

Mandel Teacher Educator Institute

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**A Decade of Learning:
An Evaluation of the Mandel Teacher
Educator Institute (MTEI)**

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Introduction

"A Decade of Learning" is an in depth evaluation of the first five national cohorts and one community-based program of the Mandel Teacher Educator Institute (MTEI). After more than thirteen year of developing Jewish Education leadership in North America, MTEI has conducted evaluation research in order to document accomplishments to date as well as highlighting some enduring challenges.

"A Decade of Learning" addresses the history of the MTEI program, the reasons it has been established, its philosophy and the challenges in Jewish education the program has been addressing since its inception.

The findings of the evaluation indicate that there is strong evidence that the MTEI program has been successful in cultivating a significantly strengthened leadership corps in Jewish education in North America. MTEI alumni are working in various levels of the North American Jewish education infrastructure including universities, bureaus of Jewish education, day schools, supplementary schools, early childhood, and on-going adult education.

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Executive Summary

MTEI was designed to develop educational leaders who could design and implement high quality professional development for teachers, principals and other educational professionals. Based on an evaluation of the first five national cohorts of MTEI and one community program, there is strong evidence that the MTEI program has been successful in cultivating a significantly strengthened leadership corps in Jewish education in North America. MTEI alumni are working in various levels of our educational infrastructure including universities, bureaus of Jewish education, day schools, supplementary schools, early childhood, and on-going adult education. As this report will describe, MTEI has accomplished the following core objectives:

- **Developing Key Leaders.** Serving in senior roles in national and community Jewish organizations and in schools, MTEI alumni are positioned as key leaders of new generations of educators and lay people. Their reach extends to those who teach tens of thousands of students in Jewish schools.
- **Transforming Educational Leadership Practices.** MTEI alumni have learned and adopted practices for the professional development of educators as currently understood as the best in the field and have thereby expanded their capacity for serving as powerful educational leaders.
- **Infusing Jewish Content into Professional Development.** MTEI alumni are more fluent in strategies for integrating Jewish content into their professional development work, and are as a result effectively infusing these new understandings into their work with teachers and other constituents.

- **Development of Resources to Support Training.** MTEI has created articles and videos, which are being widely used in training new Jewish educators and educational leaders and in developing educational policy.

This report describes the impact of MTEI, using findings from an electronically-administered survey of all graduates of the first five national cohorts of MTEI, as well as the Boston community-based program. The survey was distributed in summer, 2008 and the report includes analysis of the responses of the 66% of non-retired alumni who responded.

Report

Background of MTEI

When the Council for Initiatives in Jewish Education (CIJE) did a scan of the field of Jewish education in the early 1990's, it identified a missing tier in existing educational leadership training structures in Jewish education. There were places to train teachers, principals, and other communal leaders as they prepared to enter their fields. These programs, however, failed to provide the requisite competencies to foster the continuing professional development of their colleagues and supervisees. Thus, preparation for a central part of their role—one that is crucial to the success of their schools and other institutions—was not being addressed. MTEI was born in 1995 to fill this gap: It would recruit senior Jewish educational leaders, already responsible for shaping Jewish education in communities and schools, and give them the capacity to deliver high-quality professional development to teachers and other educators. MTEI has served primarily heads of schools, central agency personnel and others who are in a position to deliver substantive, innovative professional development for teachers and other educators, helping them become more skilled at their work. MTEI has used and taught the most promising models of professional development from general education, adapting them to the Jewish education context.

Developing Key Leaders

Thus far, there have been five national cohorts of participants from seventeen communities as well as five teams from national movements and organizations.¹ In addition, there have been two community-based programs, one in Boston and one in the San Francisco Bay Area.² These community-based initiatives included teams of educators from a total of 21 different schools. One hundred and forty-five professionally active alumni (see Table 1) were surveyed³ and two-thirds responded (n=96).⁴ Alumni are currently serving in the following capacities:

- Senior Leaders of Congregational and Day Schools (40%)
- Senior Leaders of National or Communal Agency (BJEs, federations, etc.; 36%)
- University faculty/researchers (10%)
- Teachers (9%)
- Congregational rabbis (3%)

¹ More specifically: the seventeen communities include Atlanta, Baltimore, Bergen County, NJ, Boston, Chicago, Cleveland, Columbus, Detroit, Hartford, Kansas City, Los Angeles, New York City, Orange County, (CA), Rochester, San Francisco Bay Area, Seattle, Suffolk County, (NY). The five teams from national organizations and movements include the Conservative movement, the Experiment in Congregational Education (ECE, a national project of the Rhea Hirsch School of Education of Hebrew Union College in Los Angeles), the Reconstructionist movement, the Reform movement, and the Florence Melton Adult Mini-School.

