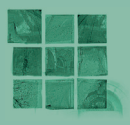

MANDEL
FOUNDATION

Jewish Education in JCCs

Steven M. Cohen
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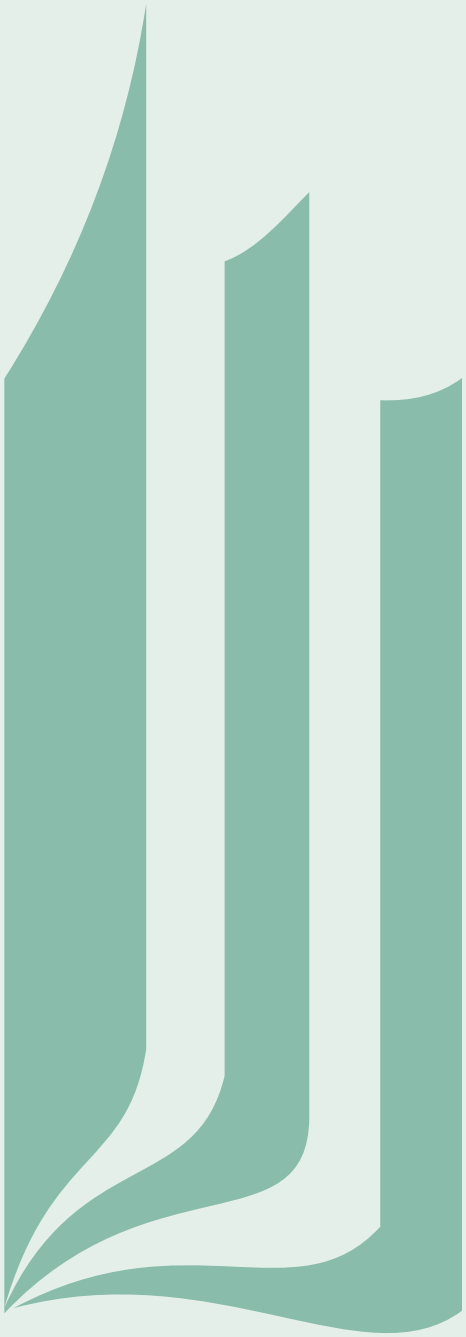

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Jewish Education in JCCs

Every year across North America tens of thousands of Jews walk through the doors of Jewish Community Centers. They come to swim in the pool, to work out in the health club, to drop their children off at the day care center, to chat with their friends—and today in ever-increasing numbers they come to do other things as well: They come to view an exhibit of Israeli art, to attend the Jewish book fair, to eat at the kosher cafe, and even, perhaps most surprisingly, to study some Torah.

The Jewish Community Center of today is a complex and multifaceted institution. It weaves together a variety of activities and attempts to address an agenda suited to the needs and concerns of the times. The JCC in recent years has rethought its commitment to its educational mission and in many ways it has reinvented itself in the light of the contemporary situation of Jews in a changing world. No longer satisfied with actualizing only its social and recreational mission, the JCC views itself as part of a bigger picture, part of the core of *educating* institutions within the Jewish community in North America.

There are 275 JCCs throughout the continent, serving an estimated one million members. As a potential resource for Jewish education, the Center has at hand a wide range of departments, programs, and personnel. In recent years, as we describe below, Centers have moved in a decisive fashion to upgrade the quality and quantity of their Jewish educational offerings. There have been significant and dramatic initiatives undertaken to bring new personnel for Jewish education on board and to improve the Jewish knowledge and skills of the people who have been long in the field. At least 65 Jewish educators have been added since the early 1980s; over 90 percent of Center executives have gone through Jewish training and learning programs, both in North America and in Israel.

We have reached an appropriate time to look at Jewish education in the JCCs, to take stock of their accomplishments and reflect upon what needs to be improved. How do Jewish Community Centers engage in Jewish education? What are the signs of an educationally effective JCC, and what are the key ingredients in good Jewish education in JCCs?

These central questions are raised at a time when the organized Jewish community, more concerned about its creative survival than ever before, has placed renewed emphasis upon Jewish education in its many forms. In fact, this investigation comes several years after the Center movement has inaugurated a significant move toward increased emphasis on Jewish education. The initial steps in this direction began in the 1970s. (This is not to ignore the several distinguished—but largely unheeded—voices within the Center movement that had called for heightened commitment to Jewish education decades earlier.) In the early 1970s some JCC camps

began to increase significantly their Jewish content, and throughout the decade a small number of Centers hired directors who would later emerge as well-known advocates of a Jewish educational agenda in their individual Centers.

Then in the early 1980s the Commission on Maximizing Jewish Educational Effectiveness in the JCCs (COMJEE I) sparked a significant across-the-board surge in investment in Jewish education and culture. Surveys of JCCs conducted in the 1980s and 1990s documented a large and growing amount of Jewish educational programming across North America.[1] Moreover, this movement has sponsored a wide variety of in-service staff development programs designed to enhance both Jewish commitment and competence among executive directors, line workers, and everyone in between. Notably, since COMJEE I, well over 2,000 Center professionals have participated in Israel Educational Seminars sponsored by the Jewish Community Association of North America (JCCA). Veteran professional leaders in the Center movement are deeply impressed with what they see as a fundamental transformation in the mission and standard operation of the JCCs.

Now, after about two decades of a growing commitment to Jewish education, we find throughout the continent many examples of outstanding Jewish education in JCCs. They point the way for Centers that may still be in the early stages of transformation. This study reports on our efforts to locate, understand, and interpret the most notable practices in Jewish education now taking place in the Center movement.

As two researchers whose professional and personal lives have been close to the practice and study of Jewish education in conventional settings, we came to this study with a degree of skepticism. We wondered whether serious Jewish education was taking place anywhere in the Center movement. We questioned whether it was even possible for a JCC to engage in effective Jewish education. Several considerations underlay our initial skepticism.

As champions of Jewish education in the Center movement readily concede, JCCs face a daunting number of obstacles if they are to be taken seriously as "players" in the world of Jewish education in North America. At its heart, the JCC is a market-driven, service-oriented agency, best known for its preschools, camps, and physical education facilities. For decades, Jews have come to Centers for specific services that are only tangentially related to Jewish education as it has been traditionally understood. Jewish education in the JCC context is not a money-maker, at least in the short term. (As we shall see, advocates of Jewish education in the JCCs argue that Jewish education is essential for the institutional well-being of Centers in the long term.)

Moreover, putting matters most simply, Centers are neither synagogues nor schools, two institutions that have been in the business of Jewish education for centuries. Jews do not come to Centers to pray; they do not celebrate their most momentous life cycle events in the Center context; and (for better and worse) they do not expect to be confronted with a particular religious ideology there. Centers cannot expect to engage their clientele Jewishly in the same fashion as do synagogues and schools; not, in fact, do they seek to do so.

Our skepticism was further fueled by our initial impressions of the Center professionals. At least until recently, JCC staff have historically been selected for their group-work skills rather than their proficiency in or dedication to Judaism. For the most part, they have not been very well educated Judaically (although, as we report below, this has been changing). In addition, it could be argued that social workers (who dominate JCC professional staffs) are inclined to accept the validity of their clients' values and beliefs. In contrast, educators—especially religious educators—see themselves in the business of challenging, if not changing, fundamental values and beliefs. On a certain level the social work ethos and the education ethos are in tension, although that tension may be resolvable or even fruitful.

Yet in the course of conducting this study, our own views began to change. Notwithstanding the obstacles mentioned above and our initial reservations, we did in fact discover numerous examples of good Jewish education taking place within the confines of Jewish Community Centers throughout North America. JCCs, we came to believe, *can* be effective instruments of some forms of Jewish education. Without looking very hard, we found several examples of what may be called "best practices" in Jewish education in JCCs.

The Best Practices Project

In describing its "blueprint for the future," *A Time to Act*, the report of the Commission on Jewish Education in North America, called for the creation of "an inventory of best educational practices in North America,"[2] Accordingly, the Best Practices Project of the council for Initiatives in Jewish Education (CIJE) documents exemplary models of Jewish education. Up to this point, the Project has published volumes in two areas: the supplementary school, and early childhood Jewish education programs. This volume on Jewish education in Jewish Community Centers, then, is the third in the series.

What do we mean by "best practice"? One recent book about this concept in the world of education states that it is a phrase borrowed

> from the professions of medicine and law, where "good practice" or "best practice" are everyday phrases used to describe solid, reputable, state-of-the-art work in a field. I a doctor, for example, does not follow contemporary standards and a case turns out badly, peers may criticize his decisions and treatments by saying something like, "that was simply not best practice."[3]

We need to be cautious about what we mean by the word "best" in the term "best practice." The literature in education points out that seeking perfection will be of little use as we try to improve actual work in the field. In and enterprise as complex and multifaceted as education, these writers argue, we should be looking to discover "good," not ideal, practice.[4] "Good" educational practice is what we seek to identify for Jewish education, models of the best *available* practice in any given domain. In some cases best available practice will come very close to "best imaginable practice"; at other times the gap between the best we currently have and the best we think we could attain may be far greater.

We also need to think carefully about the second word in the phrase "best practice." As we conducted our investigation, we came to learn that what is best about JCC Jewish education cannot be reduced to a specific program or procedure. Rather, educationally effective JCCs have developed an ethos, a set of principles that pervade entire organizations. These principles constitute and overall approach to Jewish education that, when it works, informs the decisions and functioning of professional staff and lay leaders. In short, for purposes of this report, best practice embraces not only best programs)or procedures), but also best philosophy and best principles.

Main Purposes and Intended Audience

In describing areas of Jewish educational excellence, this study seeks to understand what goes into making an educationally successful Center. Earlier studies[5] have pointed to the director the

board, the Jewish educator, the staff, the institutional environment, and other elements of success in JCC Jewish education. What we have tried to do in this volume is to fill in the portrait, add color and nuance to the description, and help the reader imagine the way that successful JCCs operate in their settings.

Our concern here is with the JCC as a Jewish educational institution, and it is only in this realm that we sought to document best practices. We define the concept of "Jewish education" quite broadly. Education includes schoolrooms and classes, to be sure; but education takes place in many different ways—in the gym, in the art gallery, in early childhood and family programs, as well as by the way of the very ambiance of an institution, the decorations on its walls and the music in its corridors.

The notion that education is broad-based and multidimensional, that it goes beyond formal schooling, is an idea explored in depth by Lawrence Cremin, the great historian of American education. Cremin's definition of education includes "the multiplicity of individuals and institutions that educate—parents, peers, siblings, and friends, as well as families, churches, synagogues, libraries, museums, summer camps, benevolent societies, agricultural fairs, settlement houses."[6]

Perhaps no institution in Jewish life today reflects the notion of an "ecology"[7] of diverse educational opportunities better than does the JCC. And there are few institutions that have so much potential to educate.

As should be obvious by this point, we hope that our study will promote better practice in this important area of Jewish education. Ideally, JCCs that are currently less advanced in this domain will be inspired to change their practice and advance their commitment to Jewish education.

We believe that this report will be useful to JCC board members, executive directors, department heads, Jewish educational personnel, and all those who work professionally for their JCCs. If this document truly succeeds, it will help provoke renewed and deeper thinking on the part of event the most expert and thoughtful practitioners and policy-makers in the Center movement.

This report is also directed to policy-makers, Jewish educators, and others outside the Center movement who may be unaware of the significant recent developments in JCC Jewish education. The JCC movement has effected enormous changes in the ways that Centers view their role as Jewish educational institutions. As we have come to learn through the course of our research, JCCs ought to be taken more seriously as a locus of Jewish education.

Method

We began our research by consulting with several experts and reading the literature published in recent years about this topic. On that basis, we chose a half dozen JCCs that are reputed to be among the outstanding Jewish educational Centers in the field. We sought diversity with respect to several characteristics: geography, size of community and Center, structure (i.e., a metropolitan system as well as local units), and personnel (i.e., status of Jewish educator). Our six sites were:

The Jewish Community Centers of Chicago
The JCC on the Palisades, Tenafly, New Jersey
The Memphis JCC
The Jewish Community Centers Association of St. Louis
The JCC of the Greater St. Paul Area
The YM & YWHA of Suffolk, Commack, New York (Long Island)

We wish to underscore that these six particular Centers are not the only examples of best practice in this arena. We chose them because they constitute a *sample* of the best Centers and because they are diverse along the lines stated above. We specifically excluded some Centers with a deserved reputation for excellence, in part because they are so unusual or so well-endowed with institutional resources that other Centers might regard them as *sui generis*.

