

## The Jewish Component in the Training Programs of Jewish Communal Workers

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*With regard to the dialectic of the social work and Jewish components (of training for Jewish communal service), an approach is presented which affirms that both components remain essential to effective professional practice, but rather than being viewed as competing foci, the emphasis is on their complementarity.*

Looking back upon the formation of the Graduate School of Jewish Social Work, which operated from 1925-1940, a Jewish leader speaking in 1940 commented that the successful launching of the school "was a compromise between the view of those who could see no difference between Jewish and non-Jewish social work and regarded the separate system as being without justification, and those who pointed to the need for a positive Jewish ideology for social workers whose task included concern with Jewish cultural life."<sup>1</sup>

The tension between the Jewish component and the general social work component in the educational preparation of professional personnel for the American Jewish community has been a central and pervasive issue in the almost 100 years since Jewish social welfare services have been professionalized. As with other vital aspects in Jewish life the response to this tension has varied over time, reflecting the shifting relationships between the Jewish community and the larger non-Jewish so-

ciety. So, for example, during the decades of the 1940's, 50's, and 60's, the major motivating themes of American Jews might be characterized as assimilation and "making it." It was during this period that education for professional careers in Jewish social agencies was most fully linked with graduate schools of social work. As social welfare services in America proliferated in the post-depression era, and with significant advances in the realms of social science and psychoanalysis, schools of social work flourished. The schools of social work could offer to the Jewish communal worker professional status and technical skills, both of which were responsive to the needs and priorities of the Jewish communal agencies of that period. With the task of Americanization of immigrants essentially completed the Jewish communal agencies now focused their energies on solidifying the status of the American Jewish community. To this end the Jewish agencies pursued dual objectives: to afford their Jewish clientele full access to the resources and opportunities of American life, and to maintain their historic commitment to care for their social casualties. The professional training offered at the schools of social work was ideal for these objectives.

A new set of priorities for the American Jewish community began to emerge in the late 1960's. The combination of the events associated with the Israeli Six-Day War

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<sup>1</sup> Morris D. Waldman, "Training for Jewish Communal Welfare," address delivered at National Conference of Jewish Social Welfare, May 24, 1940 (quoted in Herman Stein, "Jewish Social Work in the United States," in J. Blau, *The Characteristics of American Jews*. New York: Jewish Education Committee Press, 1965, p. 221.

and a resurgent interest in ethnicity in America led to a heightened American Jewish consciousness. Jewish leaders increasingly began to call for enriching the uniquely Jewish dimensions of the Jewish social agencies and to upgrade the Jewish commitment and background of the professional staff. It was in response to this affirmation of Jewish consciousness that a significant innovation in professional education for Jewish communal workers occurred: the emergence of specialized graduate programs in Jewish communal work.<sup>2</sup> The educational rationale of these new schools was essentially that the balance between the social work and Jewish components needed to be realigned, with more emphasis given to the Jewish component. This pertained not only to the curriculum content but to the Jewish background and commitment of the students and faculty.

Over a decade of experience with the schools of Jewish communal service affords an opportunity to assess this development and its impact on the field of Jewish communal service. On one level, while an increasing proportion of new professional staff of Jewish communal agencies are graduates of these schools, the majority of professional staff entering

Jewish communal agencies continues to come from schools of social work. But the growing presence of Jewishly committed and knowledgeable staff members in agencies in communities throughout the country contributes, in a manner disproportionate to their numbers, to enhancing the Jewish component of the agencies and their services.

On another level, ten years make available considerable experience for evaluating the manner in which the schools of Jewish communal service have responded to their educational mission. Specifically I seek to assess that unique aspect of the schools' mission: transmitting the Jewish component. This will be the focus of the remainder of this analysis.

### Defining the Jewish Component

At the outset several points need to be clarified to explain the perspective and bias I bring to defining the Jewish component in programs of professional education.

