

"MARKETING" JEWISH IDENTITY: SERVICES TO CONGREGATIONAL SUPPLEMENTARY SCHOOLS

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Planning for vital identity efforts cannot and should not be limited either to the Bureau or to the Federation, or to both together, or to both and the synagogue, but rather requires a total systemic effort by the entire Jewish communal service profession if we are going to make any progress for the next generations.

INTRODUCTION

The increased incidence in recent years of mutual consultations and joint meetings of Jewish Federations and Jewish education personnel spells refreshing new directions and healthy developments for Jewish communal service. I believe it bodes very well for a Jewish future in which service delivery will be looked upon more and more as an interdisciplinary effort requiring a new kind of structuring.

These new efforts demand that we begin now to redefine what we mean by "service delivery." They call on the various Jewish communal service disciplines to redefine client groups, broaden our concept and conception of Jewish survival and design systems appropriate to Jewish continuity needs. That truly new way of serving the Jewish community compels us also to examine and evaluate the content of the various services we deliver. We will individually as professionals and collectively as professions, come to recognize as true and accept sincerely that it is more a question of *what* it is we are to do and less a question of *who* is to do it. The *who* is now clear; it is all of us, and together.

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SYNAGOGUE EDUCATION PROGRAMS

In concentrating on the congregational supplementary school at this time, I imply no less significance to other supplementary education programs or to day schools. Much has been written of their importance. I join with all who assert that the day school, especially, is essential to Jewish continuity. I encourage increased day school enrollment and increased resources to support that. But too little has been said about the synagogue which, for several decades, has been the primary locus of education and has received the least community support. The synagogue is still the major educator and, in recent years, has begun to receive various kinds of support from Federations and central agencies for Jewish education. While such help may still be too little, it is not too late—provided that goals are clear and strategies are defined.

Within these frameworks I propose some planning assumptions which relate specifically to service delivery for synagogue education programs.

I note at the outset that, despite all we hear and read about civil Judaism or secular Judaism, the survival of the Jewish People is and will always be rooted in Jewish knowledge and faith. Without constant and compelling attachment to God,

Israel and Torah, we will be bereft of the essential fueling mechanism which will propel the experiment into future generations. It is incumbent on all of us, therefore, to consider carefully the role and the needs of the guardian of that spiritual impetus—the synagogue.

In all of our dreaming and planning for Jewish survival and Jewish identity we are required to address succinctly and forthrightly the complex dimensions of education in the synagogue setting. Here I mean education in its very broadest sense. We may not limit ourselves to Jewish schooling, because Jewish schooling is only one, albeit significant, aspect of Jewish education.

The synagogue community generally, at any one moment, represents approximately fifty percent of the eligible elementary and secondary age students. I'm not addressing now pre-school or adult education which involve planning considerations beyond the scope of this paper. In addition, at any moment, and as a national average, we find in the synagogues some seventy percent of all of those who are in any form of Jewish education in the grade range I've defined. Moreover, somewhere between eighty and eighty-five percent, some say as high as ninety percent, of all Jewish children are, at one time or another, touched by the synagogue education system, either through the schooling program or through synagogue youth groups.

The synagogue and its programs, therefore, need to be viewed as integral parts of the community. They require community aid which flows from full acceptance by the community of a responsibility for what goes on in synagogue education.

Let us understand the profile of this essential component of the Jewish community. Synagogue programs attempt to comprehend some 3,200 years of Jewish history, heritage and culture in approximately 1,200 hours, maximum, if the student attends all grades K through 12; and most attend for far fewer years. We at-

tempt that schooling at the least effective time of day and in the absence of a true teaching profession, where most teachers are part-time or quasi-volunteers and are, in many instances, less than trained for the undertaking. The setting is in institutions which are generally understaffed and suffer from limited resources of all kinds. The small miracle is—and it is a tribute to those who provide and direct synagogue education—that the results are not worse than they are. Moreover, that system has produced generations of community leaders committed and dedicated to carrying the enterprise to another level.

The challenge to Jewish communal service, which includes the synagogue, is how to make that system better and how, within the synagogue setting, to address Jewish identity and Jewish continuity despite the systemic shortcomings. I phrase it this way because I believe that the system itself, supplementary Jewish learning in the synagogue ambience, will not, perhaps can not and should not, change.

SPECIFIC TASKS OF SYNAGOGUE EDUCATION

We come then to some specific tasks to address from a planning point of view if we are going to make any inroads at all. I expand a little further what I said above about Jewish education not being limited to Jewish schooling. The newest term for this is "beyond-the-classroom" which is seen to be the rubric for learning opportunities outside of the school.

Schooling and beyond-the-classroom become the two sides of an effort, not just partners but organically and dynamically connected components. In former decades we talked about co-curricular, extra curricular, enhancement or enrichment and used similar constructs that attempted to convey precisely the same idea; the intent is to talk about what we can do outside of and in connection with the classroom, the schooling experience, to begin to have significant impact on the system itself.

One specific task is to enrich and enhance the synagogue school experience. Here one thinks of efforts to individualize instruction, of utilization of the arts, of creative and innovative teaching/learning experiences, of a variety of peer experiences—all designed to illumine and bring to fulfillment specific educational goals.

A second specific task is to improve instructional quality, that is, to improve the quality of what takes place within the synagogue school context. Here one talks about in-service and pre-service teacher training but, more significantly, we should also talk about inter-agency personnel so that, for example, Jewish community center workers can find themselves in synagogue programs designed to address questions of Jewish continuity and Jewish family service professionals can play a role because synagogues deal with family life education and child development.