Beyond the six sites chosen for in-depth investigation, we also selected a group of stand-alone programs operating within other Jewish Community Centers. These specific programs are among many around the continent that offer examples of excellence in particular domains of JCC activity.

The mode of work in this study was qualitative, but the study is not "ethnographic" in the way that term is conventionally used in social research.[8] True ethnographies demand a lengthy period of participant observation in which the researcher becomes a virtual member of the society of institution that is being investigated. Such a study of a JCC would be extremely useful, but our time and resource limitations did not permit it. Our goal was to learn as much as we could from insider about how these particular JCCs did their educational work.

After selecting the six sites, we requested from each a host of documentation including catalogues, reports, minutes of board meetings, and publicity materials.

The two of us conducted our first site visit (at the JCC on the Palisades) jointly to learn how we might carry on the interviews and to allow for mutual self-reflection. Another researcher, Julie Tammivaara, then joined Steven Cohen in the visit to Suffolk; afterwards, Tammivaara visited

Memphis, Holtz went to St. Louis, and Cohen visited Chicago and St. Paul. Both Holtz and Cohen interviewed significant figures from the Centers with stand-alone programs; in addition Ruth Pinkenson Feldman researched an early childhood department at yet another Center.

In each Center we asked the director to arrange interviews with the Jewish educator, assistant directors, department heads, other staff, and board members. In all instances we met with the Jewish educator and the preschool director. We also met with lay leaders of the agencies, most typically with current or past presidents and other senior officers. Last, we viewed programs in progress, and as we walked through the Centers, we closely examined the building, looking for visible evidence of Jewish education in action. In designing our visits, we gave the executive director a considerable amount of flexibility in choosing those aspects of his or her Center that were deemed most outstanding.

We spent from one to three days in each Center and prepared separate reports on each of our visits. People spoke to us in confidence, and for that reason, throughout this report we provide few specific names.

Historical Background: *The JCCs' Growing Commitment to Jewish Education*

The Jewish Community Center movement has had a long and complex relationship to the question of its role as an educating institution. Originally created as social and intellectual meeting places for Jews in the mid-nineteenth century, Centers came to play an important role in the integration of the huge waves of immigrants that came to American shores in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.[9] In time, Centers moved out to the suburbs—often in beautiful new facilities—following the migration of their upwardly and outwardly mobile constituents.

The question of a specifically Jewish mission for the JCC has been debated throughout the history of the Center movement. Even in the earliest days of Centers, well-known personalities such as Louis Marshall, Mordecai Kaplan, and Horace Kallen urged the Centers, to adopt a more central Jewish focus. However, as Oscar Janowsky, in his groundbreaking survey of JCCs published in 1948, pointed out, "practice fell short of precept in this regard."[10] In describing settlements (precursors of the modern JCC) during the early part of the century, he wrote, "when allowances are made for...necessary concessions, and for lip-service to the positive views of [some], the Jewish settlements remained throughout this period lukewarm, if not hostile to Jewish emphasis."[11] He quotes an observer from as early as 1916 who concluded that settlements were still emphasizing the nonsectarian rather than the Jewish aspects of their mission. Janowsky

adds, "The experience of the present Survey would lead one to believe that this was an understatement, and as an understatement it describes adequately the present situation in most Jewish settlements."[12] Janowksy states, "In the main, while there has been great emphasis upon the Jewish center as a unifying agency, the cleavage of previous decades has remained: some have envisaged a distinctively Jewish purpose for the Jewish center, while others have leaned toward non-sectarianism."[13]

In the years following the Janowsky report, many of the same tensions about the issue of the Center's Jewish mission remained. But as Jews became more at home in America—both more integrated and more assimilated—the Center began to reevaluate its role and purpose. As was noted earlier, this process culminated in the JWB's Commission on Maximizing Jewish Educational Effectiveness of Jewish Community Centers (COMJEE), which began deliberations in 1982 and published its report in 1984. The report clearly and directly argued for the centrality of Jewish education to the mission of JCCs and asserted the unique role that Centers can play in lifelong Jewish learning.

A small number of Jewish Community Centers had placed Jewish education on their agenda several years before the COMJEE report. (In fact, informants at most of our six sites claimed that they had done so in the 1970s.) Certainly, the Commission's work galvanized the Center movement and represented a dramatic shift in the priorities and mission of Jewish Community Centers across North America. Despite earlier efforts to improve the Jewish educational mission of Centers, "what we are now witnessing is different in depth and intensity than anything that has preceded it. More resources, effort, support and passion have been injected into the Jewish focus of Centers than ever before."[14] Recent research has documented the expansion of Jewish educational programs in the Centers, consistent with the COMJEE recommendations.[15]

The potential role of JCCs as places for Jewish education was given further impetus by the new concerns in the Jewish community at large about intermarriage, assimilation, and the future of the Jews as a viable and dynamic community in North America. The 1990 National Jewish Population Survey[16] and the report of the Commission on Jewish Education in North America[17] raised serious questions and challenges about Jewish education and Jewish continuity.

In May 1995 the JCCA released a follow-up report to the original COMJEE. This second effort, *COMJEE II: The Task Force on Reinforcing the Effectiveness of Jewish Education in JCCs*, delineated specific recommendations to help move the educational mission of JCCs forward. In an introductory section of this report, entitled "Maximizing Jewish Educational Potential," COMJEE II outlined a set of outcomes for a Center that "seeks to reach its potential as an

institution of creative Jewish continuity," including items such as "have an ambiance that is warm, embracing and visibly Jewish," "make budgetary provision for Jewish educational experimentation and innovation," and engage "Jewish educators as part of its staff."

These eighteen paragraphs of descriptive outcomes helped form a set of criteria for our research in evaluating best practice in JCCs. In essence, the description of the Jewishly effective JCC boils down to three words starting with the letter "P": Personnel, Program, and Philosophy. The rest of this report will examine each in turn.

Notes

1. See Bernard Reisman, *Social Change and Response–Assessing Efforts to Maximize Jewish Educational Effectiveness in Jewish Community Centers in North America* (New York: JWB, 1988); Barry Chazan and Steven M. Cohen, *Assessing the Jewish Educational Effectiveness of Jewish Community Centers–The 1994 Survey* (New York: JCCA, 1995).

2. Commission on Jewish Education in North America, *A Time to Act* (Lanaham, MD: University Press of America, 1991), p. 69.

3. Steven Zemelman, Harvey Daniels, and Arthur Hyde, *Best Practice* (London: Heinemann, 1993), pp. vii-viii.

4. See, for example, Sara Lawrence Lightfoot, *The Good High School* (New York: Basic Books, 1983).

5. See, for example, Chazan and Cohen, *Assessing the Jewish Educational Effectiveness of Jewish Community Centers*. Also Barry Chazan and Mark Charendoff, *Jewish Education and the Jewish Community Center* (Jerusalem: JCCA, 1994).

6. Lawrence Cremin, *Traditions of American Education* (New York: Basic Books, 1976), p. 136.

7. Lawrence Cremin, *Public Education* (New York: Basic Books, 1976).

8. See, for example, H. Russell Bernard, *Research Methods in Anthropology* (Thousands Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1994).

9. The best history of the early years of Jewish Community Centers is a recent doctoral dissertation by David Kaufman entitled *"Shul with a Pool"* (Brandeis University, 1994). It is currently being prepared for publication in book form.

10. Oscar I. Janowsky, *The JWB Survey* (New York: Dial Press, 1948), p. 237.

11. *Ibid*., p. 244.

12. *Ibid*.

13. *Ibid*

14. Barry Chazan and Richard Juran, "What We Know About Jewish Education in Jewish Community Centers," in *What We Know About Jewish Education*, ed. Stuart I. Kelman (Los Angeles: Torah Aura, 1992), p. 171.

15. Chazan and Cohen, *Assessing the Jewish Educational Effectiveness of Jewish Community Centers*.

16. Barry Kosmin and others, *Highlights of the National Jewish Population Survey* (New York: CJF, 1991).

17. Commission on Jewish Education, *A Time to Act*.

Committed and Knowledgeable People

Jewish educational excellence begins with committed lay and professional leadership, coupled with a Judaically knowledgeable staff. The key components here (in relative order of importance) are:

—the executive director
—the board
—the professional Jewish educator
—the staff, particularly those who serve in explicitly educational capacities

The Executive Director

> The literature on effective schools tends to agree on at least one point—that an essential ingredient of good schools is strong, consistent, and inspired leadership. The tone and culture of schools is said to be defined by the vision and purposeful action of the principal.[18]

As researchers have found in education, in business, and in government, the role of the top professional is central in making any system work well. In Jewish Community Centers, the executive director is clearly the key player in creating a best practice site for Jewish education.

The executives we studied were imbued with the importance of the Jewish mission of their Center and of Centers in general. In some cases these directors have been well-known for years as advocates—sometimes in print—for the Jewish mission of Jewish Community Centers. They have a vision about what they want to accomplish and can articulate that vision to their staff and their members. In some cases the executive has a well-worked-out theory—one might even say a philosophy—for Jewish education in the JCC. In other cases the executive director works instinctively and relies on the wisdom of other staff members, most importantly the Jewish educator, to provide the theory. But without a firm belief in the Jewish educational mission of JCCs on the part of the executive, it is unlikely that anything significant in Jewish education could happen in a Center, no matter what other factors were in place—even a committed lay leadership and staff.

Most broadly, the executive has primary responsibility for projecting a Jewish educational vision and commitment that permeate the agency. More specifically, we can identify four key responsibilities:

1. Bolster the board's commitment to the Center's Jewish educational mission.

2. Advocate for the creation of the Jewish educator position, and extend personal and concrete support to the educator once he or she is in the job.

3. Hire Jewishly knowledgeable professionals for such key tasks as directors of early childhood education, the summer camp, youth programming, and cultural arts.

4. Ensure that the staff grows in terms of Jewish knowledge and commitment.

The particular ways in which the executive manages and achieves these goals differ from place to place and from person to person. But no matte how the executive expresses his or her leadership, and no matter what kind of personality and background the executive brings to the position, certain dimensions of the job seem to be constant across all our sites.

As an outgrowth of this personal and professional commitment, the educationally "successful" executive director advocates for the creation of a Jewish educator position at the Center. The educator position is probably the single most important "proximate cause" in bringing about advances in Jewish education in a JCC. Part of what the director must do is create that position. He or she must believe in the importance of the job, understand the function of the position, and advocate for it within his or her staff an board. Directors spoke of how they rearranged budgets or raised additional funds in order to pay for the position—for example, by raising endowments specifically for that purpose.

The next step is to find the right kind of person for the job. Having a clear understanding of the nature of the Jewish educator's role and the possibilities for the Center is crucial in making correct decisions in hiring. In all the places we visited, we were impressed with the apparent suitability of the particular educator to the particular environment. The director made sure there was a good fit between the educator and the needs and culture of the particular Center at that point in its development as a Jewish educational institution. As we will point out later, there are a variety of legitimate models for the Jewish educator role in Centers. Accordingly, the executive needs to have the right concept to match his or her Center and the person hired for the position.

Once the slot has been filled, the director helps integrate the Jewish educator into other life of the Center in supportive and significant ways. These may include introducing the educator to influential laypeople or working to ensure that the staff is receptive to the advice and assistance of the educator. The educator must be supervised appropriately and positioned well, both in the Center and in the community. To some extent, executives decide how much authority and influence—both formal and informal—the educator will exercise.

In Centers that we studied, executives provide helpful, supportive supervision. In some Centers the executives share access to the board with the educator. As a result, the executive helps position the educator to interact well with board members, by creating study opportunities at board meetings, for example, or at board members' homes. Generally such executives help the educator develop his or her own relationship with board members. Rather than viewing this access to the board as a threat to their own leadership, these executives encourage such encounters.

The executives provide opportunities for staff to study Judaica with the educator during work time. Some executives even conduct their own classes in text study, setting a powerful example and serving as a role model. As one Center executive put it, "If it doesn't take place during work time, it can't work and it can't send the message you want to send."

In addition, the use of time is critical to the life of the educator. In some cases (though not all) Center executives in these sites conceptualize the time demands on the educator in a manner different from that of other staff. For example, some educators are encouraged to pursue their own personal study and preparation as an integral part of their work day, even though they are not being "productive" as administrators, programmers, or classroom teachers during

those hours. Almost all the educators identify a need for time for their own continuing Jewish study. The Center environment is an activist one and unlike a university or school, it is not particularly attuned to the need for preparation time. Nevertheless, executives and educators feel that such time for reflection and learning is especially important if the educator is to serve as teacher or resident scholar at the JCC.

