

#1 MONOGRAPHS FROM THE MANDEL FOUNDATION – ISRAEL

Jewish Seymour Fox
Education and Israel Scheffler
& Jewish
& Continuity:
Prospects & Limitations



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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

At the time of the publication of this monograph, Professor Seymour Fox ז"ל was President of the Mandel Institute and served as Chairman of the Academic Board of the School for Educational Leadership and the Center for Advanced Professional Educators in Jerusalem, Israel. He was widely published in the field of general and Jewish education.

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Today Professor Scheffler is Victor S. Thomas Professor of Education and Philosophy, Emeritus at Harvard University and Scholar-in-Residence at the Mandel Center for Studies in Jewish Education at Brandeis University.. He has published extensively in the field of philosophy and education.

EDITOR'S NOTE

The monographs in this series reflect the work of the Mandel Foundation – Israel with educators, scholars and community leaders on issues related to the development of leadership, the articulation of content for Jewish education and educational policy.

It is appropriate that the paper "Jewish Education and Jewish Continuity: Prospects and Limitations," co-authored by Professors Seymour Fox ז"ל and Israel Scheffler, is the first in the series. It was commissioned by a group of prominent leaders of the North American Jewish community who constituted the Commission on Jewish Education in North America (1988-1990). While they considered plans for the improvement of Jewish education, a question arose as to the basic assumption that Jewish education leads to Jewish continuity.

In their paper, Fox and Scheffler respond to this challenge.

D. Marom

JEWISH EDUCATION & JEWISH CONTINUITY: PROSPECTS & LIMITATIONS

By Seymour Fox and Israel Scheffler

The linkage of the concepts continuity and education in public discussions of Jewish education is a fairly new phenomenon, encountered in its full force in the deliberations of the Commission on Jewish Education in North America. This group of community leaders, educators, scholars, rabbis and principals of philanthropic foundations, having studied the many problems facing Jewish education, decided that a massive philanthropic program would have to be undertaken to enable such education to contribute significantly to the continuity of the Jewish people.

In the deliberations of the Commission the question arose: Do we actually know that Jewish education leads to continuity? And if we do not know, can we in clear conscience galvanize the Jewish community and insist that Jewish education be placed at the top of the community agenda? If we must change our priorities and undertake to change the community climate, recruit community leaders to the cause of Jewish education, provide increased funding to enlarge the scope, raise the standards and improve the quality of Jewish education, don't we need to 'know' that a successful Jewish education will necessarily lead to continuity?

From one point of view, it might be supposed that the issue is trivial, since it is self-evident that education leads to continuity. From this point of view, there is a necessary connection between education and continuity, and the issue requires no further empirical study or deliberation. For if education is understood to encompass all the socializing influences that flow from one generation to the next, and if continuity implies a reflection of these socializing influences within the latter generation, certainly education involves continuity.

Ralph Barton Perry, in his book *Realms of Value*² speaks of education as involving inheritance, participation and contribution. Each generation provides a heritage to the next generation by guiding its initiation into the prevailing social process, thus embodying this process into its current life; in this way, each succeeding generation is enabled to contribute to the future in its turn, as it grows to maturity. Inheritance, participation and contribution are inseparably intertwined; constituting the basis of a necessary connection between education and continuity- since contribution inevitably embodies the influence of the heritage acquired from the past.

Nor is the situation altered if we depart from the broad notion of education as socialization and restrict our attention to deliberate educational activity alone. Our earlier conclusion again follows: any intervention you undertake is going to reverberate into the future. It is going to affect the next generation in ways that will be seen to have some continuity with what went before. Indeed, even the most radical rejection of the past - for example, the Russian Revolution - is recognizably continuous with the past, reflecting the habits of mind and the culture which revolutionists received from their predecessors. Unless the content of continuity is further constrained or specified, there is indeed nothing you can do to avoid continuity. If the whole present generation of Jews were to assimilate, continuity, in some form or other, would still be discernible. The very terms of the rebellion against or the disappearance of traditional forms would betray the influence of the past. Thus,

with continuity guaranteed, we might suppose that we need no further investigation, reflection or action to assess, improve or reform our accepted educational practices. We need only to continue educating as we have in the past. This is a comforting formula, indeed, that allows us to continue to do just as we have been doing, without further effort. This conclusion is, however, a *reductio ad absurdum*.

