

EXPANDING THE SCOPE OF JEWISH EDUCATION

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. . . the chronological scope of the educational enterprise . . . should be widened to include Jews of every age group; . . . the basic service unit of educational endeavor for individuals who live in families should be the family; . . . Jewish educational institutions should expand their programs to coordinate and provide a multifaceted curriculum of formal and informal educational programs . . .

Jewish education probably receives more attention and money than any other American Jewish communal endeavor: in many cities, Jewish education is the most expensive single item on Jewish communal budgets, and an estimated total of over \$500 million is spent on Jewish education in the United States each year.¹ American Jewish leaders have come to believe that Jewish continuity in the United States is linked to Jewish education, but great controversy surrounds the form which Jewish education should most effectively take.

During the past few years, much lively and heated discussion on educational policy planning has focused on informal Jewish education and family education. Innovators have urged shifting the focus of Jewish education to identity transmission² and "enculturation,"³ while tradi-

tionalists have pressed for the retention of more cognitive tasks, transmission of texts and other information.⁴ This crucial discussion is greatly complicated by a lack of statistical data. For despite national concern with Jewish education, few systematic studies have explored the extent or nature of Jewish education in the United States. A national study which systematically collects, coordinates, and evaluates information is sorely needed in order for Jewish educators and community planners to reach the most significant populations and to make the best use of communal resources.

Until such a national study can be launched, however, there is much to be learned about contemporary American Jewish education from Jewish population studies conducted in the 1980s. These studies include data on the complete spectrum of American Jews, from the most identified to the most marginal Jewish populations. Data are collected through the use of a variety of sampling methodologies to reach both affiliated and non-affiliated Jews. The respondents are

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1. Naomi Liebman, *Federal Allocations to Jewish Education, 1980-1984*. New York: Council of Jewish Federations Statistics Unit, 1985; and Alvin I. Schiff, "Public Education and the Jewish School," *Journal of Jewish Communal Service*, Vol. 61, No. 4 (Summer, 1985), pp. 305-311, p. 310.

2. Perry London and Naava Frank, "Jewish Identity and Jewish Schooling," *Journal of Jewish Com-*

munal Service, Vol. 64, No. 1 (Fall 1987), pp. 4-13.

3. Isa Aron, "Instruction and Enculturation in Jewish Education," presented at the Conference on Jewish Education of CAJE Research Network, Los Angeles, June, 1987.

4. See, for example, Samuel Schafer, "The Central Agency for Jewish Education: Educating for Family Responsibility," *Jewish Education*, Vol. 53, No. 2 (Summer 1985), pp. 17-20.

interviewed, primarily over the telephone, by trained interviewers; sampling methods vary, but strongly emphasize random digit dialing techniques.⁵

This paper discusses points critical to understanding the educational needs of the American Jewish community today, as revealed by data from the Jewish population studies.⁶ Dealing with figures on Jewish individuals ages newborn through 74, this paper compares the incidence of formal Jewish education with the incidence of informal Jewish educational context factors in the Jewish populations of four Eastern cities of diverse sizes: MetroWest (Morris and Essex Counties), New Jersey, Jewish population 130,000;⁷ Baltimore, Maryland, Jewish population 92,000;⁸ Rochester, New York, Jewish population 20,000;⁹ and Worcester, Massachusetts, Jewish population 15,000.¹⁰ It examines five variables by age: formal Jewish education, levels of ritual observance, synagogue attendance, friendship patterns, and preference for Jewish sponsored services.

These data suggest four major findings.

- **First**, younger and older generations of American Jews display an ironic contrast in levels of formal and informal Jewish education: Jewish children (ages 6 to 13) in MetroWest, Baltimore, Rochester, and Worcester are much more likely than their grandparents (ages 55 to 74) to have attended Jewish schools. However, since the data show that regular ritual observance declines from generation to generation, Jewish school children today are much less likely than grandparents were to have the lessons they learn in Jewish schools reinforced through affective, informal Jewish educational experiences at home.