Next, many of the Center directors at the sites we visited make Jewish commitment a specific, stated requirement in hiring new staff and in promoting veterans. One senior professional reported that she informs prospective hirees at the first interview that Jewish commitment is an absolute, bottom-line requirement. Apparently the candor and simplicity of the message is quite effective, as she reports that several job applicants proceed to withdraw their names from consideration.

Aside from establishing criteria for hiring new personnel, executives in many of the sites that we studied make the Jewish contribution of staff members already in place an important part of their regular evaluation and a clearly stated criterion for promotion. One director reported that over the years, consistent with his long-term strategy for raising the Jewish educational commitment and capability of his professionals, some experienced staff members had left his Center because they felt that they could not conform to the demand for increased personal Jewish involvement and ongoing study of Judaic material.

Executives work to enhance the Jewish knowledge and commitment among the staff. They ensure opportunities for staff study by way of study groups or sessions with the Jewish educator. Some encourage their staff to enroll in existing curricular programs such as the Melton Mini-School or Derekh Torah. In other places, this Jewish study revolves around specific situations that Center staff might encounter in their work and the Jewish responses to such situations. For example, some Centers schedule regular sessions on topics such as death and suffering ("why bad things happen to good people"), abortion, or alcohol and drug abuse, so that staff members will come to appreciate a Jewish perspective on these matters. In many places the director personally attends these study sessions, further indicating their importance in the culture of the JCC.

Perhaps the most dramatic example of the executive's commitment to enhancing the Jewish knowledge and commitment of the staff has been the staff educational seminar in Israel. These seminars can have a profound personal impact on both Jewish and non-Jewish staff members. During the course of our interviews, several staff members reported how they (or their colleagues) underwent a significant turn toward a Jewish educational commitment after JCC-sponsored seminar to Israel. As one executive remarked in a recent study of the 1989-1990 JCCA Executive Fellows Program (in Israel):

> Personally, it touched me because it gave me the opportunity to really discuss and become in touch with my Judaism, which I really hadn't been for a long time. In terms of what a JCC director does, I had been in touch more with the mechanics of it than I was with the emotions of it. So the three months that I had a chance just to feel myself as a Jew, when I got back, made a profound change in my professional life.... It influenced almost every program at the agency, as well as board meetings.[19]

Executives whom we interviewed spoke of their ongoing efforts to subsidize and organize Israel Educational Seminars, a budgetary item that can readily be dropped in hard times.

Some Centers have instituted a self-evaluation in which the executive (often using the Jewish educator as a content resource person) embarks on a critical and ongoing examination of the Jewish content, and potential for Jewish content, in all programs, activities, and departments of the Centers. This analysis prompts a search for changes to improve the Jewish program in these domains. For example, after the residential camping program at one Center went through such an evaluation, its internal report urged the hiring of

> a person on staff with a strong Jewish background (rabbinical student or person getting a masters in Jewish studies), who could be a source of Jewish programming and Jewish knowledge and who could also serve in some other capacity at camp. Besides a functioning staff member, few, if any Jewish resources are available at Camp....Resource books, tapes and videos would be valuable for staff...

When we visited this Center, these recommendations were already well on the way toward implementation, beginning with the hiring of the Judaica resource person.

In addition to enhancing the staff's Jewish knowledge and commitment, the executives in these sites work to ensure that the board is committed to the Center's Jewish education agenda. One technique for doing so emphasizes building long-term relationships with individuals. In addition, some executives encourage Jewish study by the board members, either at the formal meetings or through the creation of other contexts. We learned about Jewish study evenings designed primarily for board members conducted by the Jewish educator, and, of course, the Israel Educational Seminars for the board. In one place the board seminar served as the launch for the entire Jewish educational rethinking of the Center.

The executive who is deeply committed in his or her own Jewish life serves as a powerful role model or board members. However, the director need not be Jewishly knowledgeable at an advanced level. Those who are not advanced demonstrated their personal commitment to Jewish learning by hiring a Jewishly learned educator and by visibly participating in staff programs. Of course, in the small number of cases where the executive is knowledgeable, the impact on board members is even more powerful. In such situations the executive functions as a kind of surrogate rabbi for members of the board. One director said that he sees his own role as challenging lay leaders so that they come to adopt more Jewishness in their lives.

Finally, beyond functions internal to the JCC, Center executives have an external role to play as well. the director manages relations with local synagogues, Jewish schools, the Federation, and other relevant institutions. These relationships have become deeper, and in some cases more complex, as Centers have taken on more responsibility for Jewish education.

The Board

A Jewishly committed executive cannot go very far in instituting Jewish educational excellence without the acquiescence, if not the full support, of the board. As a result, executives committed

to Jewish education work to bring the board along, to sustain and enlarge board support for the Center's Jewish educational mission. In this regard, the board plays several crucial roles:

1. It hires (and fires) the executive.

2. It influences numerous decisions, large and small, affecting the whole tenor of the agency with respect to Jewish education.

3. It exerts ultimate authority over the budget, affecting such decisions as whether to employ a professional Jewish educator, how much to invest in Jewish educational programming, and how much to charge the clients for those services.

4. Individual board members can become enthusiastic sponsors of specific Jewish programs, facilitating them through their credibility, insights, and financial support.

Prior to undertaking our research, we had suspected that board members in educationally effective Centers would contain a core group with extraordinary personal commitment to Jewish life. After all, if some JCCs are more committed to Jewish education than others, and if the boards are indeed a critical ingredient in fostering that commitment, then it stands to reason that such boards should consist of members who are unusually committed to Jewish practice and learning in their own lives.

Instead—and perhaps paradoxically—we found that board members' Jewish background in the best practice sites were not terribly different from that of lay leader of Federations, social service agencies, and defense agencies. Typically, they are Conservative and Reform synagogue members who send their children to religious schools and support the Federation campaign, but they are not distinguished by high level of personal Jewish involvement in the home or synagogue, or by a great degree of prior Jewish learning. The very typicality of these board members' Jewish involvement and learning testifies to the strength of their Centers; commitment to Jewish education, and to the leadership of the executive who has nurtured boards that support their Centers' Jewish mission.

Indeed, with respect to the Jewish education agenda, some board members were simply nonobstructionist; insofar as support for Jewish education did not compete with needed resources, they would offer no objection. (As one executive confided, with some board members the most he could hope for is that they simply "stay out of the way.") At the other extreme, we met leaders who were insistent upon the Jewish education mission as essential to the Center and to their own ongoing participation When pushed, not a few of these said they would resign from the board in the unlikely eventuality that their Center abandoned its commitment to Jewish education.

The latter were the sort of board members who were open to personal learning and participation in Jewish education. They were either genuinely interested or saw such participation as vital to their successful "career" as a Jewish leader in the Center and community. We sensed that the impact committed key board members bring to the Jewish educational endeavor may extend far beyond their small numbers. Effective support for the Jewish educational mission can be maintained by the perpetuation of an inner leadership group

(albeit an influential and respected minority) that is willing to defend that mission in hard times and broaden it in good times.

In that regard, one significant activity that we saw in more than one place was leadership development projects to socialize new board members to the Jewish mission. One site, for instance, conducts a special three-to four-session program (for 40 people) to move new leadership toward support for the Jewish mission of the Center.

For the most part, board members stay out of day-to-day management of Jewish educational programming. Rather, they allow for the professional autonomy of the educator of Jewishly committed director. Boards viewed the executive as the key to implementing their vision. Some boards arrived at the Jewish mission and then went out to hire the right executive to realize their dream; in other cases the director was already in place and he or she (often inspired by the original COMJEE report, the 1989-1990 Executive Fellows in Israel program, or some personal experience) moved the board along this path.

We tried to determine how the board came to adopt a strong commitment to Jewish education. Beyond the influence of the executive director (the single most important factor), we identified the following factors:

1. The original COMJEE process, entailing the report and its dissemination during the 1980s by way of personal visits of the national JCCA staff and lay leaders and through the Biennial Conference of the JCCA.

2. Israel Educational Seminars for boards, at which specific teachers and programs (through the JCCA Israel Office, Melton Center of the Hebrew University, Melitz, etc.) seem to have left strong positive memories.

3. The impact of the national emphasis by Federations and other Jewish communal agencies on ensuring Jewish continuity and the interest of JCC leadership to be seen as taking part in this continental enterprise.

4. Two national leadership development programs (the Wexner Heritage Program and CLAL) entailing study of Judaica with highly proficient teachers.

A combination of the factors above was often given additional support and energy by the arrival of a visiting Jewish educator or scholar (such as from Israel) who helped demonstrate the potential of an in-house educator for advancing the Jewish agenda of the Center. The success of the visiting educator was in some cases the factor that helped secure the funding for hiring an educator for the Center staff.

The Jewish Educator

In the Center's day-to-day operation, the Jewish education specialist is the central figure in improving a Center's educational program. To varying extents, the Jewish educator assumes a variety of roles, including the following:

1. Programmer—the specialist plans, administers, and executes a variety of educational activities, be it in a specific department or throughout the Center.

2. Resource—he or she provides Jewish educational advice and materials, generally to other department heads, and particularly to the preschool and camp.

3. Advocate—the educator explicitly lobbies for change among staff and lay leaders, trying to raise the Jewish profile of the agency.

4. Teacher—the educator conducts classes personally, generally with a heavy emphasis on staff and board development (rather than for the members at large).

5. Scholar—the educator devotes time to study and, sometimes, to writing.

Individual JCCs have adopted diverse definitions of the Jewish educators' job. In any one place the responsibilities draw upon some, but not all, of the roles outlined above. Most often the educator serves as programmer, resource, and advocate. In one instance, the educator does everything but programming. In one very atypical instance, the educator serves only as a scholar-in-residence and occasional resource person. In still other instances, individuals occupying top and near-top professional leadership positions manage to devote considerable time to study and writing, particularly of professional literature. Currently JCCs have numerous ways of structuring this position and may make their decisions based upon their needs, their current personnel, and the candidates available to fill the position.

The COMJEE II report picks up on the plurality of job definitions by differentiating two main types of educators—"Advanced Jewish Educators and Jewish Programming Specialists."[20] As we noted, we saw both types—but even within the types we found significant differences in job definition as well as in previous training and experience.

Critical to the success of the Jewish educator is the proper fit between the expectations and style of the educator with his or her Center and its level of development. Not every Jewish educator or every rabbi would do well in the world of the Jewish Community Center. In our view, despite differences among them, the successful JCC educators whom we met shared an ability to fit into the particular culture of the JCC in which they worked, negotiate its complexities, and use to advantage the many educational opportunities that a Center can offer.

Each Center has its own specific ethos, its own symbols, values, and way of operating. The educators in the best practice sites were able to feel at home in their Center; they were able to share in its culture and become insiders. Perhaps the most important characteristic of the successful educator is a nonjudgmental openness to the people whom he or she meets, many of whom are less Jewishly committed or knowledgeable than the educator. Although it is true that educators and rabbis in more conventional educational settings such as schools or synagogues are generally more learned and involved than their constituents, the formal settings tend to have established norms or expectations that are acknowledged (though not always attained!) by both the educator and the lay participant. At the Center, however, the educator needs to be comfortable with a wide range of behaviors, beliefs, and knowledge—and expectations of "success" or conformity to "what we do here" needs to be very fluid and often undefined. An educator unable to meet the "client where he or she is" will not succeed in a JCC.

Thus a Center educator must be willing to accept the various Jewish choices that

Center members may make. For example, we heard an Orthodox educator in one Center enthusiastically talk about a member who had participated in his classes and then joined a local Reform synagogue. Not all educators are able to take such a stance. Those who can, however, will have a far greater chance at success working in a JCC. As one educator put it, "I don't care what Jewish path they [his students] take, but I do want them to be on a path!"

The successful educators were people who understood that other *staff* of the JCC were as much their clients as were the members. Compared with synagogues, Centers have a large number of professionals who come in contact with the lay members. Whether physical education trainers, counselors at the day camp, youth advisers leading teen programs, or cultural program directors—Jewish educators in Centers need to view the various staff members as a prime audience for their Jewish educational work.

For good practice, then, the educator maintains standards that are appropriate for his or her agency—in particular, standards consistent with the expectations of the board and the director. Conversely, the Centers (read: the directors) are responsible for helping the educator understand the organizational culture and the limits it imposes.