The contemporary Jewish concern is not with continuity in the abstract, but with continuity in a quite restricted sense. What is at stake for Jewish education is not just any form of continuity, but specifically the maintenance of Jewish loyalties as distinct from assimilation or rejection or rebellion. To be sure, assimilation is in a general way continuous, but such continuity is too weak to represent our concern. We are talking specifically about people who continue to think of themselves as Jews and who make serious efforts to raise their children as Jews in turn, retaining positive and vital connections with the Jewish heritage. The question of linking education with continuity in this special sense is no longer trivial but momentous. It is in fact an open question whether any of the forms of deliberate education we devise will, in fact, prevent assimilation or overcome it. Can we hope for a positive answer to this question?

Can Jewish education lead to the positive continuity we have outlined, in a world where Jews are guaranteed full rights, and where their achievements and identities as Americans, as people engaged in business, science and politics are not always congruent with their status as committed and practicing Jews? Do we know how to develop and sustain an educational practice that will indeed promote continuity? Our heterogeneous society is, after all, permeated by competing social forces that counteract the development of Jewish identity or involvement. Our society produces what Lawrence Cremin³ has termed an "ecology of education" that is inimical to Jewish education and that actively promotes assimilation into the larger society. It is this challenge that must be addressed.⁴

For the Jewish educational establishment to meet this challenge requires it to embark on a many-sided program of research and development:

1. To explore the causal relationships between education and positive continuity, and
2. To strive to develop the kinds of teaching and learning that might be reasonably expected to promote positive Jewish self-identification and Jewish creativity.

It is not at all clear that the community of educators has as yet decided to undertake this assignment. We are not aware of any continuous or systematic discussion of this issue. In fact, we believe that many educators are inclined to take the position that their function is to continue to teach the ideas and practices of the tradition without asking whether their teaching is likely to promote positive Jewish continuity. There is nothing in response to the issue of continuity comparable with the efforts with which we are familiar from personal experience, that have been invested in the teaching of Bible. When the Melton Research Center at the Jewish Theological Seminary⁵ decided in the early 1960's to investigate how the Bible might be taught so as to speak to the hearts and minds of students, it invested enormous energy to deal with issues such as: What are the Biblical ideas and themes with which the supplementary school student should grapple? How might these ideas and themes be presented so as to foster internalization, commitment and appropriate action? Theory (of Bible, theology, philosophy, psychology and curriculum) was accordingly related to practice (classroom experimentation, teacher education, monitoring) and, as a result, an experimental pedagogy was developed.

It is not necessary to describe here the systematic efforts that have been invested for 50 years to develop the Ramah camps as an educational setting, capable of competing with the spiritual environment that our children inhabit. Such efforts are described in a volume edited by Sylvia Ettenberg and Geraldine Rosenfeld.⁶ It is true, that in neither the Melton Center example nor in the Ramah experience has there as yet been adequate evaluation of the real world effects on Jewish continuity. In this respect, much further work remains to be done.

However, in both cases, the conscious effort was to bridge theory and practice - to devise, as a result of reflective deliberation, a sufficiently comprehensive approach to the teaching of Jewish materials in the actual environment of our children as would give grounds for further practical assessment, thus addressing the challenge of continuity in a serious way.

How shall we begin if we are to initiate a program of research and development for positive Jewish education in the contemporary world? There are many possibilities. We here suggest taking a lead from research on some of the educational reforms in the 1980's in the United States. Scholars and researchers, such as Marshall Smith, Sara Lightfoot and David Cohen⁷ have argued that educational reform makes a significant difference in institutions where there is a clear educational vision, where educators are inspired by this vision and have translated this vision into goals that directly guide classroom practice. Here is a hypothesis that might well be taken as a promising start for research and development efforts in contemporary Jewish education.

Is it conceivable that we-might think otherwise? Is not our history of education the history of ideas that have inspired visions of education that led to educational reform? The ideas about Jewish learning and scholarship of the Gaon of Vilna and the Brisker Rov (Rabbi of Brisk) led to the reform of the yeshivot of Lithuania and Poland, The centrality of the ethical teachings of the Musar movement led by Rabbi Israel Salanter⁸ continue to affect education to this day. A challenging book has been written that describes the ideas of those who inspired the Zionist youth movements and educational system in the pre-State period and in the early history of the State of Israel: the ideas and the visions of Ahad Ha'am, Joseph Chaim Brenner, Berl Katznelson, Yitzhak Sadeh, Yigal Alon, Yair Stem and Vladimir Jabotinsky.⁹ An analogous task is what the late Gerson Cohen, in his penetrating chapter on a paidaia for Jewish education, urged us to undertake for American Judaism.¹⁰

We suggest that a first step to be taken in a program to study the potential for an effective Jewish education in our time is to disclose the vision, or more correctly the visions, of Jewish education that might address the prospective life situations, thought worlds and spiritual environments of our people.