- **Second**: Contemporary American demographic trends such as delayed marriage and delayed childbirth mean that fewer American Jews are living in conventional families, which have served a significant enculturational function in traditional Jewish societies.

- **Third**: Jews of all ages express a strong preference for Jewish sponsorship of services which can include informal educational components, such as child care, camps, recreational activities for teenagers, and singles programs.

- **Fourth**: Interest is not limited to programs for children. The number of adults who indicate that they are interested in attending adult education classes is many times greater than the number currently enrolled in Jewish adult education activities.

The data show that Jewish education today is largely a child-centered enterprise, focused on giving pre-adolescents some familiarity with Jewish texts and traditions. At least three-quarters of Jewish children ages six through 13 currently receive some formal Jewish education in MetroWest, Baltimore, and Rochester, as seen in Table 1. (This is a pattern seen throughout Eastern and Midwestern cities; in some Southwestern cities the rate of Jewish education is lower).

Figure 1 shows that Jewish education

5. For further information about sampling techniques, see Steven M. Cohen, Jonathan S. Woocher, and Bruce A. Phillips, ed., *Perspective in Jewish Population Research*. Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, Inc., 1984.

6. An examination of the impact of demographic patterns on the education of Jewish children in the Southwest can be found in Bruce Phillips and Michael Zeldin, "Jewish Education as Communal Activity: Patterns of Enrollment in Three Growth Communities," *Journal of Jewish Communal Service*, Vol. 64, No. 2 (Winter 1987), pp. 123-137.

7. Michael Rapoport and Gary A. Tobin, *A Population Study of the Jewish Community of MetroWest, New Jersey*, 1986.

8. Gary A. Tobin, *Jewish Population Study of Greater Baltimore* (1986).

9. Gary A. Tobin and Sylvia Barack Fishman, *A Population Study of the Jewish Community of Rochester* (forthcoming).

10. Gary A. Tobin and Sylvia Barack Fishman, *Population Study of the Greater Worcester Jewish Community*, 1986.

Table 1
JEWISH EDUCATION OF CHILDREN UNDER 18
 (Percentage Having Received a Jewish Education by Age MetroWest, NJ and Baltimore)

City	Age Groups		
	Percentage Received Jewish Education		
MetroWest, NJ	0-5	6-13	14-17
	36	83	83
Baltimore	0-6	6-12	13-17
	24	81	88

peaks dramatically at age 13. About one-quarter of Jewish adolescents in the study continue with Jewish education until age 17, after which time the percentage drops. Despite the proliferation of Jewish studies programs on college campuses, current enrollment in Jewish schools falls at age 18, and plummets to even lower levels throughout the adult years. For the great

majority of American Jews formal Jewish education culminates and ends with the celebration of the Bar/Bat Mitzvah, and few Jewish educational activities take their place in later life. However, the data also show strong parental interest in Jewish institutional sponsorship of informal Jewish educational experiences for children of all ages and substantial interest in adult education.

The policy planning implications of these findings, as this paper aims to demonstrate, concern the expansion of the scope of Jewish educational institutions both horizontally and vertically. The data indicate a potential communal mandate for the expansion of the American Jewish educational focus. The paper will suggest that the focus of Jewish education should be expanded chronologically, to encompass individuals at various stages of their life cycle. It should also be expanded in