1. *One Approach:* Each of the several schools of Jewish communal service has evolved its own assumptions about the needs of the field of Jewish communal service and an appropriate educational rationale and curriculum. I will present one such approach: it is unique in some respects, similar in others. The Brandeis program, as undoubtedly is the case with the other schools, evolved in response to a dialectic between the convictions and commitments of its key faculty and realities in the university situation, many of which were beyond rational planning. In any event, my subsequent comments should be understood as representing one educational approach, and are offered not as *the* way but *a* way of preparing professional personnel to work in Jewish communal agencies.

2. *Jewish Communal Service—a Single Profession?* The question of whether there is a unitary field of Jewish communal work has been attracting increasing interest in

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<sup>2</sup> The first specialized program to train people for professional careers in Jewish communal work was organized as part of the New York Kehillah and functioned from 1916-1919. The Graduate School for Jewish Social Work operated from 1925-1939. Since 1969 at least five university based graduate programs have emerged which offer specialized concentrations in Jewish communal service. They are: Baltimore Institute of Jewish Communal Service; Brandeis University Hornstein Program; Hebrew Union College; California School of Jewish Communal Service; Joint Program of Jewish Theological Seminary and Columbia University School of Social Work; and Yeshiva School of Social Work.

recent years.<sup>3</sup> A useful perspective, introduced by Donald Feldstein, is that rather than a unitary profession, including all agencies under Jewish auspices, we may be able to distinguish a sub-set of agencies in which the Jewish purposes are more salient. So, for example, Feldstein identifies those agencies which provide "*associational services*" (i.e., recreational and residential programs for the elderly, camps, and youth programs) in which Jews seek out such services under Jewish auspices because they are desirous of receiving the service in a setting with other Jews. Accordingly it is appropriate to expect that professional staff in these agencies should have Jewish sensitivity and skill to respond to the expressed need of their clients.<sup>4</sup>

I would add two other categories of services, in which the agency function has a special Jewish dimension warranting special Jewish competence by its professional staff: a.) "*community building services*," where building and sustaining the Jewish community are the foci of the agency activi-

ties (e.g. social planning, community relations, fund-raising); and b.) "*tradition transmission services*," where the passing on of Jewish religious/culture knowledge and attitudes are central (e.g., coordination and planning of informal education programs in havurot, synagogues, youth movements, and educational settings).

There are other social services under Jewish auspices in which the clients may or may not be predominantly Jewish or in which special Jewish competence is not intrinsic to the professional function. This is the case with Jewishly sponsored clinical services where knowledge and skill of mental health and treatment are the primary professional requisites. An educational program to prepare professionals for work in clinical agencies would require a different balance between the social work and Jewish components than would be appropriate for associational, community-building, and tradition-transmission services.<sup>5</sup>

3. *Diverse Student Group*: The task of a school defining a balance between the Jewish component and social work is further complicated by the fact that the students who come to the school are not homogenous. People are attracted to profes-

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<sup>3</sup> The growing influence and broadening function of the Conference of Jewish Communal Service in recent years are both a result of and contribute to the trend toward a unified profession. The heightened interest in Jewishness among American Jews has led Jewish communal agencies to upgrade the priority of their Jewish content. As the Jewish aspects of the agency services have taken on greater salience the commonalities among the agencies have been highlighted. The Conference, transcending separate professional and agency identifications, serves as a logical umbrella organization for responding to the sensed common ground. The recently established Conference Committee on Scope and Function, and its prestigious membership, is indicative of the importance the leadership of the field affords to the issue of redefining the function of the Conference in the face of changes in the Jewish community.

<sup>4</sup> Donald Feldstein, "What Do We Mean When We Say That Our Agencies Should Be More Jewish?" Proceedings, Annual Sunday Seminar, Federation of Jewish Philanthropies of New York, January 13, 1980.