² The Bay Area MTEI program is just completing its seminars and was not surveyed.

³ In addition, 29 alumni have retired, left the field or have passed away. Of this group 7 responded, but we did not analyze their responses.

⁴ A word of caution must be inserted when assessing the overall impact of MTEI based on the survey results reported here. Approximately one-third of alumni did not complete the survey and we do not know if their responses would have been similar to those who did. Thus it is possible, for example, that the non-responders experienced less impact of MTEI or found themselves in jobs in which the learning was not as relevant. It is also possible, however, that the timing of the survey administration eliminated certain respondents for purely logistical reasons. A two-thirds response rate of a group such as the alumni (some of whom participated in the program as much as a decade ago) is considered satisfactory.

The geographic distribution of the alumni can be found in the map in Figure 1 at the end of this document.

Alumni were asked if they provide **direct** (design and facilitate) professional development services or if they consult or supervise others who provide professional development (**indirect**), if they provide both direct and indirect services, or if they do neither. Among the 96 respondents, approximately 19% provide direct service only, 11% provide indirect service only, and 59% provide both direct and indirect professional development service. In addition, 11% do neither.

The reach of the alumni is large. Almost a quarter offer professional development to 21 or more schools or consult and supervise others who do so. Almost half serve ten or more schools (see Table 2). Alumni report that approximately 1,150 schools are served by them directly or by those with whom they consult or supervise. Survey respondents provide consultations or direct services to a wide range of professionals, including principals, teachers, and lay leaders (see Table 3). Because those who provide direct service include heads of schools working with their own teachers, they deal with smaller proportions of principals, family educators, lay leaders and preschool teachers than those who provide indirect services. While alumni at central agencies provide more indirect services to a wider range of clients. Taking their reports collectively, alumni estimate that they have reached those who serve approximately 57,000 students or other constituents through their consultations or their direct services in the last year.

Beyond this, alumni participate in national and community networks and organizations and hold leadership roles on their boards, thus influencing the vision and implementation of high level learning among Jewish professionals of all kinds. For example, the current head, the past head and the incumbent head of the Reform educators' national organization are all MTEI alumni.

Transforming Educational Leadership Practices

MTEI teaches educational leaders how to support teachers to become more deeply skilled at helping students grapple with the wisdom and power of Jewish tradition in ways that will engage their curiosity and draw them toward life-long Jewish learning.

Educational research (e.g. McLaughlin & Talbert, 2001; Knapp, 2003)ⁱ shows that significant teacher learning and development occurs over time: and so the most effective professional development efforts are sustained, coherent, and incorporate time for teacher reflection. Additionally, the found that by building collaborative cultures among teachers, professional development practices can increase esprit de corps and teacher retention rates. MTEI is guided by this research in seeking to support radical change in the ways in which educators conceptualize and enact professional development.

According to the survey, most MTEI alumni have learned the key principles and practices of the program, and they are frequently putting them to work to support teachers. Of particular note, graduates from the first cohorts are still building on techniques and ideas learned in MTEI a decade ago. MTEI alumni are creating sustained professional development programs with multiple sessions that are connected over time. Data from the mid 90's, in contrast, found that one session professional development occurred 39% of the time in the communities from which MTEI participants came.⁵ Whereas, 43% of alumni programs have six or more connected sessions, while only 13% have only one session.

The survey asked alumni to indicate which professional development practices they used in their programs and which practices they had learned in MTEI and had not known before. We also asked alumni to assess what impact on participants their programs or those of the individuals they consulted or supervised had (see Table 4).

⁵ Gamaron, A. 1998.

As Table 4 shows, alumni make use of a variety of professional development techniques both in their direct and indirect programs. Many, but not all, of the practices used were newly learned by a considerable proportion of alumni in the MTEI program. Between a quarter and a half of alumni learned: Analysis and reflection on one's own practice, curriculum investigation and development, videotape investigation, mentoring, developing classroom observation skills, and analysis of student work. A smaller proportion of participants learned the other techniques in MTEI; some already knew the practices, such as study of Jewish content, hevruta learning, journaling and reading articles from general education. Other practices were not mastered or made use of in their work or were taught in only one cohort of MTEI (e.g. Japanese lesson study and looking at student work).