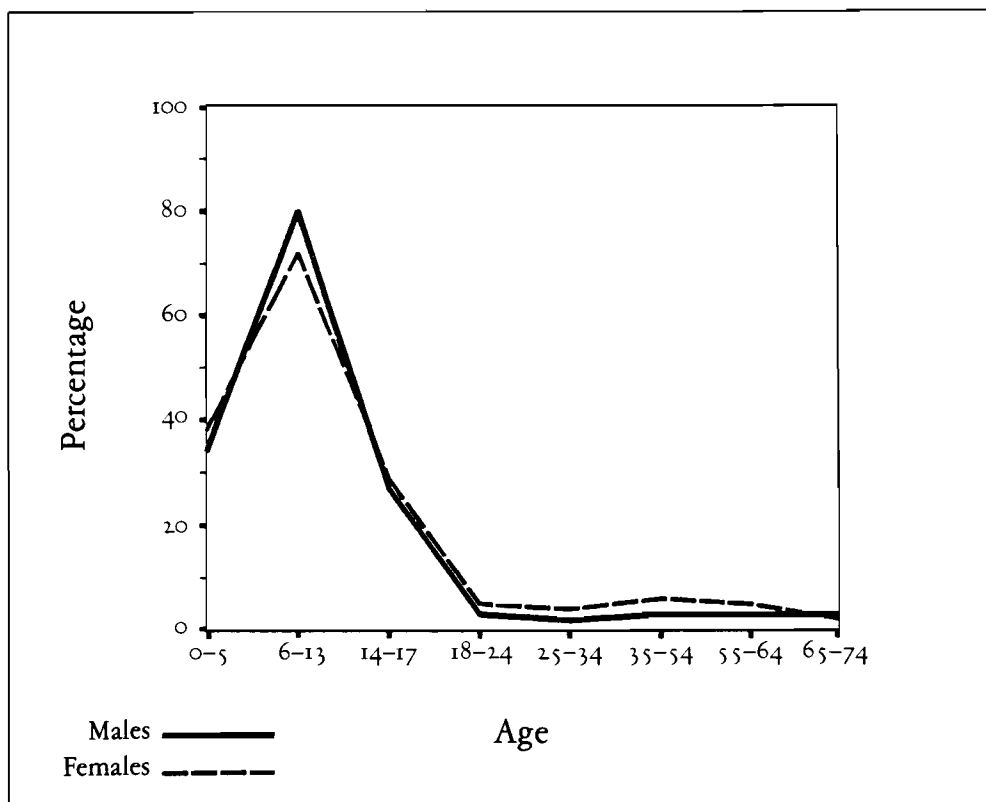


Figure 1. Jewish Education: A Child-centered Enterprise. Percentage currently enrolled in Jewish education by age - MetroWest, NJ

nature, to include a variety of informal Jewish educational experiences, of the kind which used to be supplied by the Jewish home. These informal experiences should be seen as the complement of, not a replacement for, the transmission of cognitive information and Jewish texts.

Judaism as a culture has always been behaviorally oriented, a way of life based on action, rather than on simple belief. No activity in Jewish life was more stressed than learning and teaching. Learning—the rigorous study of biblical, talmudic, and post-talmudic texts—was considered a lifelong priority among adults in traditional Jewish communities.

While there are legitimate scholarly arguments over the actual extent of formal Jewish education in previous Jewish cultures, in Eastern European communities, Jewish education was not an isolated activity limited to formal instruction. Informal educational experiences, which took place daily in close-knit families and communities, educated and reeducated young and old alike in Jewish customs and beliefs. The ethnic and the religious, the cerebral and the emotional were inextricably woven together into an organic whole. Even Jews who rejected tradition for one of the emerging secular philosophies generally lived in densely Jewish urban areas and were intensely aware of Jewish history, values, and customs. Furthermore, both stubborn anti-Semitism and the all-encompassing Jewish way of life kept Jews distinct from the peoples surrounding them.

In traditional Jewish societies, the family was the site of most informal and some formal Jewish education. The Jewish cultural stress on marriage and the family made family formation a *sine qua non* of existence, and marriage was almost universal. Many observers have noted the strong life-cycle impact of marriage upon Jewish identity indicators. Jewish identity was reinforced for married couples within the marriage bond, through close family ties with parents and in-laws, and ultimately

Table 2
MARITAL STATUS
(Comparison with 1970, 1980 US census and 1970 NJPS
Percentage of Household Types)