In fact the raw materials for such a study are bountiful. Buber, Rosenzweig, Hirsch, Kook, Soloveitchik, Heschel, Kaplan and Baek have developed ideas that can challenge the creative educator to invent new strategies, new methods and possibly even new institutions for Jewish education.¹¹

Theology, philosophy and the ideas of the great periods of Jewish history have been

illuminated by the meticulous work of numerous scholars.

To the more cautious amongst us who will point to the gap between the ideas appropriate for general philosophy and theology and the elements of a philosophy of Jewish education - between research in the history of ideas and a paidaia that can inspire educational practice - we want to report on a contemporary example of work in progress intended to close this gap. The Mandel Institute in Jerusalem has undertaken a project that will present alternative visions of an idea! Jewish education.¹² The participants include creative educators and social scientists who are working with scholars of Jewish studies, philosophy and education to apply their ideas to educational practice. Professor Moshe Greenberg, one of the participants, has written a moving essay entitled *Hayinu Ke'Cholmim* ("We Were Like Those Who Dream: A Profile of an Effective Judaic Education"). A summary of this rich essay cannot be undertaken here. However, let us mention some of his ideas that we believe can serve as the basis for fruitful educational experimentation.

Greenberg's conception of the educated Jew is based on a conception of human nature, or more specifically a personality theory, that views the person as a spiritual being. Greenberg assumes that human beings have a basic need to understand what is of ultimate significance in the world. Material success, as rewarding as it may be, is never sufficient.

Furthermore, Greenberg affirms that the Jewish classical texts, the Bible, the Talmud, Midrash and the Commentaries, point to a transcendent "realm of ultimate significance. For Greenberg, the Commentaries are particularly crucial, for it is here that each generation has contributed to the never-ending search for an understanding of ultimate value. Parshanut (interpretation) is a process, a standing invitation to all Jews to master the text, expand its meaning and thereby extend the impact of the tradition. The Hebrew language and close textual analysis are indispensable for Greenberg's conception of the educated Jew. It is difficult to conceive of a sophisticated understanding of the tradition except in the original Hebrew.

We now quote from Greenberg's essay a passage in which he states four aims of a successful Jewish education, from his perspective:

- חינוך יהודי ייבחן על פי הצלחתו להנחיל את תוצרו ארבע תכונות:
- א. חיבת לימוד התורה (ספרי היסוד וכל שבמתכונתם) וחיבת מעשה המצווה "שבין אדם למקום".
 - ב. קבלת התורה כמורה דרך בתחום שבין אדם לחברו, עם ההכרה שקביעותיה המוסריות הן פרי פעולה פרשנית בלתי נפסקת.
 - ג. הנהגת אורה-חיים היוצר קהילה.
 - ד. זיקה לכל ישראל בכל ארצות פזוריהם.

The criterion of effectiveness for Judaic Education is its ability to instill in its product four properties:

1. The love of learning Torah (that is, the basic books and all that is involved in their framework) and the love of performing the Mitzvot (the Commandments) applying "between humans and God".
2. Acceptance of the Torah as the guide to the relations between humans,

recognizing that its moral determinations are the fruit of everlasting interpretative activity.

3. The cultivation of a way of life conducive to the creation of a community.
4. Affiliation with the entire Jewish people.

To strive to promote these four qualities, to build an educational program based on these principles, will challenge our creativity and ingenuity. Let us consider some of the challenges that flow from Greenberg's aims, as listed above. Because learning and the acceptance of the Torah are not only intellectual, not only spiritual, but must be lived and require a community—it is doubtful that such an education can be undertaken only in schools or in formal settings. It most likely needs to be undertaken in enclaves which offer a subculture where the students can experience and learn what it means to act on ideas and where their search for meaning can be responded to. This idea suggests efforts to expand day schools so that they include informal education in youth groups, in trips to Israel and in summer camps.