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<sup>5</sup> Some would argue that clinical services under Jewish auspices warrant professionals with special Jewish knowledge, no less than that called for with other Jewish communal services. The problem is a pragmatic one: given a limited time period for any educational program choices must be made in the curricular emphases. It is in that sense that the balance between educational content in the particular professional discipline and the Jewish component must be sought. The need to make choices is pertinent with regard to two other professional services which are difficult to incorporate in a single profession of Jewish communal work: those services provided by pulpit rabbis and Jewish educators. Here the issue is not the salience of the Jewish component, which obviously is central, but the appropriate professional discipline, which is not social work or social work related, but rather, in one case the rabbinate, and in the other, education.

sional careers for a variety of motives and career aspirations, and they bring different educational and work backgrounds. Despite entrance requirements which seek to screen out recruits with values or backgrounds not fully consonant with the educational standards of the school, each cohort of students reflects a continuum of experiences on both the Jewish and practical components. It is not possible to achieve a single definition of the Jewish and professional components which satisfies the needs of the full student group. One strives for a balance which is responsive to the needs of most of the students, without compromising the educational standards of the school and the requirements of the Jewish community to be served.

4. *A Changing Balance*: Finally, I return to my opening point: Jewish communal services evolve in response to changing needs of the Jewish community. Given the rapidity of change in the modern era it is hazardous to present a definition of the Jewish component without recognizing the likelihood that this definition might soon be outmoded by changing circumstances in Jewish life. Charles Zibbell, addressing the Jewish component in Jewish communal service, addresses this issue: ". . . it is impossible . . . to define the Jewish component for all time. Rather, the Jewish component must be viewed as a response to the Jewish condition at a particular time and place. Further, it may well be that the Jewish component in one field of activity will occupy a radically different position from the Jewish component in another field of activity."<sup>6</sup>

#### **Jewish Knowledge, Skills, Values**

All professions require their practitioners to master a body of knowledge relevant to their function, achieve skill in applying

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<sup>6</sup> Charles Zibbell, "The Jewish Component in Jewish Communal Service," *Journal of Jewish Communal Service*, Winter, 1978.

their particular professional expertise, and be guided in their practice by a set of values and ideals. Professionals who work in Jewish communal agencies need to achieve a blend of two areas, in which there are appropriate bodies of knowledge, skill, and values: one is social work which includes the technical competences of working with individuals, groups, organizations, and communities; and the second is the Jewish area which involves achieving sufficient mastery of the Jewish heritage to transmit information and values about that heritage. In professional practice the expectation is that these two areas will be integrated. Such an integration is seldom achieved in the process of professional education, where the two components tend to be treated as distinct entities. I believe such a compartmentalization of the Jewish and social work components during the process of shaping the basic professional identity of the Jewish communal worker is dysfunctional. So while the assigned subject of my presentation is the Jewish component in the education program, I inevitably must make some connections to the professional component as well.

#### *1. Jewish Knowledge*

Even the most knowledgeable Judaica scholar in a lifetime of study cannot master the full scope of the Jewish experience. What then can be expected of the Jewish communal worker, whose period of professional education is limited and who must address other areas of learning? Several areas of Jewish knowledge can be outlined in which at least a general familiarity is requisite to the function of the Jewish communal professional.

#### A.) Judaica

a. History: knowledge of the origins and historic developments of the Jewish people from biblical times to the present, understood chronologically and in terms of recurrent themes, motifs, and tensions.

b. Literature: a familiarity with the classical texts, Bible, Talmud, and medieval

writings and their major ideas and perspectives.

c. Language: sufficient mastery of Hebrew to enter the realm of Jewish scholarship and to communicate with fellow Jews in Israel and other parts of the world.

d. Religion and Culture: knowledge of the Jewish religious customs, ceremonies and rituals and the songs, rhythms, phrases and values of the Jewish culture.

B.) The Contemporary Jewish Context

a. The organized Jewish community: familiarity with the full network of Jewish organizations and their programs, and patterns of governance.

b. Issues: knowledge of the agenda of contemporary problems and requirements which arise in the course of efforts to maintain the Jewish community.

c. The People: an awareness of the demography of the Jewish people; the diversity of current patterns of Jewish identification, and the aspirations, sensitivities, and concerns of Jewish individuals and families.

### 2. Skill

For the Jewish communal professional a number of specific skills can be defined which relate to the capacity to transmit the Jewish heritage.

A.) Relevance of the Tradition: understanding the essence of the Jewish experience and how to link Jewish wisdom and perspectives to contemporary life-use of images, metaphors, and heroes of the Jewish past both to foster a sense of group pride in one's heritage and to give meaning and direction to life today.