The Jewish educator serves important roles both inside and outside the Center's walls. Within the Center, as was noted, the educator may serve as direct teacher of staff and laypeople. Indeed, the educator may be a kind of quasi-rabbi for lay leadership and professional staff of the JCC. The job embraces a very important outside dimension as well; like the executive director, the educator must develop relationships with local rabbis, Federation professionals, and others in the community.

In both domains, one recurrent theme we discerned was the need to have people develop a sense of trust in the educator. This is certainly a best practice important for all Center workers bit especially crucial for the Jewish educator. The ambivalent feelings contemporary Jews harbor toward Judaism, coupled with the changing place of Jewish education in the JCC, combine to raise at least the potential for resistance, suspicion, and even antagonism on the part of some staff members toward the Jewish educator and what he or she represents. Some staff members might wonder, as one worker told us, "Who is this guy and what does he want from me?" One of the educators, for example, remarked that he needed a good deal of time to show the key professionals and lay leaders that he was worthy of their trust and that he was not out to make them "religious." Complicating the situation is the fact that the educator does, of course, have an educational mission, though the suspicions of the staff may be overblown, educators do aspire to influence the people with whom they interact.

The issue of trust is related to the educators' need to build relations around the Center by personal connections and relationships with the entire staff. Educators in the best practice sites try to meet with the various staff members in a variety of ways—in some cases through being a teacher, and in others by developing informal friendships. In one Center the Jewish educator goes out to lunch on a monthly basis with a number of staff members, including those seemingly remote from his work, such as the

maintenance director of the Center. In this way he gets to know many people around the JCC—both staff and members—and is able to develop real relationships that help him do his job more effectively.

Trust plays an important role in the educators' relationships with the outside community as well. Clearly the most complicated of these relationships is with the local rabbis. These relationships become more complicated still when the Jewish educator at the Center is a rabbi, as was true in three of the sites that we studied. Local rabbis worry about the Center's becoming a competing Jewish institution, "a pool with a shul," as the old saying (quoted to us by more than one Center professional) has it. To avoid conflicts with rabbis, Center educators refrain from performing ritual functions and channel their JCC "students" toward various synagogues for life cycle events and conversions to Judaism. One educator (a rabbi) who has become particularly close with members of his Center's board told us that he is scrupulous in not performing weddings, funerals, and other rites of passage, even for board members who find he is the one rabbi to whom they feel close.

Despite their self-imposed constraints, it is also clear that rabbis working in Jewish Community Centers come to play a kind of rabbinic role. One such educator reported that he very rarely is asked for rulings on questions of Jewish law and ritual, but he *is* asked to serve as an authoritative teacher and a repository of information and ideas about Judaism, often demonstrating Judaism's relevance to contemporary situations. In that role he quite closely resembles his rabbinic peers in other JCCs.

Staff Development: *Deepening Knowledge, Comfort, and Commitment*

Like other Jewish institutions JCCs must cope with the challenges of recruiting and retaining highly qualified staff members. The key issue for JCCs today is not merely budgetary constraints. Rather, in light of the increasing emphasis on Jewish education as critical to Centers' mission, it is in finding and developing staff who will meet the new and expanded set of criteria that flow from a commitment to Jewish education. Some Centers (those with only a moderate commitment to a Jewish education agenda) need concern themselves only with such qualifications as group skills or pedagogic abilities. A minimal level of Jewish knowledge and commitment generally suffices for most line positions in such places. In fact, some Centers regularly turn to non-Jews lack both Jewish commitment and Jewish knowledge (which is not to say that they are incapable of acquiring at least one and perhaps both, in time). Under these circumstances, Centers committed to a Jewish education agenda have no choice but to institute vigorous, comprehensive, and effective programs of staff development with the twin goals of deepening Jewish knowledge and enhancing Jewish commitment.

In the Centers that we studied, we saw staff involved in a variety of study opportunities to enhance their Jewish knowledge, and, more broadly, their comfort level and confidence in their Judaic competence. These programs included staff classes on a monthly basis and staff classes every week. The program of study often was based around one of the two major

adult study curricula currently in use in JCC adult education: the Florence Melton Adult Mini-School or Derekh Torah. Both programs provide a structured curriculum in basis Jewish literacy and are not specifically job-related. In other words, the goal is to improve the Jewish knowledge of the staff irrespective of its immediate relationship to the staff members' work. Staff members from a wide range of departments attend, both Jews and non-Jews.

Ideally, participation in some of these programs comes to be seen as a matter of professional recognition. One Center we visited is about to launch a Derekh Torah course for its staff. This new class will require staff members to apply and be accepted, and it involves a considerable amount of commitment in coming to the sessions and preparing for classes. Nonetheless, as soon as it was announced, there was a great deal of interest. It seems likely that this enthusiasm emanates from a number of factors that may be instructive: the respect the staff holds for the Center's Jewish educator (who will teach the class); the fact that the executive director supports the course and views Jewish learning as a desideratum for his staff; and the fact that the course is considered part of one's work and takes place during working hours.

Another Center has made Jewish study mandatory for its preschool teachers, all of whom are studying Jewish texts two hours a week. One key ingredient here: The teachers are paid for their time spent learning. The executive director made it a priority to raise the additional funds necessary (many thousands of dollars) to keep the entire system's teachers on salary while in the classroom.

Directors and educators at the more educationally effective Centers viewed Judaic staff development and enrichment as a long process taking place over several years. At one point we felt as if we were talking to field generals in a military campaign as they spoke about how they, in effect, captured or converted one department after another to the cause of Jewish education. They might replace a Jewishly weak with a Jewishly committed department head, either by change in personnel or as the result of nurturing a growing commitment to Jewish life through classes, personal relationships, and Israel Educational Seminars. Directors and their senior Jewish educators were capable of making penetrating assessments of the extent to which each key staff member was committed to the Jewish education agenda. (Upon speaking with the staff members, we were also impressed with the seeming accuracy of these assessments.) A best practice emerges here: the ability on the part of senior professionals to assess accurately the level of Jewish knowledge and commitment of their professional subordinates.

While the techniques may differ from one Center to another, the Jewish enrichment of the staff occupies (or should occupy) a central place in the process of turning Centers into Jewishly effective educational institutions.

Virtually any JCC program has potential as a Jewish educational venue, given the right blend of support, knowledge, creativity, skill, and time. No JCC that we saw taps the Jewish educational possibilities in all areas, and certainly some programs have more obvious potential for Jewish education than others. For example, the physical education program does lend itself to some features of Jewish education (e.g., through posters of Jewish athletes, scenes of Israel, a Jewish sports heroes hall of fame, Hebrew signage). But no one would argue that it is as centrally related to the Jewish education mission as, say, early childhood education or classes for adults.

We identified five distinct areas where one could say that Jewish education was an explicit part of the program. They are definable roughly in terms of the age of their principal target populations: early childhood education, summer camps, teen programs, adult education (with several varieties), and senior adult programming. Our intention is not to describe specific activities in great detail. Rather we seek to provide a synthetic overview of some of the principles that seem to guide the most educationally effective programs within each type.

Some of these principles of best practice cut across the board and are worthy of mention at the outset:

- The program is directed by an educationally oriented department head who is personally committed to the Jewish education agenda.

- The Center's Jewish education specialist and the department head maintain a good working relationship, such that the specialist can exert significant influence over the program content and the training of the staff.

- The staff is recruited, trained, supervised, and developed in line with the goal of securing enhanced Jewish commitment and greater Jewish knowledge.

- The department head has developed, adopted, and transmitted to the staff a detailed "curriculum" containing the Jewish educational objectives of the program. The program opens up possibilities for Jewish growth, leading clients to opportunities for more intensive Jewish living of learning, be it at home, in the JCC, or in other settings (synagogue, school, Israel, etc.).

- The program succeeds in general terms. That is, clients are attracted to the nursery school because it is a good school (even *without* the Jewish program) compared with other options in community. The camp is known to be as good as any of its competitors. The program capitalizes upon and addresses the clients' need for community and recreation; in other words, it uses all of the educational tools characteristic of informal education, even within more traditional Jewish educational programs at the Center.

- The program's director establishes and makes frequent use of open channels of communication with the learners and their families so as to learn of any difficulties and immediately take corrective action.

Throughout our discussions of the five major areas of Jewish educational programming, we will see many of these points emerge. Our primary goal in the discussions below is to try to understand just how and why certain programs stand out above the others in the Center movement.

Early Childhood Education

Recent research has amply demonstrated what Jewish educators have known instinctively: parents of young Jewish children constitute and ideal target group for educational intervention.[21] The ability to draw families into a Jewish program through early childhood Jewish education is one of the most obvious and important gateway possibilities that JCCs can offer.[22] More pointedly, some senior professionals have made a strategic decision to make the preschool their number one priority for Jewish educational intervention. In their view, Centers resources are limited, as is their ability to reach, influence, and Jewishly educate their constituency. The preschools offer the possibility of influencing both very young children and, perhaps even more important, their parents. Parents of preschool youngsters are especially amenable to advice from educational experts, are often immersed in a period of transition as Jews themselves, and, with two or more children, are likely to spend upwards of ten to twelve years in direct contact with the Center's early childhood program.

As its best, the good JCC preschool is directed by a skilled and learned Jewish educator who works closely with a highly motivated, stable teaching staff. The director herself (most are women) is deeply committed to the Jewish mission of the program and has a strong Jewish background that enables her to deepen the Judaic dimension of the program. The responsibilities are *structured* in such a way as to free up the director's time for close educational supervision of the teachers, in contrast to the more typical situation, in which early childhood directors are almost entirely engaged in administrative and management issues. Such situations are rare, but we did see a program—indeed a model that could be emulated—in which the job had been structured to make sure that the early childhood director had the time to function as an educator. We saw that she was assisted by two fully competent administrative assistants who tended to the chores that often overwhelm talented and educationally motivated directors in other Centers.

Generally, even in the best places, teachers tend to arrive with weak Judaica backgrounds,[23] but we did see at least one example in which the director managed to devote a considerable amount of time working individually with the teachers to help them prepare lessons that are rich in Judaic content. There we saw an early childhood director who obviously enjoyed an excellent rapport with her teachers. She and the staff had known each other for many years. She maintained a personal one-on-one relationship with her teachers and she invested heavily in in-service training for early childhood education generally and for the Jewish dimension specifically. She was seen as a mentor and the Jewish educator of her teachers. The mutual respect, support, and confidence were palpable.

Nonetheless, we also noted what may be a significant misunderstanding by the leadership in the field as to the level of Judaica required for teachers in early childhood settings: Several directors noted in their interviews that subject matter knowledge on the nursery school level is not all that difficult for teachers to acquire. It appears that these school directors believe that because of the *age* of the children, the *knowledge* of the teachers could be minimal—one step ahead of the students might suffice. In fact, however, early childhood experts point out that given

the extremely fluid and dynamic interactions of education for this young age group, a greater knowledge might be required on the part of the teachers! Early childhood teachers don't deliver lectures; they "teach on their feet," in Philip Jackson's term.[24] Knowing how to pull out the right Jewish story and the appropriate Jewish value it two children are suddenly caught up in a fight, for example, requires a richness of background that few teachers in these settings may have.

For these reasons, and consistent with the observations made earlier in this report, the better preschool directors take pains to Jewishly educate and motivate their staffs. For the most part, these efforts are tailored to the individual teacher. After all, some are non-Jewish, some are only marginally Jewish, and a few come from very strong Jewish backgrounds; moreover, newcomers to the profession need more intensive work than veterans of ten or twenty years.

As for the execution of the preschool program itself, several elements distinguish the schools that are educationally effective from a Jewish point of view. The Jewish side to the curriculum emphasizes the annual major Jewish holidays, Shabbat, and some Hebrew language. At their best, teachers blend general and Jewish studies in creative and organic ways. The classrooms are decorated with Hebrew letters, holiday displays, pictures of Israel, and ritual objects, generally at the youngsters' eye level. In other words, all the critical tools of educational excellence are brought to bear with equal force on the Jewish (as well as the secular) side of the learning. Nonetheless, some of the early childhood directors and Center executives with whom we spoke expressed a need for more sophisticated and creative curriculum tools that could be used with this age group.

Preschools use a variety of techniques to Judaically engage their students' parents. they offer regular workshops and provide a stream of attractive materials that are sent home with the children (usually focusing upon the upcoming Jewish holidays). We were told of occasions when parents would turn to preschool directors or teachers (and other JCC staff) as Jewish resources for home activities and for personal direction in the Jewish community. One early childhood director explicitly defined "her students" to be *the entire Jewish family* of her preschool children. This concept was part of the informal contract between parents and school and it was understood and shared by other key members of the JCC staff.