City	Divorced/ Separated			
	Married	Single	Widowed	Separated
Boston (1985)	61	29	4	5
Washington, DC (1983)	61	27	4	7
Chicago (1982)	65	23	6	6
Denver (1981)	64	23	4	9
Rochester (1987)	68	23	6	3
Minneapolis (1981)	66	22	7	5
St. Paul (1981)	66	20	11	3
Baltimore (1985)	68	19	9	5
Phoenix (1983)	63	18	9	10
Kansas City (1985)	70	17	7	5
Los Angeles (1979)	57	17	12	14
Nashville (1982)	70	17	8	5
New York (1981)	65	15	11	9
Milwaukee (1983)	67	14	9	10
Richmond (1983)	67	14	12	7
Worcester (1987)	69	14	←18→	
Atlantic City (1985)	67	13	13	6
Cleveland (1981)	69	11	13	8
St. Louis (1982)	68	9	17	6
Miami (1981)	61	7	23	8
1980 U.S. Census	67	19	8	6
1970 U.S. Census	72	16	9	3
NJPS (1970)	78	6	10	5

through their role as educators of their own children as they raised them.

In contemporary America, however, many social and cultural supports of Judaism have been sharply reduced. In United States cities today, Jewish populations participate in a national trend which delays marriage and family formation. As illustrated in Table 2, one fifth of the adult Jewish populations of MetroWest, Rochester, and Baltimore are single, as are 14 percent of the Jewish population of Worcester.

When compared with the National Jewish Population Study (1970) and the 1980 U.S. census, we see that American Jewish populations today resemble all other Americans, one-fifth of whom are single, much more than they do the American Jewish population of 1970, when only six percent of the adult Jewish population was single. For the first time in modern Jewish history, singlehood has become an extended period in the adult life cycle rather than a short way-station between childhood and adulthood.

The data show that during the extended years of Jewish singlehood most young adults have no contact with formal Jewish education. These are the years during which young people attend college, graduate, and professional schools, establish themselves in the labor force, move to new communities, establish friendship patterns and ultimately choose mates. At the very time when their knowledge of the secular world is becoming most sophisticated and their vulnerability to assimilative influences is most pronounced, they are at least connected to the Jewish world.

The impact of these Jewishly disconnected single years is seen most clearly in cities which do not have large Jewish populations, as well as in areas of new settlement. Figure 2 shows almost exclusively Jewish friendships among four-fifths of MetroWest and two-thirds of Baltimore young adults ages 24 to 34, compared to fewer than half of Worcester and Rochester Jewish young adults.

Thus, many American Jewish singles have neither the Jewishly reinforcing effects of Jewish education, Jewish families, or Jewish friends to support their Jewish identity. While it is true that the years before marriage have always been years of low Jewish affiliational activity, it is also true that these single years in the past comprised a relatively brief period. As part of their response to changing Jewish demography, Jewish educational planners would do well to consider the currently prominent group of Jewish singles as an important focus for creative educational innovation and activity.

In addition to the fact that patterns of family formation have changed, American Jewish families as they exist today are a diverse lot, and often do not correspond to traditional norms. One of the largest single changes is that very few households include one parent who functions as a full-time homemaker. The prevalence of the two-paycheck Jewish family and a growing Jewish divorce rate have put conventional American Jewish families, with

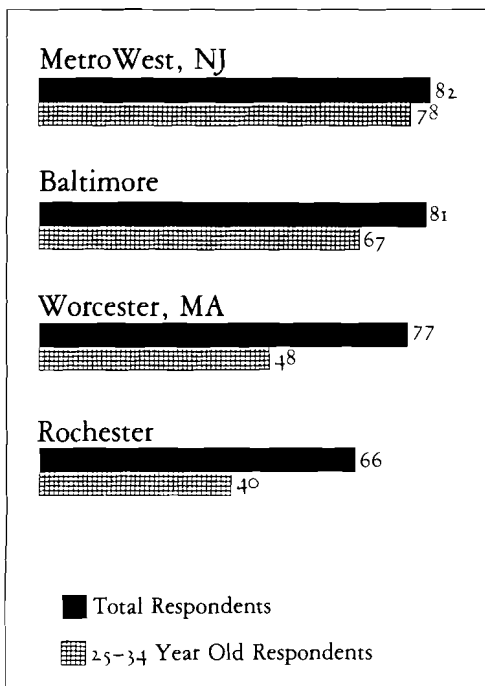


Figure 2. Friendship Patterns. Percentage of respondents reporting that at least two of three best friends are Jewish.