B.) Creating a Jewish Ambience: shaping the environment of the Jewish communal agencies through the use of events associated with the Jewish calendar, Jewish rituals, art objects, and other Jewish customs so as to provide a Jewish content for the encounters between professionals and the people in the community.

C.) Blend of Infusion and Involvement: the capacity of the professional to present a

personal positive Jewish orientation while accepting the diverse views of others as they seek to define their own Jewish beliefs and practices.

D.) Blend of Technician and Statesman: the capacity of the professional to take seriously and to be effective in responding to the many mundane and menial, self-effacing tasks of Jewish organizational work while also representing, with knowledge and dignity, the Jewish historical perspective.

### 3. Values

Values are important in all professions both to provide guidelines for the work of the practitioner and to engender confidence by the recipients of the service in the judgment of the professional. A value orientation is particularly vital in Jewish communal work because the mandate of the Jewish communal worker includes the obligation to transmit ideals and beliefs of the Jewish heritage. Typically, professions include their preferred values in a formal code of ethics. No such code has yet been developed for Jewish communal workers.<sup>7</sup> The following are some preliminary thoughts on values which could serve as the core of a code of ethics for Jewish communal workers.

A. Jewish Continuity: a positive identification with the Jewish heritage and the conviction that this heritage has the capacity to give direction, meaning, and enrichment to life today and for the future.

B. Am Yisroel: a perspective which views the interests of *Am Yisroel* (the Jewish people) as one's primary loyalty, overriding separate institutional, denominational, geographic, or other Jewish subgroup identifications.

<sup>7</sup> Charles S. Levy explored the issues involved in a code of ethics for the field of Jewish communal service in an article, "A Code of Ethics for Jewish Communal Service?", *Journal of Jewish Communal Service*, April 1977.

C. Personal Commitment: detachment and objectivity in the realm of personal Jewish beliefs and practices are not virtues for Jewish communal workers. As agents for transmitting a religious cultural heritage and as models for identification by clients, students, members, etc., professionals are obliged to define their personal Jewish beliefs and practices, including synagogue or other Jewish institutional affiliations and contribution to the communal campaigns.<sup>8</sup>

### **Educating For The Jewish Component**

Having defined the rationale and the elements which comprise the Jewish component of professional work in the Jewish community, we come to the final issue: how to design an appropriate university education program to transmit the Jewish component to graduate students. Since the professional educational objectives are multi-dimensional, involving knowledge, skill, and values, a multi-dimensional educational program is needed to achieve these objectives. The curriculum utilizes both formal and informal approaches to transmit information, to teach skills of practice, and to socialize recruits for a professional identity with appropriate attitudes and values. A basic principle of the Brandeis educational rationale is that these multiple educational goals should be integrated. That is, they are addressed simultaneously (not in sequential blocks), in a single school setting, and by a single faculty which

affords equal priority to each of the several goals. The intent is to represent a unitary definition of professional Jewish communal work. This is particularly pertinent as it applies to the Jewish component, which is not viewed as a separate segment grafted on to a separate professional identity, but rather as part of an organic whole. Such an integrated approach to shaping the basic professional identity affects how students define their professional function and how they view their future career expectations.

In designing an educational methodology to implement the Jewish component one can identify four elements:

#### *1. Academic courses*

The basic Jewish educational content is transmitted in formal Judaica classes. Depending on their previous schooling, students are expected to take courses in Jewish history, literature, Jewish thought and philosophy, Hebrew, and contemporary Jewish life. In addition, a variety of other educational structures are used to transmit content which can be more appropriately presented in informal formats, using briefer time periods than the traditional semester classes. Examples include a weekly luncheon colloquium with guest speakers on Issues in Contemporary Jewish Life, a three-day trip to New York City to visit offices of the major national Jewish agencies, and a one-month seminar of study in Israel.

