NEW APPROACHES TO LEARNING
How Will They Affect Jewish Education?

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Changes taking place nationally in secular education affect Jewish education as well. This article describes four ideas that are currently popular in secular education—lifelong learning, the professionalism of teachers, the individual-in-community as the unit of instruction, and cooperative learning—and their potential impact on Jewish education.

My intention in this article is to describe changes taking place nationally in secular education and to suggest ways that they may affect Jewish education in the United States. My comments are offered as a springboard for future action to be shaped by the readers' own initiatives.

The four ideas described in this article are **lifelong learning** and what can be seen as a subset of it, the **professionalism of teachers**, a popular discussion topic in secular schools; the **individual-in-community** as the unit for instruction, rather than the individual alone; and **cooperative learning**, another popular topic in secular schools that can be seen as a subset of the third idea.

It is tempting to consider that the focus of the first two ideas—lifelong learning and the professionalism of teachers—is upon ourselves as adults and as professionals and that the focus of the second two—the individual-in-community and cooperative learning—is upon our students. In truth, however, each of the four affects people of all ages. Cooperative learning, for instance, may be experienced as successfully by adults as by children. Our accepting the idea of lifelong learning means that we have to reconsider what should be learned at each stage of the lifespan. We also have to help young children understand that each person will continue to learn, both formally and informally, as long as he or she lives.

LIFELONG LEARNING

Our society is moving away from the belief that formal education for most people ends at age 16 or 17. The increase in life expectancy to over age 70 for both men and women means that people live many decades after their formal education has ended. In our fast-changing, highly technological society, formal learning is essential to keep abreast of new developments. Another reason for encouraging all people to continue learning is that most young adults can now expect to change jobs as many as four times during their work life; therefore, they are likely to need formal courses in order to acquire additional skills in mid-career. In fact, the right to financial support and release time for adult learning has recently been a feature of some union contracts.

Because formal learning is needed now by almost every person during adulthood and because our society provides many ways to acquire such learning—from lectures in public libraries, proprietary courses, and industry-based workshops to advanced degrees at universities—we can begin to

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discuss whether the content of courses offered at each age level today is necessary or even useful (Burstyn, 1986). For instance, we may decide that it is desirable for children to leave school knowing less about some subjects than they used to know, whether they be secular or Jewish culture, mathematics or Hebrew. Such a decrease in knowledge in one or several areas at age 17 may be acceptable in a society where learning continues throughout the lifespan and where opportunities are provided for all people to learn as much, either formally or informally, later in life as during childhood.

Before such learning opportunities were widely available, everything one needed to know had to be "crammed in" during the school years. Yet, today it is not undesirable for a person to learn at age 20 or 30 some things that previous generations learned at an earlier age. In fact, researchers have now concluded that most people retain only a small fraction of what they learn in the classroom! Today, many people believe that it is more important to leave school with a desire to continue learning and knowing where to go for information and how to obtain it than to have taken a course in a particular subject.

Applied to Jewish education, that means it is more important for Jewish teenagers to finish their formal education with **a desire to continue learning about Judaism and what it means to be a Jew** and knowing **where** to go for information about Judaism and Jewish learning and **how** to obtain it than to have taken a particular number of courses in Hebrew or Jewish history. The last thing Jewish educators should subscribe to is the "vaccination theory" of learning, so graphically described by Postman and Weingartner (1969) in *Teaching as a Subversive Activity* whereby students check off the courses they have had as though they were shots that prevented them from having to take further courses in that area.

This formulation of lifelong learning does not suggest that students in school should or will spend less time learning than did former generations. Rather, they will concentrate on different tasks than we have traditionally set for them. They may learn skills of cooperation and conflict resolution, for example, which previously were not considered part of any curriculum (Kreidler, 1984). Innovative courses in Jewish history might well be taught with an emphasis on conflict resolution.

Although the term "lifelong learning" has been incorporated into the vocabulary of educators for some time, its implications are rarely examined. If society makes it possible for us to continue to study as adults and if we all continue to learn throughout our whole life, then we need to construct curricula for a person's lifetime not merely for grades K-12.

Our educational systems were developed when formal education for most people was expected to last only a few years. Children were to be turned into conscientious workers who were able to read, write, and calculate, to work according to industrial and not agrarian timetables, and to use the skills necessary to function well in the industrial workforce. Religious education, which in the United States was separated from public education and organized, supervised, and funded solely by religious denominations, was to teach the ritual, culture, and ethics of the particular religion (Katz, 1987; Tyack & Hansot, 1982, 1990).

