

Jewish Action Research*

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Action research is systematic inquiry designed to produce social change within the Jewish community. This applied form of social research has advanced considerably in methodology and scope over the past twenty-five years . . . In this essay, we pinpoint . . . the state of the field and top research priorities in several . . . research areas. We conclude . . . with a discussion of the research process, considering the strengths and weaknesses of inside versus outside study personnel.

DR. Louis Finkelstein, Chancellor Emeritus of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, once made the following observation,

Some years ago, I undertook to prepare a comprehensive work describing the whole phenomenon of Judaism. . . . What surprised me was the dearth of information about Jews today. There are probably a hundred people whose profession it is to discover all that can be known about the Jews in Jerusalem in the first century; there does not seem to be one who has the same duty for the Jews of New York in the twentieth century. So it comes about that we understand Judaism in the first century better than we understand Judaism in the twentieth.¹

Finkelstein's assessment was made in 1958. In this paper, we will explore how far we have advanced over the past twenty-five years. In particular, we will examine the state of the art—the adequacy of existing studies for Jewish community planning; the future research needs of Jewish organizations; and the process of conducting scientific studies on Jewish communal life.

Before focusing on these specific issues, we need a working understanding of the nature of Jewish social research. Research in its simplest sense means to search, to take a careful look, to find out

more. When I refer to "research" in this essay, I am relating to its more technical definition. For our purposes, research is systematic investigation intended to add to available knowledge in a communicable and verifiable form by the use of standardized procedures. It seeks to find answers to study questions through the application of scientific methods.² Formal research results in a report which usually includes four dimensions.

1. Problem formulation—specification of the questions to which answers are sought; hypotheses which have been examined; definition and operationalization of key concepts.

2. Study design—the logic or blueprint of the research.

3. Data collection statement—procedures for sample selection, methods of data collection, and items included in the study instruments.

4. Data analysis and interpretation.

Although the Jewish community has supported the accumulation of "pure" research for its own sake, priority has been given to "applied" studies—research designed to improve staff and organizational performance. Lay and professional leaders need practical information to improve Jewish decision-making.

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¹ Cited in Marshall Sklare, editor, *The Jews: Social Patterns of an American Group*. New York: Free Press, 1958, p.v.

² Mary MacDonald, "Social Work Research: A Perspective" in Norman Polansky, editor, *Social Work Research*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1961, pp. 1–23.

This paper evaluates research based on its contribution to the improvement of Jewish communal functioning. The litmus test for successful Jewish communal research is that it be action-oriented. It be "used."

A classic example of the type of research we are describing was done by the Research Branch of the U.S. Department of War during World War II.

The Research Branch existed to do a practical engineering job. Its purpose was to provide the Army command quickly and accurately with facts about the attitudes of soldiers which, along with other facts and inferences, might be helpful in policy formulation.³

Jewish action research is applied social research. For example, during the course of a typical year, Federation lay leaders and staff may need to answer the following questions.

- How can staff morale and output be raised?
- How do we deal with massive staff turnover?
- Where should the new Jewish community center be located to insure a maximum number of new members?
- Is the bureau of Jewish education making a difference in improving the quality of Jewish schools?
- How can more wealthy Jews be enticed to give to Federation?
- Should the Jewish community build another senior citizens housing complex or expand in-home support services? What are the costs and benefits of each option?

Systematic action research is a tool to generate solutions to these problems. It provides the missing information. It enables us to develop a supportable answer

which goes beyond hunch and intuition. Some of the major sources of such policy-oriented social research are critiqued in the next section of this paper. We review research on demography, Jewish identity, Jewish education, family life, and organizational behavior. Our concern is with their value and limitations.

Major Research Approaches

1. Demography

The major areas which are studied in demographic research are population size, composition, distribution, and change components. Community demographic reports provide baseline data on such issues as family size, birth and death rates, marriage and divorce patterns, residential mobility, and socio-economic status.⁴ Official government statistics are of limited usefulness in these areas since questions on religious preference are not included in American decennial censuses. Although general surveys, such as those conducted by Gallup, include some Jews, the number of Jewish cases has not been sufficiently large. As a result, the best Jewish demographic data are contained in Jewish community surveys.