Dad at work and Mom at home, in a small minority. The great majority of Jewish mothers with children under 18 work outside the home—and this is increasingly true of Jewish mothers with children under age six. Furthermore, single-parent and blended families make up a growing proportion of the Jewish households with children in many cities. Clearly, when Jewish educational planners think of providing services for the “Jewish family,” they must revise their notions of who comprises those families, and what are their needs and limitations.

The newly ubiquitous working American Jewish mother puts Jewish day care, after school programs, day and sleep-away camps, and recreational programs for teenagers in an important educational spotlight. During the time period when a resident homemaker was the norm in most Jewish homes, institutional child care and child enrichment programs were optional. However, today, Jewish parents show a

high level of interest in Jewish sponsorship of programs for children of all ages. Indeed, as illustrated by Figures 3, 4, and 5, among parents who have a preference, that preference is almost always for Jewish programs. Only tiny percentages of Jewish parents express a preference for non-sectarian sponsorship for such programs.

Contemporary American Jewish parents have expressed what amounts to a communal mandate for the development of informal Jewish educational programs. To cite just one of the areas of special need, the demand for Jewish day care can only grow, not diminish, and with it comes an extraordinary communal opportunity for early childhood and family-centered Jewish education.

Educators who work with young children know how quickly they absorb information and with what delight they respond to colorful rituals, ceremonies and celebrations. By providing day-care programs which are rich with Jewish experiences and Jewish content, we can help to recreate for the youngest American Jews some of the emotional associations which would otherwise be missing from their en-

vironments. We can give them an enjoyable, stimulating, and wholesome pre-school experience and at the same time lay the groundwork for further education and Jewish identity development.

Such programs are particularly important on today's Jewish education scene, because they can help to redress the marked decrease in observance of daily and weekly rituals in American Jewish

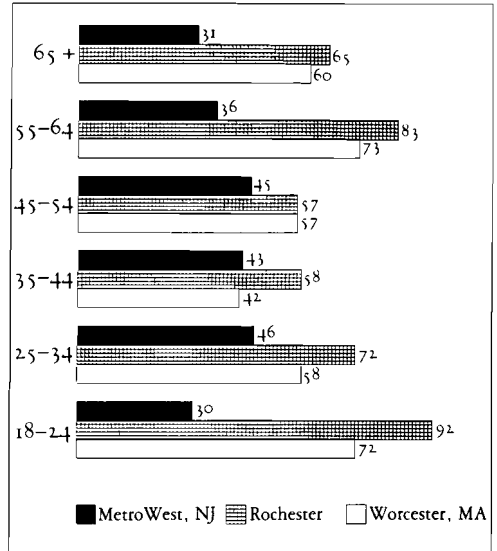


Figure 4. Preference for Jewish-sponsored Day Camps. Percentage of households expressing preference by age.

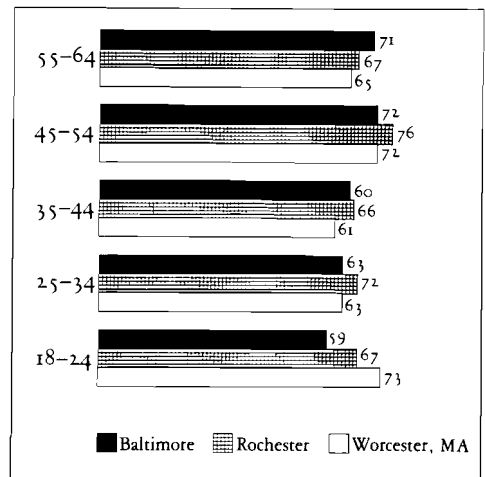


Figure 5. Preference for Jewish sponsored-programs for Teenagers. Percentage of households expressing preference by age.