The reported impact of alumni programs on their participants was assessed by asking alumni to select up to 3 categories of impact from a provided list. Table 5 shows the results. Alumni report that their efforts led to increased reflection about teaching and learning for 71% of educators with whom they work and to improved teaching practice (46%), increased sense of collegiality (41%) and increased Jewish content knowledge (40%). These practices provide teachers with conceptual and analytic frameworks for reflecting on and improving their instructional practices and programs. These categories of reported impact seem to follow rather directly from the most commonly used professional development practices and suggest that participants in alumni's programs are really learning to think more about their own teaching and teaching in general. In contrast, something like increased observation of one another's classes was not an outcome and would require structural alterations at the school level which did not seem to occur.

In their responses to some of the open-ended questions on the survey, alumni report their struggles to embed ongoing professional development into teachers' work. The chief constraint is creating the time (and paying teachers for that time). It is also challenging for some alumni to plan professional development on their

own and to persuade other school personnel that sustained professional development is worthwhile. School cultures often do not support gradual professional growth for teachers. Last, some early childhood educators report difficulty in translating some MTEI principles and practices to their settings.

Infusing Jewish Content into Professional Development

As has been documented (for example, CIJE Study of Educators, 1993, Dorph & Stodolsky, 2007), teachers in Jewish schools, especially congregational schools and preschools, often have inadequate backgrounds in Judaism. A cornerstone of the MTEI methodology has been to integrate the best, state-of-the-art practices of professional development with significant Jewish content. MTEI participants have studied traditional Jewish texts as well as core ideas of Judaism -- and learned how to infuse these texts and ideas into their professional development work in ways that enhance the effectiveness of Jewish educators. In the open-ended questions and in feedback to seminars, MTEI alumni frequently report that their participation in the program has enabled them to lead Jewish text study sessions as part of professional development. Eighty-three percent of MTEI alumni report that in their direct services to schools, they support teachers in studying Jewish content and in how to transmit it in meaningful ways to students. There is good reason to believe that, as a result of MTEI, alumni are more effectively enabling teachers not only to be better teachers, but better teachers of *Judaism*.

The program experience

The survey contained questions about the MTEI program and how alumni experienced it. Responses were very positive, pointing especially to the quality of the faculty, opportunities for stimulating and supportive collegial interaction, and to the Jewish and pedagogical content of the seminars.⁶ Particularly striking, however, is that alumni varied considerably in terms of the specific seminar experiences they cited as having the most impact on their professional growth. This result supports the deliberate variety of experiences and techniques built into the program.

Alumni were more similar in reporting the challenges they faced in implementing the ideas they learned in MTEI. The large majority cited issues of time constraints and lack of resources (financial and human) as barriers to implementing professional development as learned in MTEI. In addition, some felt that they could not sustain new efforts on their own or faced a lack of support or acceptance of their efforts among other professional colleagues.

MTEI Tools

MTEI has sponsored the creation of powerful tools for building knowledge about teaching, in particular, a set of videos of teaching in Jewish classrooms and detailed facilitator guides to support their use. Some graduates of MTEI have used the videos to help their teachers become more analytical and reflective about their own teaching practices. It is interesting that the videotapes are more likely to be used by alumni who are working directly with teachers on professional development than by those who are recipients of consultation or supervision from alumni (36% versus 13%). (See Table 4) The use of videotapes as envisioned by MTEI requires some intense training and multiple sessions to adequately enact. In contrast to some other practices, the use of the videotapes is a more central activity

⁶ It should be recalled that about one-third of the alumni did not fill out the survey and it is possible that their attitudes toward MTEI were less positive than the respondents.

when adopted and it can not serve all professional development goals.

The videotape materials have been used as part of the core curriculum of MTEI itself. But they have also enjoyed a much wider distribution, and are being used by graduates of the program and others for the purposes of professional development in their own settings, at national professional conferences, and by academics in Jewish training institutions (JTS, HUC-NY, Bar Ilan, Boston Hebrew College).

The faculty and consultants of MTEI have written a number of articles which now serve as core texts in the training and professional development of Jewish leaders in a variety of university and community settings in addition to use in MTEI. The bibliography emerging from MTEI includes eight papers and three reports.ⁱⁱ These writings document aspects of MTEI's impact on the participants and the teachers they teach and they have been used to support the creation of MTEI-inspired professional development programs and to support requests for personnel.