Among the local communities to have undertaken such studies are Akron, Allentown, Boston, Cincinnati, Dallas, Erie, Houston, Jersey City, Kansas City, Los Angeles, Minneapolis, New Orleans, New York, Norfolk, Oakland, Omaha, Pittsburgh, Portland, and San Diego. Federations and agencies have varied in their use of this information. Some communities have been exemp-

³ The Department of War quotation is found in Claire Sellitz *et al*, *Research Methods in Social Relations*. New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1976, p. 7. This text contains a first rate introduction to virtually every step in the data-gathering process.

⁴ Two excellent examples of demographic research are included in the *1981 American Jewish Year Book*. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1980, pp. 3-117. See Sidney Goldstein, "Jews in the United States: Perspectives from Demography" and U.O. Schmelz, "Jewish Survival: The Demographic Factors."

lars in the application of the data, as the following illustrations confirm.

Fact—One community noted that over a ten-year period there was a marked decline in the percentage of population under ages 10 and over 40, while there was a marked increase in the number of persons aged 20–30.

Response—The Federation established a Young Professionals group and the Jewish community center developed a Young Adult Center in the area of new Jewish concentration.

2. *Fact*—The same survey demonstrated considerable population relocation. The areas of growth, particularly for homeowners, tended to be in new suburban locations. The scope of the population shift far exceeded the projections of the Federation.

Response—The Federation moved to build two new multi-purpose facilities and constituent agencies opened satellite branches in the new residential centers.

3. *Fact*—It was discovered that hardly any Jewish adolescents were enrolled in post Bar-Bat Mitzvah Jewish education. Less than 50 percent of Jewish children were getting any form of Judaic instruction.

Response—A Program of Jewish Studies for High School Youth was developed and the Bureau of Jewish Education mounted a major pupil recruitment drive.

4. *Fact*—A survey verified that the image of the Jewish Federation is vague. Among all groups, there was enormous misinformation about the organization, especially its allocations structure.

Response—The Public Relations Department formulated a series of media productions to dispel the specific myths about the Federation which had been uncovered.

Although such studies are very useful, many have a critical flaw. Their study samples are based on organizational lists

which contain Jewish names and addresses. These lists are biased since they only contain affiliated Jews. This is a particular problem in large communities where the affiliation rate may be below 50 percent. The generalizability of such samples is very limited.

Several techniques have been developed to overcome these methodological problems. For example, some communities use a computer to randomly generate telephone numbers. Residential telephone numbers are then called to ascertain whether Jews reside in the household. "Random Digit Dialing" may be extremely valuable in producing population profiles. It is, however, expensive and requires a great deal of sampling expertise.⁵ As a result, some communities are experimenting with modifications of this system and the counting of persons with "distinctive Jewish names."

2. Jewish Identity

A major body of research exists on Jewish behavior and attitudes. These analyses deal with people's involvement with Jewish life and their sense of what being Jewish means to them. The two data sources are case studies and sample surveys. Questions are asked about ritual observance, attitudes toward Israel, intermarriage, philanthropy and related matters. Community case studies include in-depth interviews, field observations and examination of existing documents. For example, the *Lakeville*

⁵ See Joseph Waksberg, "Sampling Methods for Random Digit Dialing," *Journal of the American Statistical Association* (March, 1978), pp. 40–46. A community experience with a random probability telephone survey is David Varady and Samuel Mantel, "Estimating the Size of Jewish Communities Using Random Telephone Surveys," *Journal of Jewish Communal Service*, Vol. LVII, No. 3 (Spring, 1981), pp. 225–234.

Studies of Marshall Sklare and Egon Mayer's *From Suburb to Shtetl—The Jews of Boro Park* provide authoritative insight into the workings of communities. Such intensive studies of selected examples can be an excellent procedure to stimulate hypotheses for further research. These insight-stimulating studies are exploratory; they do not test or conclusively demonstrate hypotheses. We are always concerned with whether the case under study is idiosyncratic or representative.

The other major source of identity data is the sample survey.⁶ The most important project has been the National Jewish Population Study (NJPS), undertaken in 1970–1971. Only preliminary reports have been available from the NJPS. These reports were based on a survey of some 10,000 Jewish households distributed across the country. The data are now over ten-years old and need updating.

3. Jewish Education and Family Studies

Professor Seymour Fox, Director of the School of Education at the Hebrew University, remarks that "there are practically no scholars or researchers in the field of Jewish education . . . How can we hope to train proper personnel or look at Jewish education reflectively if there are no experts to undertake these tasks?"⁷ The Jewish education research enterprise consists primarily of student theses and census gathering by national organizations.