With respect to the future Jewish education of the youngsters, the better early childhood education directors felt comfortable advocating continuing Jewish education as a goal for their "graduates." So we saw, for instance, a Jewish education fair that presented the various day school and synagogue school options to the preschool parents. Taking a strong role in advocating for children to continue in Jewish education beyond the preschool is an important "best practice" element in the better early childhood programs we observed.

It is obvious from our observations that JCC preschools are a key component of most Centers and represent a huge opportunity for Jewish educational intervention. Center executives and Jewish educators are well aware of the potential impact that these programs can have on contemporary Jewish families, both through the children and the parents. In all of the

sites that we visited the professional leadership expressed a desire to take the preschool to the next level—through increased staff development, a focus on appropriate curriculum materials, and expanded offerings in family education. The next few years will no doubt show a marked emphasis on this domain in the arena of JCC Jewish education. The general feeling in the best practice sites is that the possibilities are great and the potential of these programs needs only to be tapped.

We came away from our research convinced that the national JCC Association can play an important role in addressing the needs of early childhood Jewish education. However, the role of the JCCA in this process must be carefully thought out an delineated. The JCCA, with the assistance of the best and the brightest JCC Jewish educators, ought to serve as a catalyst that stimulates local JCCs to improve the content and quality of their early childhood programs. This advancement may come through a combination of curriculum development projects programs for preschool directors, or in-service education for early childhood teachers in JCCs. The JCCA role might include conferences, seminars, model curriculum publications, guidelines, consultants, and the like. It is clear, however, from the range of settings that we observed that any effort on the national level must be suited to specific local conditions and must take into account the active involvement of teachers, early childhood directors, Jewish educators, and other local interested parties and stakeholders. Striking the balance between local input and national expertise will help ensure the level of quality needed to improve the field and assist in mobilizing the necessary local support for proposed innovations.

Summer Camps—Day and Overnight

For more than a half century, summer camps sponsored by synagogue movements, Zionist youth movements, and Yiddishist associations have offered Jewish educational experiences to tens of thousands of youngsters. Although no definitive studies have successfully measured the impact of these camps, anecdotal and impressionistic accounts of the "alumni" suggest that camps have indeed played a significant role in shaping the Jewish identity of many of the former campers and counselors.

In contrast with these ideologically sponsored camps, the JCC camps have historically adopted a less pronounced Jewish profile, in part because they have catered to a Jewishly and denominationally diverse clientele. Today almost all Centers of reasonable size sponsor day camps during the summer; in addition, across North America, JCCs sponsor 22 residential (or overnight) camps. The increasing emphasis on the Jewish educational agenda has affected the camps; in fact, some claim that the camps were the early incubators of the JCCs' turn toward a greater emphasis on Jewish education.

As with the preschool (and with the JCC itself), Jewish educational excellence in camps begins with a director who is committed to the Jewish educational mission. Either the director is personally capable of imparting that mission, or he or she makes sure to hire a Jewish educator to recruit and train an appropriate staff and to design and implement the Jewish curriculum. (Indeed, camps noted for Jewish educational excellence do have a curriculum—a defined set of Jewish educational goals and specific procedures for how to achieve those goals.)

The JCC camps that have managed to make progress in boosting the Jewish educational content of their camp experience conduct pre-Shabbat programs, teach Hebrew songs, and provide what may be called Israeli or Hebrew "decoration" to the program (e.g., Hebrew bunk names or sports teams). One camp devotes different weeks to different Jewish ethical themes (e.g., kindness to animals) that have universal appeal and that can be transmitted easily by staff with less Judaic knowledge, whether Jewish or not.

One Center we visited had engaged in a thorough and highly critical evaluation of its camp's Jewish content and personnel and had begun to take steps in line with the report's recommendations, such as hiring a professional Jewish educator to supervise the Judaic program.

JCC summer camps face (and work to overcome) several challenging obstacles, of which staffing may be the most daunting. If year-round Center programs (such as the preschool) encounter difficulties in recruiting, training, supervising, and retaining staff with a modicum of Jewish commitment and knowledge, the camps, especially the day camps. are in an even more tenuous position. Their staff consists by and large of college students and local teenagers. The turnover rates are high and the Judaic background of many staff members is weak. Accordingly, the camp's Jewish educator is faced with a daunting task. The better camps simply set aside more time and resources for the Jewish educational preparation and supervision of their counselors, both before the camp season gets underway and during the camp season itself.

As with preschools, JCC camps must often turn to non-Jews for staff. One of the cardinal principles in informal education, particularly with teenagers, is that one wants the staff to serve as admirable and accessible role models. Non-Jews as counselors simply cannot fulfill that function, and noncommitted Jewish counselors may be even worse. It follows that better camps from a Jewish educational perspective are those that manage to hire (and retain from one year to the next) Jewish staff who are comfortable with the camp's Jewish educational mission. Such camps also are able to bring over Israeli staff, a step that offers numerous educational possibilities.

Clearly much remains to be done in this area. Camps need to think through and institute a Jewish educational curriculum. They need to plan and budget for Jewish educational training of the staff. Perhaps most of all, they need to clarify the Jewish mission and goals in regard to summer camp, imagining the successful outcomes of a Jewish camp experience and the unique contribution that JCC camps can make to North American Jewish life.

These and other steps will require a personnel pattern resembling that of the Center as a whole: a director (in this case, of the camp) who is committed to introducing Jewish educational content; a professional Jewish educator who is given the backing and support necessary to institute change; and a staff that is ready to accept training and supervision designed to enhance their Jewish commitment, Jewish knowledge, and the skills needed to transmit both to their campers.

One clear example of best practice that we saw in this domain was the willingness of

some Centers to engage in a process of self-reflection and evaluation in regard to the Jewish educational dimension of their camp programs. Viewing the camps in the light of the Center's Jewish educational potential and making recommendations to improve the staffing and the programming of the camps is the first and most crucial step toward realizing the full potential of JCC camping.

Teen Programs

Through the 1960s urban JCCs served as major centers of Jewish teenagers' social lives. Many of today's JCC lay leaders got their start in jewish life "hanging out" at the JCCs of their youth. Today the Center's aspiration to serve as the surrogate for the largely defunct Jewish urban neighborhood is especially challenged in the case of the suburban Jewish teenagers. Ideally, the informal and multidimensional nature of Centers create the potential for them to compete with the youth "mall culture" that is so prevalent in American suburbs. Thus at a JCC a teenager can play basketball, swim in a pool, take part in a play, and engage in meaningful volunteer activities for his or her community.

The geographical dispersal of teenagers in suburbia has undoubtedly taken its toll on teen participation in all sectors of Jewish life, making it unlikely that many 14–16 year olds will casually gravitate to the JCCs as their urbanized parents did. A recent article on informal Jewish education of teenagers concludes:

> It is important for successful youth programs to espouse an ideology that expresses a certain amount of idealism. Such idealism calls upon the young person to give up some of is or her own needs to serve some nobler cause. For this idealism to be placed in the service of Jewish identity, it should relate to the Jewish people or religion.[25]

Truth to be told, no Jewish agency or type of agency is doing a particularly good job in attracting and organizing Jewish teenagers. The synagogue youth movements, Zionist youth movements, an supplementary high schools all report difficulties, often with stagnant or declining levels of participation.

In this context, we can readily understand why few executives and other Center professionals pointed to their teen programs (aside from summer programs) as models of Jewish educational excellence. We did, however, see instances where Centers managed to recruit large numbers of teens for a variety of community service projects, such as assisting the elderly or improving the environment. Thus, if there is one area in which Centers excel with this age group, it may be in the realm of providing volunteer opportunities that appeal to teenagers' keen sense of idealism.

JCCs have been successful in recruiting thousands of youngsters every year to the JCC Youth Maccabi Games. Not only are over 4,000 youngsters involved, so are some 8,000 parents and family members. At minimum, the games provide an arena (literally) for these 12,000 or so people to gather under Jewish auspices. In addition, they surround these people with a Jewish and Hebrew environment, and sponsors are looking for ways to augment the Jewish educational dimension. The Center movement is exploring ways of bringing the games to Israel, as a significant organizer of Israel travel by North American Jews, especially for teenagers.

Adult Education and Jewish Culture

In the six Centers that we examined closely, the most developed area of Jewish programming was in the area of adult education. The programs took a variety of forms:

1. Holiday workshops (usually connected with the preschool, as was noted earlier) and other forms of Jewish family education.

2. Libraries: books, videos, magazines.

3. Cultural events (Israel fair, book fair, film festival, musical presentations, theater, exhibits).

4 Lectures.

5. Courses, a special subset of which consists of two structured programs for teaching basic Judaism.

Taken together, these programs lend a significantly different atmosphere to the JCC than in 1948, when Janowsky reached his down-beat conclusions regarding the absence of Jewish educational content in JCC programming, as reported above. Taken as a whole, these programs even represent considerable progress over the pre-COMJEE I period.

To be sure, each form of adult education programming represents a distinctive attempt to engage Jewish adults in a particular fashion. Some of them merit special comment.

Jewish family education as an identified field first began to emerge during the 1980s, although JCCs' early childhood programs have been operating in this area for decades. One beginning point for the field was with conventional Jewish educators who felt frustrated at attempts to educate children who returned to homes that did not or could not support the lessons being taught in the classroom. Moreover, parents seemed interested in learning what their children learned and in spending time with their children in a context that combined recreation with education. Today both JCCs and synagogues sponsor various forms of Jewish family education.

As currently constituted, Jewish family education revolves around the children in school, be it the toddlers in the JCC preschools or the grade school children in the day schools and supplementary schools. As a result, a large proportion of those attending JCC holiday workshops are the Center's own preschool youngsters and their parents, although community-wide events such as Purim carnivals have wider appeal. To JCC professionals, these parents represent an ideal target audience. They are relatively young and open to intervention. They are generally not otherwise affiliated with Jewish institutions. And they are keenly aware of their responsibilities as parents. One Center that we visited actually sends staff members into the homes of new parents to engage in Jewish educational activities with the family where they live. Centers also offer childbirth and parenting classes as a way of bringing new parents into the life of the JCC.

In another sphere, the expansion of JCC libraries (of books, periodicals, videotapes and more) and, more significantly, the numerous cultural events offered by JCCs highlight the Center's significant role as purveyors and sponsors of Jewish culture. JCCs appear to be uniquely equipped—in size, space, and ambiance—to take the lead in housing, exhibiting, and merchandising Jewish culture. If American Jews support and consume a distinctive culture, they probably do so more through the JCCs than through any other sort of institution.

The single lecture of lecture series are among the most popular vehicles. They aim at drawing large audiences and usually present well-known figures from the Jewish or general community speaking on issues relevant to Jewish concerns. Their virtue is that they serve social as well as educational purposes, bringing together a large number of people who renew their ties to one another. Their shortcomings are also well understood by Center educators. Lectures are, by definition, one-shot affairs, providing little opportunity for sustained growth and building relationships. The educators with whom we spoke, then, saw lectures—with all the glitz and showmanship that may accompany them—as no substitute for the more intensive and sustained Jewish education that takes place in ongoing classes.

The classes offered in the JCCs generally focus on classic Jewish themes, topics, or texts. they are taught by the Center's own Jewish educator, rabbis, or local teachers. In general, they aim at beginners or inexperienced learners. Classroom texts are English translations and the topics appeal to a less knowledgeable clientele. One Center's typical offerings, for example, included a course entitled "Does the World Need Jews?" which met once a month and dealt with issues such as the idea of being a chosen people. This same Center also offered a course based on Abba Eban's television series "Civilization and the Jews," a course called "How to Celebrate as a Jew" (which met in advance of the major Jewish holidays), a monthly course on the classic rabbinic text Pirkei Avot, and a monthly discussion group on "The Future of the American Jewish Community."[26]

Nonetheless there were exceptions, places where more intensive or advanced Jewish educational offerings could be found. In one Center, for example, students could enroll for a weekly, year-long Talmud class taught by a leading academic scholar in the field. This JCC had the advantage of being located in an area with many available intellectual resources, and the Center served a population that could provide the kind of students appropriate for such a course. Nonetheless, this is not a case of merely responding to the clientele's needs. An advanced Talmud class is precisely the kind of program that attracts a more Jewishly committed membership to the Center. Although the class may enroll relatively small numbers of students, its very presence helps shape, sustain, and strengthen the institutional image that this Center cares about Jewish education and is able to appeal to the cognoscenti as well as the novices. Other advanced offerings included a weekly course in Jewish philosophy, a course in Mishnah, and a course on "Great Figures of the Bible" (based on the Elie Wiesel video series).