Discussion

MTEI has taught the best current vision of professional development held in general education and incorporated Jewish content and context as integral additional elements. The research data show that participants have understood and adopted the central ideas and practices in their work with Jewish educators in a variety of settings, and exposure to them is making a difference in teaching and learning in Jewish schools. Instantiating complex, on-going professional learning is particularly difficult in Jewish settings in which teachers are often part-time and support is limited. Yet many MTEI alumni have succeeded in creating such programs in spite of the resistance and skepticism on the part of some of their

constituencies. In settings where MTEI alumni have created ongoing learning for their teachers, professional collegiality and esprit de corps have also emerged. The leadership of MTEI alumni has raised expectations about the quality of professional work in many Jewish settings. There is reason to believe that the effect of these changes is to raise the quality of teaching and learning in these settings in significant ways.

Despite the impact and success of many MTEI alumni, the professional development challenges in Jewish schools and communities is a continuing one. For example, many Jewish schools do not have the vision or resources to adequately support long-term professional development and MTEI alumni cite these barriers as major challenges in implementing what they learned in MTEI. Nonetheless, the growing numbers of MTEI alumni and those whom they have influenced in their local communities serve as bedrock for achieving educational excellence in Jewish schools. As this cadre of leaders with a capacity to deliver strong professional development grows, it is hoped that they will bring more institutions and communities to expect and support strong professional development programs designed and implemented by outstanding educational leaders.

TABLE 1

Number and Percent of Alumni in Each Cohort who Responded to Survey

Cohort	Number of Respondents	Number in Original Cohort	Percentage of Original Cohort
One	10	14	71.43%
Two	22	40	55.00%
Three	20	37	54.05%
Four	18	34	52.94%
Five	18	28	64.29%
Boston	15	23	65.22%
TOTAL*	103*	176	58.52%

*Seven retired alumni responded, but their responses were not analyzed

TABLE 2

Schools Receiving Professional Development from MTEI Alumni (n=122)*

Number of Schools Served	Number of Alumni	Percentage of Alumni
1	35	28.7%
2-5	21	17.2%
6-9	11	9.0%
10-20	25	20.5%
21+	30	24.6%

*The total is 122 because alumni who deliver professional development directly and also consult with individuals who provide professional development are counted twice.

TABLE 3

Constituencies with whom Alumni do Professional Development

Constituency	Direct (n=74)		Indirect (n=64)	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Teachers in Supplemental Schools	43	58.1%	36	56.2%
Teachers in Day Schools	30	40.5%	30	46.9%
Principals	25	33.8%	27	42.2%
Family or Teen Educators	14	18.9%	20	31.2%
Lay Leaders	14	18.9%	17	26.6%
Preschool Teachers	12	16.2%	23	35.9%

*Direct refers to providing professional development to constituents. Indirect refers to providing professional development and consultation to others who deliver professional development programs to constituents. Some alumni do both.

TABLE 4

Professional Development Practices Used by Alumni (n=127)*

Professional Development Practice	% Total
Study Jewish content	77.0%
Analysis of and reflection on one's own practice	70.4%
Curriculum investigation and development	69.6%
Mentoring	66.4%
Study general education articles	60.8%
Hevruta learning	58.4%
Co-planning	49.6%
Develop classroom observation skills	46.4%
Teach evaluation techniques	43.2%
Conduct classroom observation	40.8%
Videotape investigation	26.4%
Analysis of student work	28.8%
Journaling	32.0%
Lesson Study	24.0%

