, how-to classes in celebrating the Jewish holidays. These young parents, third and fourth generation Americans, realizing that they have lost touch with their 'roots' are searching for concrete ways to regain a connection with their heritage, and communities are providing them with educational options to meet their needs. Synagogues are also involved in a variety of programs of family education which seek to provide parents with classes whose Jewish content parallels the subject matter their children are studying, or which provide opportunities for children and their parents to study together.

A third factor leading to the expansion of the network of educational options available within synagogues results from the concern about the high rate of intermarriage. The Reform movement's pioneering efforts in outreach to non-Jews, to encourage them to "choose Judaism" (Kukoff, 1981) and encourage mixed married couples to participate in synagogue life and raise their children as Jews, has led to the development of programs aimed at this newly-recognized population. Courses for converts have long been offered in communities throughout the country; but for the first time, programs which blend group counselling with Jewish education are being offered for people who have already converted and for couples in which the non-Jewish member has decided not to convert. Since it is unlikely that the rate of intermarriage will decrease in the near future, the need for educational programs for adults who are intermarried and for their children will become more urgent if we are not to lose these people to Judaism.

The expanding list of educational opportunities offered by synagogues has created the need for a new type of synagogue professional. No longer can the functions of the synagogue school principal be limited to the administration of the religious school. The synagogue's educational director must be an educational leader who is sensitive to the needs and possibilities of the community. The educator must be able to maintain the existing programs of the synagogue, to administer and direct them and to work towards their continual improvement. But he or she must also be able to develop a vision of what Jewish education can be within the synagogue without being restrained by the limitations of the past.

Graduate professional programs in Jewish education seek to train young educators to fill precisely this role. Concurrent with the professionalization that results from high-level graduate training, there is a renewed interest in Jewish educational research, defined broadly as the theoretical and empirical inquiry into the nature of the Jewish educational enterprise. While still in its infancy, this movement promises to deepen our understanding of the nature of Jewish education and ultimately to lead to improved policy-making and practice. Together, the professionalization of the practitioner and the development of a broadly-defined research enterprise promise to contribute to higher quality educational experiences for those children and adults who choose to participate in the broad array of Jewish educational opportunities that are and will be available in the American Jewish community.

Notes

1. See, for example, the report of President Reagan's blue ribbon panel on excellence in education, "A Nation at Risk."
2. In a speech before the UAHC-CCAR Commission on Jewish Education in November, 1981 ("Reform Day Schools – Why We Changed Our Minds"), Rabbi Samuel E. Karff explained: "The public schools in the Temple neighborhood are quite viable, but parents who seek a higher level of educational excellence in classrooms of limited size are opting increasingly for a private primary school education for their children. There is little if anything we can do to influence those choices. We envisage that the majority of children whom we enroll in our Day School would have been headed for some other private primary school program."

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