The Jewish education program coordinator in this particular JCC believes that the key is having the funding to pay top-notch teachers enough to lead such courses. Thus the Center has created individual endowment funds to pay for these classes. Indeed, this JCC aims at raising funds for many endowments in the $5,000–$10,000 range.

Two "turn-key" adult education programs:

As is mentioned above, across Jewish Community Centers the two most popular programs for intensive (and largely introductory) adult Jewish learning are the Melton Mini-School and Derekh Torah programs have been born, nurtured, and

developed primarily within the precincts of JCCs in North America. Although the programs have certain similarities, some Centers offer both programs. In such places, Derekh Torah is usually seen as the more basic program; its graduates are steered toward the Melton Mini-School as the next step in Jewish study.

Derekh Torah was created by Rabbi Rachel Cowan about ten years ago at Congregation Ansche Chesed in New York and then moved to the 92nd Street Y. The program emerged out of Cowan's work with mixed faith couples, some of whom were already married and others of whom were considering either conversion or marriage to a Jew without conversion. The program sought to introduce non-Jews to the basics of Judaism in a serious and intellectually stimulating fashion. The Jewish partners, in appropriate cases, were also encouraged (or required) to attend. Often these Jewish partners were ignorant of or estranged from Judaism.

As the program evolved, the fundamental orientation toward non-Jews or interfaith couples remained in place, but it grew to include any Jews simply seeking knowledge about Judaism. Typically, people who apply to the program are interviewed by the teacher in advance. In one locale that we visited, several students were newcomers to the community. Derekh Torah seemed to be an access point into a social network for (mostly single) Jews. Central to the program is its social dimension. Classes meet in the homes of the instructors or students and are bracketed by informal meeting time.

Derekh Torah is not a conversion class per se, although in some places rabbis use it for that purpose. The curriculum is a set of topics that are covered in weekly meetings over an academic year. The instructor has considerable latitude in adapting the curriculum to his or her own interests or abilities, as well as to the interests of the class. In this 30-week program, classes of about fifteen students study and discuss Jewish History, theology and Jewish living. Classes meet once a week for two hours and include topics such as ethics, the Sabbath and holidays, prayer, dietary laws, life cycle events, Israel, and various other issues.

The concept of the Melton Mini-School was invented by a lay leader, Florence Melton of Columbus, Ohio. There was a need, in her view, for a program of learning that would address the basic "Jewish literacy" needs of adults in a serious and intensive way. Melton believed that such adults would be hesitant to attend classes in synagogues, even where they were members, because they would not wish to display their ignorance. The JCC, a more neutral area, would be an ideal setting for such programs.

Florence Melton turned to The Melton Center for Jewish Education of The Hebrew University to develop a curriculum. The program consists of a two-year course of study with weekly meetings, each built around certain key topics and themes. Anecdotal reports indicate that the program is successful, in terms of both the quality of learning that takes place and the satisfaction of the students. In fact, in some places students have asked to continue beyond the two years of the curriculum. Today the program functions in over twenty sites around the country, mostly in Jewish Community Centers.

The curriculum consists of five courses. One focuses on "functional Jewish terminology,"

another on "essential Jewish ideas as they unfold in...sacred texts"; a third probes "Dilemmas of Jewish Living" such as assimilation and anti-semitism in the past and present; a fourth takes the student through the Jewish life cycle, and a fifth looks at "issues in Jewish ethics" in a variety of contexts. Taken in their entirety, these courses certainly provide what may be regarded as a valuable introduction to Jewish life and literacy.

Like Derekh Torah, the Melton Mini-School relies on good teachers for its success. The Melton Mini-School requires a two-year commitment on the part of the student, Derekh Torah one year. The Melton Mini-School seems to be less oriented toward the interfaith couple. Both programs have also been flexible enough to be used in ways different from the original design. For example, both Derekh Torah and the Melton Mini-School curriculum have been used for staff classes in JCCs.

The popularity of these two programs in the JCC world says something about the conditions and culture of Jewish education in the Center movement. Both programs provide an introduction to Judaism. To varying extents, the programs can appeal to interfaith couples. Both emphasize a social, community-building approach, and both are intent upon utilizing dynamic teachers who are nonjudgmental, engaging, enthusiastic, and open. Last, both programs come with a ready-made curriculum (the Melton Mini-School being more detailed), relieving the Center educator of that burden. Clearly, the Derekh Torah and Melton Mini-School programs are highly compatible with the needs of JCCs and of their members.

Senior Adults

Professionals who work closely with senior adults report that they are keen consumers of Jewish educational and cultural services. Understandably, the seniors are the most ethnically committed and least intermarried population group in the Centers. They are chronologically closer to the European experience and Yiddish culture.

As a result, Jewish cultural programming is deeply imbedded in the social and recreational services offered to this group. The professionals who work with them find the experience Jewishly rewarding and challenging. On the other hand, executive directors were not particularly focused upon this group as a target of Jewish educational services. In effect, they were saying that this is one group for whom expanding Jewish education is not of the highest priority. In part, senior adults were seen as tending to their own Jewish educational needs as an organic outgrowth of their firm ethnic involvement. And, in part, we suspect that directors and JCC educators assigned lower strategic priority to senior citizens than to the parents of young children, who, it could be argued, are more "at risk" from a Jewish communal point of view and also more potentially pivotal in influencing the next generation.

In the last few years JCCs have increasingly turned to organizing groups of visitors to Israel, a program that has heavily drawn upon senior adults. This age group possesses the time, money, and inclination to travel to Israel, particularly in well-organized groups.

Ambiance

The educational programs noted above occur in the JCC building. Obviously, the appearance,

physical characteristics, sights, sounds, and smells of the building all serve to influence the conduct of the programs. They send messages even to those members who never directly participate in those programs. These nonverbal messages carry with them Jewish educational import and constitute an important component of what may be called the Center's "hidden curriculum." This dimension has been characterized as "ambiance."[27]

A specifically Jewish ambiance is effected in a variety of ways by the different Centers. The lobbies in these buildings are recognizably Jewish environments—in a number of the places we saw Hebrew signs prominently displayed. Typically the signs on office doors ("Administrative Center," "Senior Services," or "Physical Education Department") give the title in both English and Hebrew.

Lobbies allow for displays around upcoming events in the Center's schedule. In the JCCs we looked at, the Jewish calendar is also highlighted through these displays. Pictures or exhibits relating to upcoming Jewish holidays are a regular feature in these JCCs.

In a dramatic fashion, one Center has a set of large, almost life-sized dolls, a "family" that has been placed in the lobby of the JCC. (In fact, they've even been named—"the Rosens"—and everyone refers to them by name!) The dolls are set up in various ways to reflect some kind of Jewish idea or upcoming Jewish holiday: The family is sitting around the Passover seder or dressed up for Purim. This display has now become a focal point in the lobby, and, in a humorous way, expresses the underlying Jewish values of the Jewish Community Center.

Another typical aspect of ambiance in the places we studied was a centrally located kosher cafe. The cafe can also become the locus for other kinds of informal social programming. One Center is in the process of setting up a sound system to pump Jewish music into the halls. Most have gift shops that market Jewish games, novelties, books, tapes, and ritual objects. A few have established Halls of Fame or other exhibits to honor Jewish sports heroes. Many sprinkle posters of Israel or other Jewish themes throughout the building.

The program catalogues produced by some Centers include Hebrew translations for the various activities and divisions of the Center. The prominence given to the Jewish educational activities and the separate flyers produced for those activities also send a message to the potential consumer about the importance of these aspects of the JCC's total program.

Toward An Educational Philosophy for the JCC Movement: *Points of Consensus and Unresolved Questions*

As was mentioned previously in this report, no uniform philosophy of Jewish education characterizes the entire Center field. Nonetheless, a kind of "theory-in-use"[28] informs the work of the staff and the perspectives of the lay leadership that we observed. Indeed, the JCC theory of Judaism and Jewish education has undergone significant deepening and increasing sophistication over the last ten to fifteen years. Notable are the two COMJEE reports; the numerous continental task forces and local board retreats; the seminars for staff and lay leaders; and several intensive training programs, particularly for up-and-coming executives. The sheer volume of discussion, both written and oral, has produced and disseminated a philosophy of Jewish education in the JCC movement. It consists of several key elements, the most prominent of which we describe below.

Judaism Can Be Enjoyable

First, Jewish education in the JCC world takes place in an environment that is informal, relaxed, and recreational. Members feel good about their JCCs. Centers seem less fraught with the kind of ideological and emotional weightiness present in other Jewish institutions, such as synagogues, day schools, or Federations. The Center is an institution in which one can swim in a beautiful pool, take yoga and dance classes, sing in a chorus, hear noted Jewish authors and scholars lecture, study in a Melton Mini-School or Derekh Torah class every week, and to which you can send your children to summer camp. As such, it is a powerful and attractive place.

Yet at the same time, Centers, at their educationally effective best, realize that if Judaism is only fun, then members may start to ask, "Why should one sacrifice time, energy, emotion, and resources for it?"[29] While Centers beckon to people with the notion that Judaism is enjoyable (the not-so-subliminal message found in the JCC publicity literature), Center educators often speak about the need to promulgate the idea that Judaism is also "serious," that it offers more than the pediatric variety encountered by so many Jews who ceased their formal Jewish education in their early teens.

Introductory Judaism for the Many, Advanced Judaism for the Few

Beyond the idea that Judaism can be enjoyable, JCCs have built their education around a particular focus—introductory Judaism. JCCs recognize that they can readily appeal to the most tentative or ambivalent Jews, or seekers and newcomers. Unlike synagogues, JCCs pose few ideological barriers, religious demands, or expectations of liturgical competence that may inhibit newcomers from crossing the threshold. Leaders in the Center movement point out that JCC Jewish education strives to be highly participatory and welcoming. Such education may help create introductory opportunities for those who take advantage of it, and it may also serve as a feeder for Jewish education offered by synagogues. Rather than centers' serving an essentially unaffiliated population, the National Jewish Population Survey of 1990 showed that 72 percent of members of JCCs are also members

of synagogues. The possibility for a connection between the world of the JCC and the world of the synagogue should not be underestimated.

At the same time, educationally effective Centers strive to balance their emphasis on introductory Judaism with offerings that appeal to the learned and committed. Though clearly a much smaller constituency than the targets for elementary forms of Jewish learning, the participants in more demanding and sophisticated educational programs serve to enrich the Center's ambiance, program, and staff. By their commitment and knowledge, such participants legitimate ongoing study for staff and other members alike. In essence they give the message: If you begin your Jewish studies now, here is a model of what you could attain.

The JCC as Gateway

Consistent with their emphasis on introductory Judaism, Center professionals see their Centers serving as gateways to Judaism generally, and more specifically to other Jewish institutions such as synagogues and day schools. This is not to say that Centers see themselves as subordinate to those other institutions. Rather they view themselves as especially suited to bringing formerly uninvolved or unaffiliated Jews into the network of Jewish institutional and communal life. In this regard, Centers are able to capitalize on the attachment of certain population groups to the JCC for specific services—in particular, preschool parents. No professional with whom we spoke saw the Center as the only institution with which Jews should be involved, but many referred to the ability of the Center to serve as the chronologically first institution for young adult Jews. If the Center's Jewish educational efforts succeed, then these newly affiliated Jews will also find other areas of involvement in the home and community.

The New Jewish Neighborhood

Jewish Community Centers are seen as surrogate Jewish neighborhoods. One JCC educator pointed out that especially in suburbia, where a centralize physical neighborhood is hard to define, the JCC can act as a replacement for the "main street" that no longer exists. In that sense the Center becomes a positive alternative to the shopping mall, the suburban pseudo-neighborhood that social scientists have been exploring in recent years. The Center offers a contrast to the pure consumerism of the mall by having its own attractive, air-conditioned indoor space—with a food concession (kosher in this case!), healthy activities, and opportunities for social and intellectual interaction in a safe environment.

The Center entices people into a setting in which Jewish cultural and educational activities can take place. Some of those activities may be what educational philosophers would call "accidental" learning, such as seeing the lobby displays and signs on the wall as one heads toward the health club. But accidental learning may lead toward something more deliberate as well.