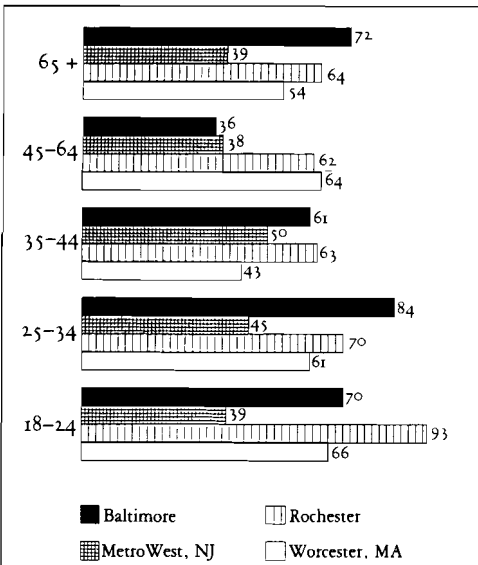


Figure 3. Preference for Jewish-sponsored Child Care Programs. Percentage of households expressing preference by age.

homes. As Figure 6 illustrates, regularly observed rituals, which were most likely to keep Jews aware of their own identity and separate from their neighbors, are least observed by American Jews in the 1980s. High proportions of American Jews attend Passover Seders, light Chanuka candles, and alter their behavior on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. Relatively few keep kosher homes, discriminate between Sabbath and weekday activities, and attend synagogue services regularly.

It is not the purpose of this paper to enter the dispute over whether the decline of Kashruth and Sabbath and Festival observance is or is not a devastating blow to the vitality of the American Jewish community, but simply to observe that their decline marks an impoverishment of Jewish educational opportunity in the home. Taking one example, the lighting of the Sabbath candles, Figure 7 shows us that age and generation are far more potent indicators for observance than the probable presence of children in the home. About one-quarter of MetroWest and Baltimore women ages 35 to 44 always light Sabbath candles, compared to over 40 percent of women over age 65. It seems obvious that the Jewish concept of the Sabbath as a day clearly demarcated from the rest of the week, with all the social and historical connotations which that concept carries, can be more easily communicated to children who have the

emotional anchor of witnessing, on a regular basis, the attractive ritual of candle-lighting.

We are less differentiated from other Americans, not only because few of us retain ritual activities which make us different, but also because we can enter into the social and cultural fabric of the surrounding society far more easily than ever before in history. The removal of restrictive covenants and discrimination both in housing markets and in the areas of education and employment has allowed middle-class and upper-middle-class Jews to choose their residences and their occupations according to their preferences and abilities. While Jews are by no means randomly distributed within cities, the dense geographical proximity they once shared has been lost, with rare and colorful exceptions. In most areas of the country, even so-called "Jewish neighborhoods" are indistinguishable in any external way from non-Jewish neighborhoods. And Jews are no longer limited to working either for themselves or for other Jews. Up the corporate ladder or across the country, Jews today can follow almost unrestricted job opportunities.

Even with all the economic, social, and political benefits which we enjoy as identified Americans, most American Jews prefer that their children remain identifiable as Jews as well. The answer, for the majority of American Jews, has been formal, institutional Jewish education.

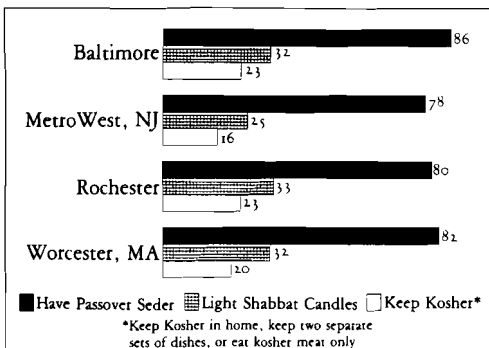


Figure 6. Ritual Observance. Percentage of households that observe selected religious practices "always" or "usually."