***Respondents could select as many practices as they used.**

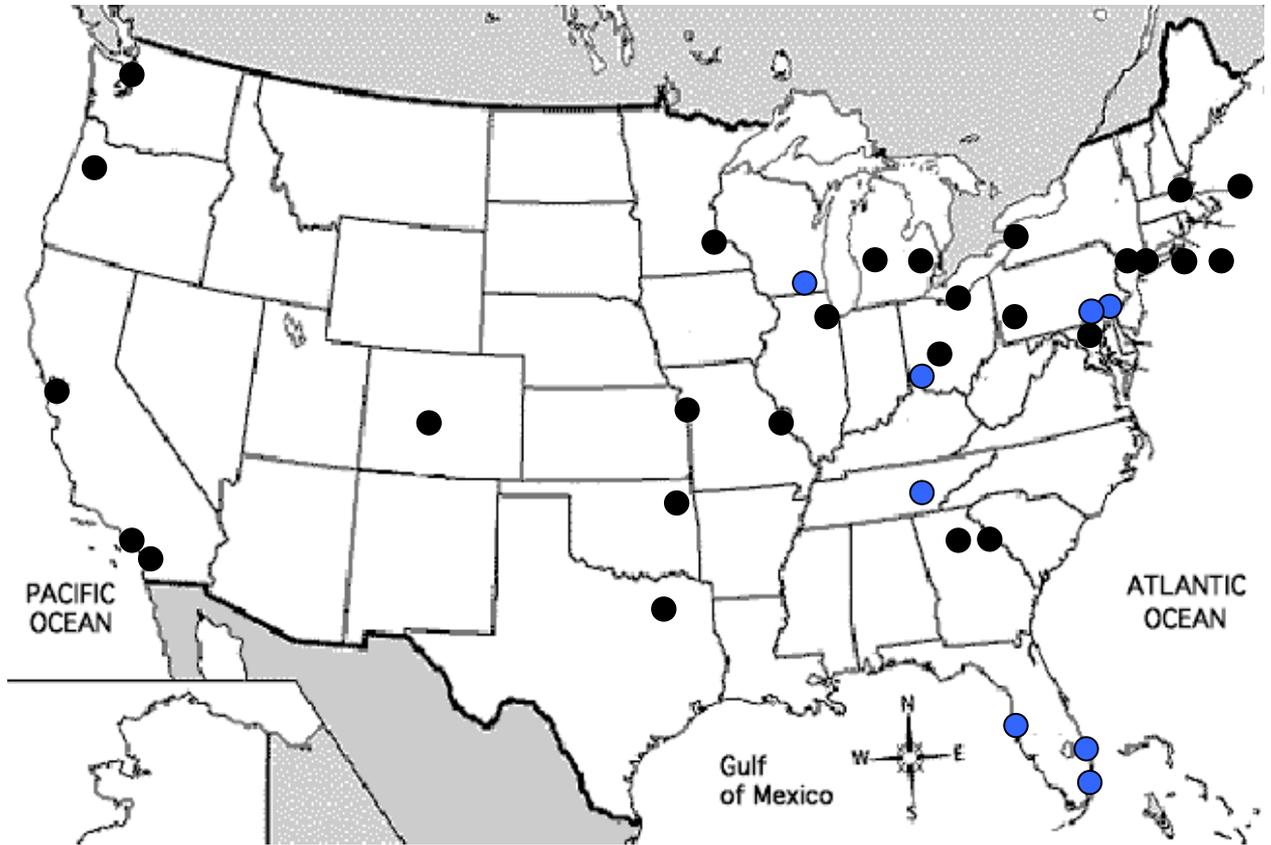
TABLE 5

Perceived Impact of Professional Development
on Recipients* (n=127)

Alumni's Perceptions of Impact of the PD They Provide	Number of Responses	Percent of Responses
Increased reflection about teaching and learning	85	70.8%
Improved teaching practice	58	45.7%
Increased sense of collegiality	52	40.9%
Increased Jewish content knowledge	51	40.1%
Increased professional conversation among teachers	40	31.5%
Increased sense of professionalism	28	22.0%
Learned specific theory or technique	15	11.8%
Improved mentoring skills	15	11.8%
Increased personal conversation among teachers	6	4.7%
Increased observation of one another's classes	3	2.5%

*Respondents could select up to 3 categories of impact. Responses include impact on those receiving direct and indirect professional development from MTEI alumni (as previously defined). Some alumni responded to questions regarding both direct and indirect services they provide.

Distribution of Alumni in Cohorts 1—5, in 2008



Los Angeles, CA | Orange County, CA | San Francisco, CA | Denver, CO | Hartford, CT | Atlanta, GA Augusta, GA | Chicago, IL | Baltimore, MD | Boston, MA | Detroit, MI | East Lansing, MI
 Minneapolis, MN | Kansas City, MO | St. Louis, MO | Nashua, NH | Bergen County, NJ | New York, NY
 Rochester, NY | Suffolk County, NY | Cleveland, OH | Columbus, OH | Tulsa, OK | Salem, OR
 Pittsburgh, PA | Dallas, TX | Seattle, WA

Foreign Cities:

Vancouver, BC | Mississauga, ON | Jerusalem, Israel | Tel Aviv, Israel

Participants in Additional Communities from Cohort Six (2008-2010) (in blue):

Miami, FL | Palm Beach, FL | Orlando, FL | Tampa, FL | Cincinnati, OH | Harrisburg, PA
 Philadelphia, PA | Knoxville, TN | Madison, WI

ENDNOTES

ⁱ Knapp, M. S. (2003). Professional development as a policy pathway. *Review of Research in Education*, 27, 109-158. McLaughlin, M.W. & Talbert, J.E. (2001). *Professional communities and the work of high school teaching*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

ⁱⁱ Dorph, G.Z. (2003). Studying curriculum materials: A strategy for Improving teaching. In N. Moskowitz (Ed). *The Ultimate Jewish Teachers Handbook*. Denver: Alternatives in Religious Education.

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