Complementarity of the Center and the Synagogue

The clear emergence of the Jewish mission of the Center in the past 15 years has, for all its positive dimensions, also engendered tensions, if not sometimes conflict, with rabbis and

synagogues, who can often feel especially wary of the Centers' move into Jewish education. Even in 1948, the Janowsky report discussed the tension between these two institutions. All the JCC Jewish educators, and especially those who are rabbis, reported that relations between the local synagogue rabbis and the JCC educator required a good deal of work. With respect to these relations, one Center educator reported "a truce" and not much more.

To be sure, the tensions between JCCs and synagogues are not entirely derived from ideological, cultural, or stylistic differences. Both institutions compete for limited resources in the same communities. They seek leaders, participants, money, and recognition. Synagogues themselves compete with each other and experience some of the same tensions among themselves that they experience with Centers. By strongly supporting the educational mission of JCCs, Federations can and do help minimize potential interagency conflicts.

Despite the suspicions voiced by some in the synagogue world, we saw a genuine respect for synagogue Judaism and what synagogue involvement can mean. Executives and Jewish educators in the best practice sites were themselves personally connected to synagogues and traditional Jewish rituals. They often volunteered their view that their members' Jewish lives would be incomplete without synagogues. A few claimed that one measure of their success is the speed and extent to which their members join and become involved in congregations.[30]

Indeed, as an overarching theme, Center professionals speak of the synagogue and Center operating in a complementary fashion on several levels. They maintain that both institutions serve to enhance Jewish involvement but do so in different ways and at different points in people's lives. Synagogues and day schools educate youngsters during the elementary school period and during the school year. Centers emphasize the years before and after elementary school and, through their camps, serve school youngsters during the summer.

Executives speak about certain areas (e.g., celebrating life cycle transitions) that are best left to synagogues. So as to avoid intruding on the synagogues' domain, Centers establish clearly articulated boundaries. All the Centers we studied prohibit religious services and other functions (such as weddings, bar mitzvahs, etc.) from being conducted at their sites.[31] In one community, the Center refrains from sponsoring and adult education institute—an area seen as the legitimate domain of both Centers and synagogues—so as not to compete with the institute sponsored by local rabbis.

We certainly saw some positive examples of JCCs connecting to local community institutions. One community, as mentioned, now holds a "Jewish education fair" in which the parents of JCC preschool children get to meet representatives from the various day and synagogue schools in the area. Another Center sponsored a JCC "Walk through Jerusalem" exhibit that had the full support of all the local synagogues and rabbis. The synagogues appeared as co-sponsors of the event and helped promote the exhibit in their bulletins and through rabbinic sermons or announcements. Still another, in its seasonal catalogue, features local synagogues' adult education.

In some cases the JCC early childhood program sees itself as a feeder for local day

schools or supplementary schools. Many have run programs on choosing a synagogue. One Center system has experimented with what is, in effect, a Center-congregation joint membership program for young adults.

One interesting example of a Center's relationship with local synagogues was found in the catalogue of an urban JCC. This Center sees itself, in the words of its executive, as "a neutral broker for the community." Its catalogue lists virtually all the Jewish study options available in the community, irrespective of the denominational affiliation of the institutions. Hence people receiving the JCC catalogue are also obtaining information about the variety of synagogue offerings in the neighborhood. In addition, the catalogue has a section called "Opportunities to Volunteer," in which programs offered by a variety of institutions—synagogues and independent, non-Jewish agencies—are listed for those who wish to volunteer their time for soup kitchens, homeless shelters, school literacy programs, services to the elderly, and other such agencies. Even though the catalogue lists non-Jewish agencies as well, the fact that the listing appears in a JCC publication helps people feel that their volunteering experience is connected to their identity as Jews. Moreover, the JCC staff uses these listings as an outreach to individuals in the community, and the people that contact them become part of the Center's own data base.

In one way or another, educationally successful Centers manage to defuse or deflect potential conflict with local rabbis. Centers often invite rabbis to teach at the Center. Where genuine involvement proves too difficult, Centers resort to other politically astute techniques to neutralize potential rabbinic opposition. One Center director recruited leading laypeople from local synagogues to serve on the Center board. Eventually, several of these leaders served as presidents and in other key Center positions. Clearly, Center directors and educators understand that they need to manage their relations with local rabbis and synagogues. Some do so in order to minimize the nuisance the rabbis could cause, and others operate out of a genuine respect for the importance of rabbis, synagogues, and religious Judaism more broadly. Of course, all this is not a one-way street. How rabbis, at their end, relate to JCCs is outside the purview of this paper, but it is obvious that the relationship between synagogues and JCCs needs to go in both directions.

Israel as a Special JCC Opportunity

JCCs have found a natural fit with Israel in a variety of ways. The fully elaborated Israel-oriented JCC would have the following programming pieces, reflecting and underlying commitment to the Israel dimension. The best practice sites all included various aspects of the following:

1. Board and staff seminars to Israel.

2. Organized travel to Israel for teens, families, singles, senior adults, etc.

3. Classes in Hebrew and Israel-oriented subjects.

4. Lectures on Israeli events and culture.

5. Gatherings during momentous points in Israeli history (e.g., outbreak of the Intifada, assassination of Prime Minister Rabin).

6. Cultural programming, such as concerts of Israeli music and dance, exhibitions of Israeli art and books, visits by Israeli artists and performers, items from Israel in the gift shop, Israeli food in the Center's cafe.

7. Hebrew signs and posters.

8. Use of *shlichim* (official Israel emissaries), Israel themes, Hebrew terms, etc. in the camps and youth programs.

The JCC movement may yet develop a distinctive role in connecting American Jews to Israel. In some communities, for example, the JCC is the central agency for the community youth trip to Israel and houses the *shaliach* to the community. The JCCA's national office has now hired a full-time *shlicha* to focus on enhancing the number of teens participating in Israel Experience programs for JCCs. The transdenominational character of the JCC may be particularly helpful in addressing the issue of Israel. The fact that the JCCA has an Israel office which is attuned to issues of Jewish education also increases the likelihood that seminars in Israel will go beyond tourism experiences to include serious Jewish study and reflection on educational issues.

Intervention and Confrontation

Beyond the points of consensus described briefly above, we uncovered a key point of disagreement among leading theoreticians of the Center movement, all of whom staunchly advocate the Jewish educational agenda. To simplify the argument greatly: they differed with respect to the extent to which JCCs ought to be proactive, explicitly change oriented, and overtly interventionist or confrontational with respect to the Jewish lives of their members and clients.

Jewish Community Centers, partially because of their history and partially because of the social work training of most of their staff, have classically taken what we are calling a "nonconfrontational" stance vis-à-vis their participants. What we are seeing in the best practice sites, however, is a philosophic evolution beyond the historical simplistic prohibition on confrontation. In the last fifteen to twenty years the Center movement has developed several—albeit diverse—approaches that sanction some form of educational intervention, while at the same time remaining faithful to the social work teaching that emphasizes respect for individual autonomy.

The least confrontational approach sees the JCC as the Jewish neighborhood, whose purpose, in a phrase popularized by Barry Chazan, is to "pump Jewish oxygen" into those who come there. The JCC "is a new neighborhood of Jewish life."[32] The total ambiance—including the physical features of the building, the concentration of familiar Jewish faces, the explicitly educational programs, and more—combine to exert a powerful pro-Jewish message. This approach rejects attempts to push explicitly the member or client in one Jewish direction or another. In the view of this approach, heavy-handedness may only backfire, intimidating or alienating those who may be interested in exploring their Jewishness within the "safe" and unthreatening confines of a JCC.

A second model is somewhat more pro-active. This view maintains that the job of Centers is to put Judaism in front of people, so that they come to understand that Judaism

is serious and has something important to say to contemporary life. The educator has no role in pushing any particular perspective—people need to make their own choices of what to do with what they've learned. The Center may affirmatively push Jewish involvement, but it stops short of advocating particular choices with respect to religious belief, observance, or lifestyle.

As one educator stated, "My assignment is to put Judaism out on the table, and from there people should make their own decisions about what it would take to put this into their own lives." Another educator remarked that his approach was to tell his students at the JCC, "I don't know what kind of Jew you should be—it only has to be serious." He believes that his job is not to be "apologetic" for Judaism, but to argue for its seriousness in the Center and in people's lives. One executive saw four Jewish goals for the Center: seeing ongoing regular study of Jewish texts built into people's lives; developing in people a sense of Jewish curiosity; creating an environment where people can develop their own views on Jewish subjects; and using an interactive method in study and learning.

A third position advocates that Center educators must actively challenge the beliefs, values, life choices, and religious practices of the people with whom they interact. In a recent paper expressing this more assertive approach, Yehiel Poupko of Chicago wrote:

> The JCC's Jewish educational work...must be accountable to the received Jewish past as expressed in the Torah and its classic commentaries. Without accountability to the text, without grounding in the Torah, there is no Judaism, no effective Jewish civilization, and there is no transmission of Jewishness from generation to generation.... The...question must move JCC work...to presenting "what a Jew ought to be."...While [autonomy of the individual, tolerance, pluralism, etc.] are critical to the culture of the JCC, they do not constitute Jewish education. The challenge before the JCC is to use these assets to make Jewish education more possible and even more effective.[33]

Religious Education in JCCs?

The issues raised touch upon a more fundamental question about the role of the Center as a Jewish educational institution: Can Jewish education in JCCs be religious education? As long as Centers dealt only with social, recreational, and some cultural activities, this question was essentially moot. The Centers represented a secular, or at least a nondenominational, approach to being Jewish. But with the Center's engagement with Jewish education, the question of the religious character of that education is hard to avoid. When Centers function as Jewish educational institutions, are they providing a way of being Jewish that differs from that offered by the synagogue, or are they providing a way of learning about Judaism and a path to Jewish involvement that resembles synagogues' religious Judaism? Or, to state the question in its broadest terms, what is the goal of Jewish education in the world of Jewish Community Centers?

Most Jewish education in North America is specifically religious in nature, even when it takes place outside of the synagogue. For example, even in so-called community day schools (i.e., those with no particular religious affiliation), boys are required to wear kippot

during text study. these nondenominational schools still conduct religious services, often daily. Most Jewish summer camps sponsor prayer services as well.

Where does the Jewish Community Center stand in this regard? Is the Center an alternative purveyor of Jewish religious education, specializing in areas where all denominations can agree? Or are Centers recasting the religious tradition in secular or cultural terms, in much the same way as many Israelis observe Jewish holidays and customs as a function of their belonging to a Jewish society?

In some ways, Centers are similar to community day schools in their attitudes, with most of the Jewish educators in JCCs viewing themselves as religious educators who happen to be working (and are pleased to be working) in a multi- or nondenominational setting. For them, the Center offers an opportunity to reach otherwise unreached or even unreachable Jews and to involve them in some form of genuine (read: religious) Judaism.

By way of contrast, some Center professionals view the JCC as an autonomous, essential institution that provides opportunities for Jewish involvement that complement the synagogue. According to this view, JCCs fulfill roles that other institutions such as synagogues simply cannot. These might include providing Jewish arts festivals, adult learning centers, and early childhood programs—programs that either are unavailable through synagogues or are conducted in a too thoroughly religious environment to suit the taste of many JCC members.

This view could lead to a truly secular ideology for the JCC. Perhaps this position is simply foreign to North American thinking, but certainly one finds versions of a secular Jewish ideology both in Israel (for obvious reasons) and in Latin America. Indeed, in Latin America the Jewish Community Center is a powerful secular institution in the community, more powerful in many ways than the synagogue. We need to point out that secular Judaism is a live and serious alternative in Latin America, far more so than in the United States. Many American Jews may be secularized, but their Latin American counterparts are secularists. As such, they lend a positive Jewish ideological character to their JCCs.

Is an overtly secular Jewish education feasible or even desirable in the Diaspora? Should the JCC position itself as the locus for secular Judaism, an explicit alternative to synagogue/religious Judaism? Is another major Jewish denomination emerging around the JCCs, one consonant with the individualism, personalism, and voluntarism of American Jewry? In light of the Center movement's bid to become a major player in the world of Jewish education, these questions merit renewed attention.

Conditions Conducive to Success

Directors of Centers with a reputation for success in Jewish education tend to believe that any Center can adopt a policy of commitment to Jewish education. Some, however, are not so sure. They argue that resources for success in Jewish education are not universally available. Is success in Jewish education possible everywhere? Or are certain ingredients essential—or lacking—in certain communities?