In such settings, we could hope to undertake education for Jewish citizenship and American citizenship, as well as the continuous dialogue between them. Such an education would count heavily on early childhood experiences in an environment in which Hebrew would be mastered and curiosity nurtured. For without mastery of the Hebrew language and an increasingly sophisticated curiosity, the encounter with the text would be dull and lifeless, as the student matures, Greenberg would challenge us to develop a curriculum that would help the student develop love of learning and commitment to the tradition.

Such a curriculum would attempt to foster skills of reading and analysis that would help the student choose behavior consistent with the principles of the tradition. Some of the skills and assignments for the student to master would be:

1. Decoding: leading to the mastery of the language.
2. Memorization: leading to *bekiyut* (erudition).
3. Understanding: knowing the assumptions and principles of the author, the redactor or the scholar.
4. Comparison: comparing and contrasting of principles.
5. Analysis of case studies: requiring the student, to analyze real or hypothetical situations according to principles disclosed by the textual analysis.
6. Experimentation: applying competing principles within the tradition and confronting the consequences.
7. Behavior: learning that authentic Jewish education places reading, analysis and behavior on one continuum.¹³

Students who master such skills might be able to join in the process of *parshanut*

(interpretation). They certainly would understand and appreciate it.

Green berg's paper is a rich source for educational ideas that can be translated into practice within educational enclaves such as those we have described.

With a vision, with goals in hand, the educator can strive to create means consistent with the goals and visions. The means would have to be monitored and evaluated and good practices (methods that have impact) would have to be sorted and separated from those that do not "work". Means and methods, curriculum and pedagogy, as they are implemented, as they succeed and fail, would serve as a challenge, as a basis for modifying the visions that form these goals. The constraints of empirical feasibility and the learning that in fact occurs as a result of implementation offer legitimate challenges to the refinements and modification of theory.¹⁴

To strive to find an effective causal relationship between Jewish education and continuity will require a massive investment in existing institutions and the establishment of sites where thinking, research, experimentation and evaluation can be undertaken. Experimentation in educational settings will challenge and offer insights for theory and educational theory in turn will inspire creativity and invention. It is a massive undertaking, but it is appropriate for the huge challenge. A new era will have to be ushered in for Jewish education if education is to make the required difference, to change the trend lines. Ambitious yes, but not unrealistic.

Mort Mandel, who convened and sponsored the Commission on Jewish Education in North America, was asked one month before the first meeting of the Commission to describe what would have to be done to realize the aims of the Commission. This is how he responded:¹⁵

What we need is a hardnosed search like a search for the cure of cancer. We know what we want in the search for the cure for cancer: we want to eliminate cancer. We want to reduce the incidence of cancer. And we have been working hard at it. There are now all sorts of cancers that we've learned how to cure. The difference today from over 50 years ago is startling. There is no single, simple cure for cancer. All cancers are not the same; they are all different. But the search for the cure for cancer has changed our world. People are cured or there is remission.

I think the search for how to produce the Jewish *mensch* will never end. We will make gains; our inventory of small victories will be like building a beach with little grains of sand. We are not going to build a beach by suddenly deciding today and having it tomorrow. We know we're not going to cure cancer that way; we're not going to cure heart attacks that way. I think it's going to be very complex. So I want the search to go on by outstanding researchers, practitioners and clinicians.

If we can get people of a high enough quality studying, debating and experimenting in various universities, research institutes, yeshivot, schools and organizations, then the net result, over say a hundred years, will be something very different from what we have now. We have outstanding people seeking the cure for cancer, working in multiple centers all over the world— there must be many many centers, each specializing in elements that are important if we are to discover a cure for cancer. We need to do the same thing for Jewish continuity.

It is too early to describe the prospects or limitations. To consider prospects, we need to think, investigate and, above all to plan the steps that are required to undertake the assignment. To speak of limitations, we have to experiment and modify plans and the visions that guide these plans. This is the time to build an infrastructure and that will make possible the sort of thinking that is required. When the 30 professors of Jewish education in North America are increased to 200, when the number of graduates who specialize in education from institutions of higher Jewish learning are increased from 200 to 1,000, when successful institutions are transformed into model, experimental centers, then we will be able to judge what can happen when the necessary investment is made.