#### *2. Field Work*

Students are assigned to field work in two different Jewish agencies. In addition to individual supervision by Jewish communal professionals (potential professional role models), students meet bi-weekly with university faculty to explore the link between theoretical approaches to professional work and the students' practical field experiences. As with the courses in professional methods, these deliberations are focused on practice in Jewish settings.

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<sup>8</sup> Advocating an ideological stance for a Jewish communal worker is contrary to the classical social work view which calls for a "value free" attitude by the professional. The incompatibility between ideology and professionalism in the Jewish communal field was noted in a recent article by Charles Miller. He refers to a "professional attitude which is generally understood to be non-ideological and which has often been considered to be incompatible with ideology." Charles Miller, "Commitment, Ideology, and Skill", *Journal of Jewish Communal Service*, Fall, 1980, p. 30.

3. *Socializing for a Professional Identity*  
I affirm that an integral goal of professional education for Jewish communal work is to socialize students for a career definition linked to the Jewish community. Whether students think of themselves as social workers or as Jewish communal workers, the key issue is that upon completing their education, the graduates expect that their professional careers will be fulfilled in Jewish communal agencies.

In part, the integration of the Jewish and professional components in the curriculum contributes to a professional identity linked to the Jewish community. In addition, the ambience of the school is deliberately structured to socialize the students to a professional culture associated with Jewish communal agencies. Links to professional practice are defined in relation to local and national Jewish communal agencies. Field work is done in Jewish agencies, professional course content is focused on Jewish settings, and guest lecturers are professional and lay leaders from the Jewish agencies. Students are introduced to the literature and professional associations of the field of Jewish communal service: their journal is the *Journal of Jewish Communal Service*; their professional associations are the Conference of Jewish Communal Service, the Association of Jewish Center Workers, etc.; the professional meetings they aspire to attend are the Conference of Jewish Communal Service, General Assembly of the Council of Jewish Federations, etc.; and the pressing social policy issues about which the students concern themselves are the issues which confront the contemporary Jewish community.

In sum, the students' professional competencies as well as their sense of professional mission are linked to the Jewish community and its agencies. The results of such a process of socialization have important ramifications for the students' future careers in terms of a consonance between

the students' professional aspirations and the aspirations of the Jewish communal agencies and ultimately, in the likelihood of long term careers of service to the Jewish community.

Finally, it is vital, particularly in a professional education program, that the manner in which the school carries out its educational objectives is compatible with the methods and values it seeks to teach the students. The school is a microcosm of an organizational setting in the field of practice with the expectation that how the faculty represent their roles and how they design and execute the programs of the school are models for the students. In regard to the educational objective of shaping the style and attitudes of emerging professionals, what the faculty teach in their classes is likely to be less significant than the way faculty exercise their authority, express their sensitivity and creativity, are responsive to the needs and interests of students, and incorporate Jewish practices and values in the school environment.

In a related sense the students themselves should be viewed as an important educational resource. A student group which represents the diversity of Jewish identifications provides an excellent opportunity for broadening the students' Jewish perspectives. Further, as a Jewishly heterogeneous mix of students are helped to share with civility their different practices and ideas about the Jewish condition they learn a vital lesson about the meaning of *Am Yisroel*.

### Summary

The focus of this presentation has been on the teaching of the Jewish component of Jewish communal service to people preparing for professional careers. At the outset a brief historical review highlighted two key issues: 1) the content of all training programs in Jewish communal work has included two major components: social work and Jewish content, both of which

are necessary for effective professional performance; 2) the balance between the social work and Jewish components has shifted depending on changing priorities in Jewish life at different periods of time. Over the past decade we have witnessed in America the emergence of several specialized university-based graduate programs in Jewish communal service. The curriculum of these new schools has afforded a heightened prominence to the Jewish component.

The presentation concludes with an analysis of the elements which comprise the Jewish component and the educational

methodology appropriate for its transmission. With regard to the dialectic of the social work and Jewish components an approach is presented which affirms that both components remain essential to effective professional practice, but rather than being viewed as competing foci, the emphasis is on their complementarity. An effective integration of the social work and Jewish components in the curriculum is likely to lead to a definition of professional competence in Jewish communal work which is most congruent with the needs of the American Jewish community. At least for now.