In fact, the truth lies somewhere between these two starkly framed alternatives. Centers vary widely in the underlying conditions that are conducive to the Jewish educational agenda. What is possible or even likely in one place may be simply unachievable elsewhere. However, all Centers possess some of the necessary resources. We saw examples of Jewish educational success in Centers located in a variety of communities.

What are the conditions that seem to have the greatest impact on Jewish educational success?

They include the following:

1. Being located in a strong Jewish community.

2. Having a secure executive.

3. Having reasonable financial security.

4. Having a supportive local Jewish Federation.

5. Large size (as measured by budget and staff).

To elaborate upon the first condition, Jewish communities differ markedly in size, recency of migration, and rates of affiliation. We were struck with how many of the Centers we visited are located in relatively strong Jewish communities.

We were also struck by the long tenure of the executive in these places. Most had been in the same job ten to fifteen years or more. Somehow, we surmise, their longevity may provide them with the political capital and credibility to undertake a serious commitment to Jewish education. The executive who pushed for Jewish education, especially in the late 1970s and early 1980s, is one who felt secure enough in his or her position to advocate a policy direction that was, at least then, innovative and that is always difficult to justify in terms of the financial bottom line.

(To be sure, as these executives noted, only a Center concerned with higher values, such as those embodied in a Jewish educational commitment, is apt to engender the type of involvement and allegiance from major supporters necessary to sustain and expand the Center's operations. In other words, what may seem costly in the short run may be fiscally prudent in the long term.)

A parallel argument may be made for the contribution that financial stability makes to launching and sustaining a Jewish educational agenda. In our travels we saw that none of the Centers we visited were awash with all the funds they could use, but we did sense a feeling of fiscal confidence. Directors with whom we met conveyed the idea that they were successful fund-raisers and budget managers who could raise reasonable sums for needed sustenance or expansion of the Jewish educational program.

A related issue is the relative prominence and influence of lay leadership. JCC board members and the directors in the sites we visited generally projected great satisfaction with the extent to which they are able to elicit the support of the local Federation. JCCs certainly perceive themselves as favorable situated vis-à-vis Federations specifically and the local Jewish institutional complex generally.

This situation differed from that found in some communities, where Federations view

their local JCCs as competing with them for resources (e.g., participants in Israel travel groups). Obviously, Centers succeed more readily in the Jewish educational sphere if their respective Federations, for whatever reason, see Jewish education as a legitimate and necessary function of their JCCs rather than seeing Centers as yet another competitor.

Finally, larger Centers manage to invest more heavily in Jewish education. Sheer size means that the start-up funds necessary for personnel or program are relatively easy to locate. Smaller Centers certainly are capable of maintaining educationally effective operations (indeed, we witnessed some in action). However, Jewish educational effectiveness demands certain basic building blocks (e.g., a full-time Jewish educator, in-service training for staff, board seminars in Israel, etc.), each of which is easier to come by where there is a larger budget and staff, and resources can be more easily shifted.

All five indicators, in one way or another, point to institutional strength. In short, stronger JCCs—however measured—seem more able and ready to invest in a policy of effective Jewish education.

Significant Achievements, But Major Challenges Remain

We come away from our study of Jewish educational excellence in Jewish Community Centers with somewhat contradictory reactions: We are both impressed and chastened. We are impressed with the sheer extent of investment in Jewish educational programming and with the possibilities for serious education in the JCC context. As we noted early on in this report, we embarked upon this study somewhat skeptical about whether good Jewish education could even take place at a JCC. After seeing these examples of educational excellence, we are convinced that such education is possible and, indeed, is taking place right now—and not just in the six Centers we chose to visit.

At the same time, we are indeed chastened by the sheer enormity of the task of trying to change the JCC institutional culture and redirect the thinking of the staff. We met with some extremely impressive executive directors, all of whom expressed a deep commitment to the Jewish educational mission. All had been in their positions for many years, in some cases as many as two decades or more. Yet, in part reflecting their commitment to excellence and in part reflecting the dynamic processes of change in Centers now underway, none was fully satisfied with the current state of Jewish education in their respective Centers. One may excel in strategic thinking or staff development. Another may sponsor an extraordinary adult education program. Another may be justifiably proud of its preschool or its camp. Everywhere we saw signs of progress, both in the recent past and anticipated in the near future. But nowhere could we point to an entire institution with all its components producing at peak or near-peak educational capacity.

The recent entry of Centers into the Jewish educational field means two things: Much has been accomplished in a short time, but much remains to be done. Taken in their entirety, as the directors themselves readily admit, Centers are still a long way off from the time when a commitment to high-quality Jewish education is a routine and long-standing element in the Center ethos. In fact, one could argue that the dissatisfaction of directors with the current state of Jewish education in their Centers—a phenomenon that typifies good Jewish educators in all contexts—is itself an element of best practice. With respect to Jewish education, Centers are still in a stage of transition, and good directors recognize that circumstance.

For all the talent, commitment, and progress, some of our interviewees wondered out loud about the extent and depth of their educational impact. In a Center of 10,000 or 11,000 members, what percentage of the membership is actually being affected? One Center executive told us, for example, that he believed about 1,500 people a year participated in some form of Jewish educational program. Is that a large number or a small one? The answer depends a good deal on the particular observer's own point of view. At about 10 percent of his membership population, it may seem small (especially since it includes people who are both studying every week in a class and those who appear once a year). Of course, one cannot ignore the likelihood that Centers exert a more subtle, pervasive effect, as Chazan's "Jewish oxygen" position would argue. If so, then the Jewish educational impact of educationally effective

JCCs extends well beyond the fraction who, in any one year, participate directly in their Jewish educational programs. But even if 10 percent is an accurate estimate for a Center with one of the most advanced adult education programs on the continent, and even if only half that number characterizes many other Centers, we cannot ignore the fact that adult Jewish education is a "hard sell" everywhere. Federation-sponsored, community-wide programs enroll very small percentages of their putative constituency (all Jewish adults in a given locale), as do synagogues for their constituencies (i.e., membership).

However, numbers alone may not be that significant. As one Center educator told us, "There is a need to build cells, small groups, of 15 to 25 people, rather than big lectures." He thinks the small intimate groups are the way to engage people with Judaism. "If we get hung up on big numbers, we'll get killed." He thinks there are other ways to affect large numbers of people, but he doesn't think energy should be invested in programming for large numbers of people.

To what extent can Centers realistically aspire to significantly influence large numbers of people? From a cost-benefit perspective (the most Jewish educational impact for the smallest investment of time and money), is it in fact wiser to target small groups rather than design programs to touch large numbers of Jews.

From Programs to Strategy

These, of course, are not the only questions being raised by senior professional and lay leadership raised by senior professional and lay leadership at Centers with a history of commitment to Jewish education. In fact, one element of good practice we witnessed was a pattern of strategic thinking. That is, senior staff had given serious thought not merely to the most effective ways of planning particular programs, but to the larger questions of Jewish educational impact. Most broadly, they were asking how the Center could exert the greatest impact, on which population groups, and in what fashion.

Senior staff spoke of the efforts they had invested in formulating and debating mandates and policies, both with other staff and with key board members. Some have developed a "culture of writing." That is, some Centers—or, perhaps more accurately, some professionals—are given to setting their thoughts down in writing and submitting them to critical scrutiny of other staff members in their agency, their laypeople, and, more broadly, the Center movement and Jewish communal professionals through a variety of professional outlets. The writing of a mission statement, a set of guidelines for a preschool, a curriculum, or a staff orientation manual becomes an occasion to generate thoughtful debate in the agency. Indeed, we were excited and impressed to see these discussions underway.

The questions that have been addressed by some of the most sophisticated thinkers in the area of Jewish education in the JCC world, taken together, constitute an agenda for further reflection and deliberation by a broader group of key JCC policy makers, both lay and professional. In addition, they constitute an appropriate conclusion to this investigation:

1. Who is the constituency for JCC educational efforts? Is it the entire local Jewish community, or just the members or clients of JCC services?

2. Within that constituency, which groups are the most worthy targets of Jewish educational efforts? Who is most likely to combine the following characteristics: They are accessible to the JCC; they are amenable to Jewish growth; and they are underdeveloped in terms of their Jewish knowledge and commitment.

3. What out to be the Jewish identity and knowledge requirements in hiring and retaining staff? Should different standards apply for staff in different departments or at different levels of authority?

4. What sorts of Judaic demands of the staff are legitimate, which are most effective, and which are most useful?

5. To what extent may (and should) a JCC and its staff intervene in the Jewish lives of their constituencies? How aggressive in promoting Jewish involvement can they be? And how aggressive should they be?

6. What type of Judaism is the JCC working to "market"? Is it "introduction to Jewish religion—you pick the denomination" or is it a nascent and emerging form of American secular Judaism?

7. To what extent can the JCCA produce models that can be widely adopted? The success of Derekh Torah, Melton Mini-Schools, Israel Educational Seminars for professionals and board members, and the various senior staff development programs[34] run by JCCA suggests several other possibilities. Examples include model curricula for preschools and camps, as well as in-service staff development. In short, how can the JCCA in conjunction with foundations and others with the ability to reach beyond a single Center further the cause of Jewish education in the JCC movement?

8. Finally, what are the characteristics of the surrounding Jewish community that support the Jewish educational mission of the JCC, and how may JCCs operate to modify or adjust to their environments?

Undoubtedly other important questions have been raised in this report. We hope and trust that opinion molders and leaders within the JCC movement will be moved to take some of these challenges seriously and deliberate carefully on the questions we have raised, both immediately above and throughout the report. The demands of the present hour require the best resources of the Jewish community—to engage young people in exploring what a meaningful Jewish life might mean; to transmit Jewish knowledge, skills, and attitudes; to help families, teenagers, and senior adults find social engagement and spiritual meaning; and to create communities of friendship and concern. The Jewish Community Center has long played a central role in the lives of North American Jews. As Jews grapple with deep concerns about our situation today, JCCs are a precious resource that can be engaged in the service of a Jewish future. In the best practice sites observed for this report, we saw the exciting beginnings of that very effort.

Notes

18. Lightfoot, *The Good High School,* p. 323.

19. Steven M. Cohen, "The 1989-90 JCCA Executive Fellows Program" (New York: JCCA, 1993).

20. COMJEE II, p. 18-19.

21. Susan Wall, "*Parents of Preschoolers: Their Jewish Identities and Implications for Jewish Education*" (unpublished doctoral dissertation, Jewish Theological Seminary of America, New York: 1994).

22. See the important studies by: (a) Ruth Ravid and Marvell Ginsburg, "The Effect of Jewish Early Childhood Education on Jewish Home Practice," *Jewish Education*, vol. 53, no. 3 (Fall 1985); (b) Ruth Pinkenson Feldman, *The Impact of Jewish Day Care Experiences on Parental Jewish Identity* (New York: American Jewish Committee, 1988).

23. For example, in a study of educators in three North American communities, only 10 percent of preschool teachers were certified in Jewish education and only 4 percent had majored in Jewish studies in college. See the *Policy Brief on the Background and Training of Teachers in Jewish Schools* (New York: CIJE, 1994) for more on Judaica knowledge of preschool teachers.

24. Philip Jackson, *Life in Classrooms* (New York: Holt, rinehart, Winston, 1968).

25. H. A. Alexander and Ian Russ, "What We Know About...Youth Programming," in Kelman, *What We Know About Jewish Education*.

26. In addition this Center runs an unusual visiting scholar and artist program, which brings five different people into the community over the course of the year to speak and teach both at the JCC and at local synagogues and Federation.

27. For more on this topic see Jane Perman, *Enhancing the Jewish Ambiance of Your JCC* (New York: JCCA, 1992).

28. Chris Argyris and Donald A. Schon, *Theory in Practice* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1974).

29. For more on this, see Barry W. Holtz, *Why Be Jewish?* (New York: American Jewish committee, 1993).

30. A recent issue (Fall 1995) of *JCC Circle*, the magazine published by the Jewish Community Centers Association, includes a feature describing a number of positive examples of synagogue-Center relationships.

31. The only exception that we know of is the 92nd Street Y in New York city, which runs High Holiday services on its premises. However, this appears to be a long-standing tradition that has been accepted by the local rabbis for many years.

32. Barry Chazan, "A Late December Day in the JCC," in Chazan and Charendoff, *Jewish Education and the Jewish Community Center*.

33. Yehiel Poupko, "Towards an Ideology of Jewish Education in Jewish Community Centers," pp. 23-28 in Chazan and Charendoff, *Jewish Education and the Jewish Community Center*.

34. These include the Wexner Continuing Jewish Education Program for JCC Executives and the Mandel Executive Education Program.

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