The skeptic will ask: What guarantees do we have that the Jewish community will enable such an ambitious undertaking and what guarantees do we have that if the undertaking is implemented, it will in fact succeed? To this skeptic we say: There are no prior guarantees in any important department of life. But the very demand for such guarantees is a formula for inaction and consequent failure. We need to dare to hope and we need the courage to act on the probabilities alone.

Notes

1. The Commission on Jewish Education in North America was convened in 1988 by the Mandel Associated Foundations, JCC Association and JESNA in collaboration with CJF and chaired by Morton L. Mandel of Cleveland, Ohio. The report of the Commission, *A Time to Act* (University Press of America, 1991), was issued in November 1990. Throughout this paper education is conceived as including both formal and informal education.
2. Ralph Barton Perry, *Realms of Value* (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1954), pp. 411-414
3. Lawrence A. Cremin, "Towards an Ecology of Education" in *Public Education* (New York, Basic Books, 1976), pp. 27-56.
4. See Abraham J. Karp, *Haven and Home: A History of the Jews in America* (New York, Schocken, 1985), p. 360: "Whereas in the European community, assimilation had demanded an act of disassociation from one's own group -usually apostasy - in America one would become assimilated into the larger community unless he or she expressed, in word or deed, identification with the community into which he or she was born".
5. The Melton Research Center, *A Program for Jewish Education* (New York, 1963). This effort produced materials for teachers and students such as Nahum Sarna's *Understanding Genesis* (New York, The Jewish Theological Seminary of America and McGraw Hill, 1966) and Moshe Greenberg's *Understanding Exodus: Part I*, (New York, Behrman House, 1969).
6. *The Ramah Experience: Community and Commitment* edited by Sylvia Ettenberg and Geraldine Rosenfeld (New York, The Jewish Theological Seminary of America in cooperation with The National Ramah Commission, 1983).
7. Marshall S. Smith and Jennifer O'Day, "Systemic School Reform" in *Politics of Education Association Yearbook*, 1990, pp. 233-267; Sara Lightfoot, *The Good High School— Portraits of Character and Culture* (New York, Basic Books, 1983) pp. 316-323; David K. Cohen, Eleanor Farrar and Arthur G. Powell, *The Shopping Mall High School: Winners and Losers in the Educational Marketplace* (Boston, Houghton Mifflin, 1985), pp. 305-308. See also Fred Newmann, "Beyond Common Sense in Educational Restructuring: The Issues of Content and Linkage," in *Educational Researcher*, Volume 22, Number 2, March 1993, pp. 4-13. In relation to Jewish education in supplementary schools, see Barry Holtz, *Best Practices Project: The Supplementary School* (New York, Council for Initiatives in Jewish Education 1993), p. 6.
8. See Immanuel Etkes, *Rabbi Israel Satanter and the 'Musal' Movement: Seeking the Torah of Truth* (Philadelphia, Jewish Publication Society,

1993).

9. Rachel Elboim-Dror, *Hebrew Education in Eretz Israel* (Hebrew, 2 volumes: Jerusalem, Yad Izhak Ben-Zvi Institute, 1986 and 1990).
10. Gerson D. Cohen, "From Scholarship to Paideia - A Case Study," in *From the Scholar to the Classroom: Translating Jewish Tradition into Curriculum*, edited by Seymour Fox and Geraldine Rosenfeld (New York, Melton Research Center of Jewish Education at the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1977), pp. 31-58.
11. See among others: Oded Schremer, "'Martin Bubers Concept of Personality: Implications for Education'", unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, submitted to The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1976; Michael Rosenak, "Tasks of Contemporary Jewish Theology in the Construction of Religious Educational Theory in the Diaspora," unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, submitted to the Hebrew University, 1975.
12. See forthcoming publication, *Visions of Learning: Variant Conceptions of Jewish Education*, edited by Seymour Fox and Israel Sheffler with the assistance of Daniel Marom.
13. Seymour Fox, "Ramah: A Setting for Jewish Education," in Ettenberg and Rosenfeld, *Op. cit.*, p. 22.
14. For a discussion of the notion of a "means-ends continuum in educational planning" see Israel Scheffler, *Four Pragmatists: A Critical Introduction to Peirce, James, Mead and Dewey* (London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1974), pp. 227-239.
15. The quotation is taken from the protocols of an interview conducted by Annette Hochstein, Director of the Mandel Institute, with Morton L. Mandel, June 27, 1988.