Ironically, perhaps, since Judaism is based upon the history of a nomadic and then an agricultural community, many of the customs and attitudes from an agrarian calendar have remained part of Jewish education, even while Jews have adapted to urban, industrial life with greater facility than some other ethnic groups. Even so, Jews, like non-Jews, have continued to think of childhood and early adolescence as the chief, if not the only time for formal education.

Recent literature on adult learning suggests that those who continue formal learning as adults have a desire to control their curricula. Such scholars as K. Patricia

Cross (1982), Arthur Chickering (1986), and Lois Zachary (1986), suggest that adults expect a role in setting any curriculum. They want to pursue their own interests and study material relevant to their needs and responsive to their questions. Since adults have different needs, interests, and questions at different stages of life, their curricula have to be flexible and, to some degree, individualized. (Although educators have sometimes been loathe to agree to this, children and adolescents, no less than adults, also flourish in an environment of flexibility and individualization.)

Already the Jewish community, internationally as well as in the United States, has broadened its vision of Jewish education to focus on the adult as well as the child. An investigation of the factors leading men and women to identify as Jews is being conducted under the auspices of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Perry London and Barry Chazan (1990) have reviewed the psychological literature on the development of identity and applied it to Jewish identity. They also discuss the stages of Jewish life from early childhood to old age. In the United States, the Jewish Education Service of North America (JESNA) has set up a Task Force on Adult Jewish Learning to identify how the organization may, in the future, facilitate adult learning. In 1990, a Think Tank of the Jewish Education Committee of the Syracuse Jewish Federation issued a report entitled *New Directions for Jewish Education Throughout the Lifespan* that explored ways that Jewish education might encompass lifelong learning (see article by Zachary in this issue). The report suggests "the 'learning group' has to become more fluid than we are accustomed to, that we have to break down the classroom walls when we educate our children and adults Jewishly" (Syracuse, 1990, p. 6).

Adults face different barriers and motivators in relation to Jewish learning at different stages of their lives. These barriers and motivators should be taken into account as community members plan, organize, and evaluate the success of their programs. Some Jews, for instance, scarcely participate in Jewish activities after their children have had a Bar or Bat mitvah. The Syracuse report calls such Jews "going-through-the-motion Jews" who see that "life as a Jew is a series of trade-offs with the dominant Christian society. For these Jews, programs have to have a different focus, perhaps combining the intellectual with the social away from institutions of the Jewish community" (Syracuse, 1990, p. 17).

PROFESSIONALISM

One desire that adults have in our society is to develop a growing sense of competence and professionalism. This is as true of teachers as of any other adults. Yet, in secular schools teachers find little opportunity to perform as professionals. Schools have grown into immense bureaucracies, with a distinct pecking order in which the teachers perceive themselves as last in line. The teacher's lowly place in the pecking order is determined by several factors. First, the teacher is a practitioner, and in our society those who practice, who work with clients, hold a less prestigious place in a professional hierarchy than those who administer or those who theorize. Second, in schools the teacher works with children who are not full-fledged members of society and who therefore cannot form political pressure groups to lobby on behalf of those who work with and for them. Third, many teachers are women whose roles in society have traditionally been considered secondary to those of men. Women are paid less than men in most occupations, they hold fewer leadership positions than men, and they have been less visible than men in developing and running educational organizations. In schools, traditionally, men have been chosen as administrators and women have been assigned the role of teachers, with more women employed in the elementary and middle grades than in high-school grades (Grumet, 1988).

Those who work part-time find it even

more difficult than full-time teachers to prove they are truly professional, because society has defined a professional as one who works in a full-time capacity. Indeed, our definition of a professional often includes working more hours than a nonprofessional full-time worker.

Teachers claim they have not in the past been treated as professionals. In 1986 two reports dealt with this issue (Johnson, 1987; Kimball, 1988). *Tomorrow's Teachers: A Report of the Holmes Group* (originally a small group of research universities and now a more broadly based organization) and *A Nation Prepared: Teachers for the Twenty-first Century* (from the Task Force on Teaching as a Profession of the Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy) described plans for increasing teachers' professional standing. The recommended changes include the development of a career ladder for teachers, mentor programs for new teachers, and the expansion of teachers' centers. For example, in New York state alone, before the state's recent financial crisis, there were over 100 teachers' centers with their own governing boards, of which teachers formed the majority. These centers provided space for teachers to share experiences, ideas, and materials; undertake applied research; plan curricula; and study together through continuing education programs. Increased professionalism may soon result in a deregulation of some aspects of teaching, although there will still be a strong emphasis on state assessment of student attainment.