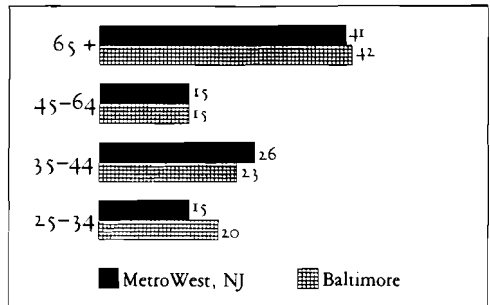


Figure 7. Shabbat Candles. Percentage of women "always" lighting by age—MetroWest, NJ and Baltimore.

However, most formal programs in Jewish education are constructed on models which assumed the active support of traditional Jewish family life, a family life which, as this paper illustrates, in many ways no longer exists. Recent educational literature reports that parents in many communities have expressed the desire to become more knowledgeable about Jewish ritual.¹¹ Furthermore, psychologists such as Mortimer Ostow have pointed out that when parents enroll young children in Jewish educational programs, they themselves are often ripe for adult Jewish education.¹² Enrolling a child in a Jewish school marks the point when young parents emotionally take on the role of "Jewish parent" in their own mind, and they are often most receptive at this moment to involvement in family and adult-oriented educational activities.

Jewish educators are turning increasingly to the concept of "family education," and it is crucial that this educational approach be researched, supported, and evaluated. Creative educational planning—and creative marketing—are necessary so that we may empower parents to become significant partners in the Jewish education of their Jewish children.

It is certainly important for planners in Jewish education not to "throw the baby out with the bath water." In attempting to meet the demands imposed by demographic change, it would be foolhardy to discard traditional educational tools. Jewish identity is weakened when generations of Jews lack a basic knowledge of Jewish history and customs and when both fathers and sons feel uncomfortable inside a synagogue—and few can feel comfortable

without the basic tools of familiarity with the prayer service. Instead, rather than disbanding the institution of Bar/Bat Mitzvah, as some disillusioned educators have suggested,¹³ we can use the American infatuation with the event as a foundation upon which to build.

Rather than abandon the kind of learning which goes on before the Bar/Bat Mitzvah, Jewish educational planners can utilize the fact that children are motivated to be in school by dramatically expanding the emotional possibilities of their schooling through informal educational experiences. During this "golden period" of captive Jewish education, informal Jewish educational experiences might well be incorporated into the formal structure of the school program as a regular part of the curriculum.¹⁴

Shabbatonim and field trips can be arranged as family activities—which helps the entire family participate in enjoyable Jewish experiences—or as peer group activities. For adolescents, peer-group weekends become an important extension of the very positive influence of Jewish summer camps. The Ramah Camps, long pioneers in using their camping experience as one of the most effective forms of American Jewish education, have now begun to explore the family camping experience as well. Past the high-water mark of Bar/Bat Mitzvah, Jewish summer camps and trips to Israel are among our most powerful educational tools.

11. See, for example, Susan Wall, "Hearing Parents Speak: A New Opportunity for Jewish Educators," *The Melton Journal*, No. 29 (Spring 1986), pp. 30–32.

12. Mortimer Ostow, M.D., "The Determinants of Jewish Identity: A Maturational Approach," 1976 *American Jewish Committee Colloquium on Jewish Identity*, p. 61.

13. Pulpit rabbis are sometimes the most outspoken critics of the emphasis on Bar/Bat Mitzvah. See Herman E. Snyder, "Is Bar-Bat Mitzvah Destroying Attendance at Synagogue Service?" *Journal of Reform Judaism*, Winter 1980, pp. 9–12, for one example.

14. One of the most vigorous exponents of such development and expansion has been Alvin I. Schiff. See, for example, Alvin I. Schiff and Chaim Y. Botwinick, *Jewish Supplementary Schooling: An Educational System in Need of Change. A Report by the Bureau of Jewish Education of Greater New York*, Executive Summary, June, 1987.

Ultimately, if we want children to take Jewish education seriously, they must observe adults taking Judaism and Jewish education seriously as well.¹⁵ Adult education is at present a vastly underdeveloped area in Jewish education. Many more adults say they plan to take Jewish classes in the future than are actually enrolled in Jewish classes at present. In Baltimore, for example, about one-quarter of all adults say they plan to enroll in Jewish education—but fewer than five percent are presently enrolled in Jewish education. This disparity between actual and potential enrollment holds true across all adult age groups from ages 18 through 64.