A third specific task is to find some way systematically, and I underscore systematically, to increase contact hours. Here the beyond-the-classroom component has its most important contribution to make, and there are no surprises on the list. The clue is to address the list in a coherent way so as to make the beyond-the-classroom activities integral parts of everything else in the synagogue.

Here we talk about all kinds of family experiences, both parallel learning for parents and parents and children learning together; Israeli experiences; camping; retreats; youth groups; inter-school and inter-agency efforts—all of which pool community resources and services in an organized and focussed fashion.

A fourth specific task is to assist congregations with their personnel needs, remembering that congregations are terribly understaffed for the task, and to assist them with their administrative and their funding needs for these activities which, together, can provide a dynamism with a significant potential to assure Jewish continuity.

EXPERIMENTAL PROGRAMS

Some Cleveland experiments relating to the tasks outlined above may be helpful as paradigms. I make but brief mention of a few:

1. Our Shroder Award-winning Israel Incentive Savings Program, a partnership among Federation, the Joint Fund for Israel and the school and family, enables significant saving for Israel experiences and encourages family and school planning for such opportunities.

2. Our heavy investment—with Federation and Bureau money and Bureau planning and administration—to provide significant financial and counseling assistance for Israel experiences supports these not only in this age group but also at the college level.

3. Our comprehensive teacher training program provides both long and short term in-service opportunities, support and network systems, coaching, funding for conferences and stipends. All of these, and others, serve the congregations, not exclusively but, certainly, primarily.

4. From a planning perspective, it is essential to note that the Bureau of Jewish Education Board of Trustees was restructured nine years ago so as to allow direct participation by the synagogues, through Institutional trustees, in preparation for increased and meaningful partnership participation by synagogues in the Bureau's planning processes.

5. Again, nine years ago, a full-time position was created at the Bureau to advocate for and protect synagogue interests. The Director of Congregational and Educational Services now is also the Assistant Director of the Bureau.

6. The Congregational Enrichment Fund (CEF) which I discuss more fully, is deceptively simple. It says, in essence, "Let's find money in the community to give to congregations for specific targeted programs which will address some of the issues just outlined in the discussion of specific tasks."

The areas defined in the CEF include family education, camping and general curriculum enhancement. Allocations are based on a formula which considers the size of the student body and whether or not those students are also attending an otherwise Federation-funded education program. The formula sets a limit to how much a congregation may receive.

Congregations submit, prior to the request for funding, a description of the program to be funded. The Bureau review committee authorizes funding for specific projects and requires an evaluation on conclusion of each program before funds are released. Specific guidelines govern both committee functions. There is a mechanism for the seventeen congregations to share successful programs.

The idea works. The funds are doing things they were intended to achieve. Beyond-the-classroom learning experiences are occurring in the synagogue and are considered to be important by synagogue leadership.

What are some problems despite five years of modest successes?

CURRENT PROBLEMS

First, we find that the synagogue schools, as already intimated, are not structured to use the funds appropriately. The synagogues, by and large, require enormous assistance to plan programs, submit appropriate forms and integrate activities with the schooling experience. That has become a major problem which we are trying to solve, in part, by reserving some Enrichment Fund money to provide planning staff help in the synagogue.

Second, there is not easy consensus within the individual congregation on the best way to use the funds. Planning necessitates consultation with the rabbi, the school director, chairperson of the school committee, the president of the congregation and, in some congregations, other leaders as well. It becomes a major planning effort, requiring a variety of strategic approaches, to help schools iden-

tify what they want to do and to translate the decision into a program.

Third, there are never enough funds. Having demonstrated that the funds can be put to good use, the need has escalated beyond present funding capacity.

Fourth, schools find it exceedingly difficult to reconceptualize and to broaden their concept of education, to break out of the narrow definition of curriculum. This impedes their ability to integrate beyond-the-classroom activities in the curriculum. The definition I use is that curriculum is whatever happens to a learner that is intended—in a planful way—to have an impact on that learner regardless of where it takes place and regardless of under whose auspices. That is hard for synagogues to accept because there is a perception that such a broad view might threaten autonomy and the mission of the synagogue.

Finally, the program requires enormous commitments of Bureau staff time and we are not funded to provide the staffing that is required. That frequently engenders competition within the agency for staff time and dollars to deliver important other services which, not coincidentally, also serve congregations rather heavily.

SUMMARY

The synagogue is seminally and utterly vital to the Jewish identity/Jewish survival enterprise. What takes place in the synagogue should be very much the concern of the entire community and the synagogue should share in all community resources. There are models which achieve both objectives, keeping in mind that schooling does not equal education but is, rather, a part of education. Political and economic issues are worked through the education channel because, frequently, it is the easiest channel to identify and use. And, finally, I conclude where I began: planning for vital identity efforts cannot and should not be limited either to the Bureau or to the Federation, or to both together, or to both and the synagogue,

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On religious education, he believes that the day school does not provide the answer for most American Jews and he would like to see a wider development of community-wide supplemental education "conducted with respectful regard for all of the elements of the community." He calls upon rabbis with their ambitions for enlargement of the purview of the synagogue to put aside their inter-denominational differences and rivalries for the sake of an improved Jewish schooling under community auspices. Similarly, on the affiliations of youth groups, he speaks for the place of the non-synagogue affiliated youth groups, such as the B'nai B'rith Youth Organization, being open to various points of view.

The author's pleas for unity in the organization of the synagogues and Jewish education become considerably modulated when he discusses philanthropic financing and the programs of the community relations agencies. He finds that fund-raising now dominates the community and while the statistics of federated campaigns are impressive and the best method yet devised to give some rational coherence to the complex of appeals, there are "plus factors in independent campaigns."

*From a review by Harry L. Lurie of
No Easy Answers, by Philip Klutznick*