Other changes include the development of shared decision making among school administrators and teachers about curricula, which in light of the need for lifelong learning may become an area of dramatic change in the future, and also about budget expenditures and school administrative policy. The task of implementing shared decision making is complex. How it and the other issues relating to the professionalism of teachers will be worked out in Jewish day and supplementary schools remains to be seen. These are urgent issues, however, that community and congregational school boards should take up as soon as possible. Ways to find and retain qualified teachers for Jewish education have already been suggested in the report of the Mandel Commission on Jewish Education (*A Time to Act,* 1990). However, the ideas need to be further elaborated and acted upon at the local level.

INDIVIDUAL-IN-COMMUNITY AND COOPERATIVE LEARNING

Taking the individual-in-community, rather than the individual alone, as the unit for learning, is an issue of concern in secular education, where some educators believe that competitiveness and concern only for self-interest have been carried too far in the schools and colleges of this country. Because Jewish education is concerned primarily about the individual-in-community and ways in which Jews can maintain and strengthen their commitment to the Jewish community through learning, Jewish educators will find current research and writing about cooperative learning in secular schools to be particularly useful.

Such researchers as Roger and David Johnson (Johnson & Johnson, 1975; Johnson et al., 1990) embrace cooperative learning as a way to combat extreme individualism. Cooperative learning promotes a set of values geared to the maintenance of community. In a book entitled *Circles of Learning,* the authors provide a chapter on "Implementing Cooperative Learning" in which they recommend that the shorter the time available for cooperative work, the smaller the group should be in order to provide all members with an opportunity to participate fully. They claim that heterogeneous groups provide opportunities for "more elaborative thinking, more frequent giving and receiving of explanations, and greater perspective in discussing material" than do homogeneous groups, a conclusion that may produce a lively discussion among parents and teachers (Johnson et al., 1990, p. 27). Cooperative learning is not simply group learning. A cooperative learning group, in contrast to a noncooperative one,

is structured to promote goals for its students that emphasize (1) positive interdependence, (2) face-to-face interaction, (3) individual accountability or personal responsibility, (4) collaborative or interpersonal skills, and (5) group dynamics (Harootunian, 1990). In contrast, traditional classrooms use primarily competitive and individualistic goals and reward structures.

Another scholar who has written widely on cooperative learning is Robert Slavin (1985). He approaches the topic as a learning theorist. He claims that ways to learn cooperatively have to be taught to children (and adults), and there are specific skills one needs in order to work cooperatively, such as learning how to facilitate discussions, act as a recorder, or break down tasks into their component parts. Each of these skills has to be learned and practiced. From a similar perspective, Arnold Goldstein (1988) at Syracuse University has been teaching pro-social skills to children already in trouble with the law because of their tendency to resort to violence and to younger children in order to prevent them from becoming troublemakers.

William J. Kriedler (1984) and his colleagues at Educators for Social Responsibility approach cooperative learning as an adjunct to learning conflict resolution. They are concerned with global issues of war and peace and the containment of nuclear weapons, and they see international violence as one end of a continuum that begins with violent interactions among individuals. Kreidler's book, *Creative Conflict Resolution in the Classroom*, provides teachers with examples of how to teach conflict resolution and cooperative learning skills, such as those indentified by Slavin and others. It contains a wealth of suggestions for working with elementary and middle-school students.

SUMMARY

Lifelong learning may be a concept of which Jews have long been aware. Yet, new scholarship on how children and adults learn, on the stages of adult development, and on the concerns of men and women in early, middle, and late adulthood as society changes mean that Jews will have to unlearn their traditional methods of delivering education to both children and adults and replace them with more sophisticated methods. Among the changes that will be needed is a new concern for the professional development of Jewish educators. Teaching to the individual-in-community may mean abandoning, or at least combatting, some dearly held views of parents, children, and teachers on the value of competitiveness. One way to do this is to encourage cooperative learning among both faculty and students, whether those students be children or adults. The fruits of cooperation may be crucial in the long run for the preservation of the Jewish community in the United States.

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