In United States cities across the country, one-quarter to one-half of Jewish adults surveyed indicate they would be interested in being involved in educational projects in the future. This is our potential clientele, and it is essentially divided into two separate populations. Both singles and married family units should be considered in devising educational activities for adults and in marketing them. Their needs and interests may be different, and the formats which attract them almost certainly will be different, but both groups need to be more attentively serviced by educational institutions.

Furthermore, we need to ensure that communal efforts in the area of adult Jewish education are in fact providing Jewish education to adults. The proportion of adults actually receiving Jewish content in the courses they take may be even smaller than it appears, for many classes which are offered under Jewish

auspices and have the word Jewish in their title actually have no Jewish content. Some professionals leading group discussions under Jewish auspices either have little personal knowledge or, in some cases, actually have hostile feelings toward Jewish tradition.¹⁶ Group leaders who are themselves deeply imbued with Jewishness will be most likely to transmit Jewish attitudes and values when the teaching moment presents itself.¹⁷

Future adult Jewish education faces two challenges: enrollment and enrichment. Given the tiny fraction of Jewish adults who actually enroll in Jewish-sponsored education, research is necessary to discover which formats would be attractive to the potential audiences. Equally important, Jewish institutions and organizations offering educational opportunities must clearly analyze the Jewish component of their offerings.

In conclusion, three major areas in the American Jewish educational picture demand creative revision:

- **First**, the data show that the chronological scope of the educational enterprise is at present extremely narrow. It should be widened to include Jews of every age group, rather than concentrating on pre-adolescents. We must focus on pre-school children, teenagers, young adults, singles, and older adults as well as school children.

- **Second**, the data show that American Jewish families have changed dramatically in the past 20 years. Rather than being the site of rich informal Jewish contexts, American Jewish families today need Jewish enrichment and support. Parents need the Jewish skills which will empower them to recreate Jewish family experiences.

15. The strong correlation between adult role models in the home environment and future Jewish identity of children was indicated by Harold Himmelfarb, "Jewish Education for Naught: Educating the Culturally Deprived Jewish Child," *Analysis* (The Institute of Jewish Policy Planning and Research of the Synagogue Council of America) No. 51 (September, 1975); and by Geoffrey E. Bock, *Does Jewish Schooling Matter*, Jewish Education and Jewish Identity Colloquium Papers for the American Jewish Committee, 1976.

16. Bruce I. Karp, "Training for the 'Jewish' in Jewish Family Life Education," *Journal of Jewish Communal Service*, Vol. 61, No. 1 (Fall 1984), pp. 70-78.

17. See Richard J. Israel, "The Context of Informal Education," *Jewish Education*, Vol. 59, No. 2 (Summer 1986), pp. 27-30, for a discussion of this issue.

Therefore, the basic service unit of educational endeavor for individuals who live in families should be the family, rather than the individual.

- **Third**, because most American Jewish homes do not currently provide a variety of informal Jewish educational experiences, Jewish educational institutions should expand their programs to coordinate and provide a multifaceted curriculum of formal and informal educational programs. Important informal educational experiences such as Jewish camps and Israel trips should be part of a coherent and comprehensive curriculum, rather than the random experiences of a privileged few.

While the Jewish populations studies are an important and largely untapped source of information on Jewish education, an examination of the questions they

do answer makes us keenly aware of how many questions remain unanswered. National work in a variety of areas is crucial for the efficient functioning of local educational efforts: research into areas needing development; documentation and analysis of educational programs which succeed; and clearinghouses for dissemination of such information.

Jewish education is our best hope for nurturing Jewish identity in our contemporary open society, and ultimately for ensuring Jewish continuity. We must learn how to best utilize the capabilities of Jewish education by analyzing our actual and potential clientele, through research and analysis of existing successful programs, and through innovative development of creative new programs to educate American Jews of all ages.