Very few studies analyze the short-term effects of Jewish education. A no-

table exception is Emile Jacoby's study of Jewish school drop-outs. Jacoby found there is a correlation between a student's sense of accomplishment and whether he continues his Jewish studies. Students who continued in high school programs reported that they had learned a great deal during their elementary schooling.⁸ Jacoby's study focuses strictly on student perceptions. Studies on student achievement have long been abandoned.

Most evaluations of Jewish school success look at some set of adult Jewish behaviors and attitudes. There are several fallacies in this approach. Many desired adult behaviors, such as belonging to a Jewish organization, are either not included in school goals or not translated into the school's curriculum. Schools should be assessed on the degree to which they are accomplishing their short-term stated objectives rather than on the basis of far removed goals. Further, when we lump together good and bad schools in our studies, the net educational impact is zero. Such correlational approaches obscure school success stories.⁹

Most Jewish communal surveys analyze the Jewish family. Frequent topics are marriage, divorce, fertility, and extended family relationships. Significant work is being carried out by the Ameri-

⁶ Emile Jacoby, *Continuation and Dropout in Conservative Congregational Schools*. Los Angeles: University of Judaism, 1970. The critique of Jewish educational studies is based on analyses of Professor David Resnick of the Jewish Theological Seminary presented at a Planning Conference for a Center for Modern Jewish Studies at Brandeis University, October, 1979. His paper was entitled, "Toward An Agenda for Research in Jewish Education."

⁹ Two of the most prominent correlational studies are J. Bock, *Does Jewish Schooling Matter?* New York: American Jewish Committee, 1972 and H. Himmelfarb, *Jewish Education for Naught: Educating the Culturally Deprived Jewish Child*. *Analysis* 51, Washington, 1975.

⁶ A valuable instructional guide is Donald Warwick and Charles Lininger, *The Sample Survey: Theory and Practice*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1975.

⁷ Seymour Fox, "Toward a General Theory of Jewish Education," in David Sidorsky, editor, *The Future of the Jewish Community in America*. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1973, pp. 267–8.

can Jewish Committee (AJC), notably by its National Jewish Family Center. The Center Newsletters contain important information on child-rearing practices and the needs of families. Its July, 1982 issue, for instance, included pieces on single Jewish fathers, men and household chores, and paternity leave.

Special note should be made of the intermarriage studies of the American Jewish Committee and the Union of American Hebrew Congregations. The AJC study documented that "intermarriage represents a threat to Jewish continuity because most non-Jewish spouses do not convert to Judaism; the level of Jewish content and practice in mixed marriages is low; only about one-third of the Jewish partners in such marriages view their children as Jewish, and most such children are exposed to little by way of Jewish culture or religion."¹⁰ Intermarriage is causing a population decline. Non-Jewish spouses and their children are not becoming involved in Jewish life. Unfortunately, few communities have reacted to this study by developing comprehensive plans to cope with this assimilationist threat. One exception is the Los Angeles Federation, which has formed a Commission on Outreach to Mixed Married Couples. One novel aspect of the Los Angeles plan is the use of Jewish justices to identify and help reach out to mixed marrieds.

Another example of Jewish action research is the Union of American He-

brew Congregations (UAHC) Intermarriage Project. Based on a study of close to 400 converts to Judaism, it was found that graduates of Reform and Conservative conversion programs are more religious than born Jews. The comment of this respondent reveals the intensity of Jewishness among converts.

At my conversion ceremony, I was nervous. But when Rabbi Cohen gave me my Hebrew name, I really felt that I had joined the Jewish people. At last, I had reached my goal.¹¹

Despite the Judaic fervor of converts, the study found that converts were in many cases being treated as second-class citizens. A person may be sincere in her conversion to Judaism, her Christian friends may view her with disgust, and some unobservant Jews may still say: "Once a goy, always a goy."¹²

Based on this study and other evidence about the peril of intermarriage, Rabbi Alexander Schindler announced a massive effort. The Reform movement committed itself to five courses of action—to intensify its Jewish educational programs; to develop convert support groups and educate born Jews about the authenticity of converts; to revise its conversion programs to include more experiential learning; to seek out mixed married couples and involve them in synagogue life; and to expose more non-Jews to the message of Judaism. Thus, a specific action plan was built with hard empirical research at its foundation. The UAHC was energized by a study which confirmed that converts make good Jews.¹³

4. Organizational Behavior

A fourth major class of studies analyzes Jewish agencies.¹⁴ Among the only

¹⁰ Egon Mayer and Carl Sheingold, *Intermarriage and the Jewish Future*. New York: American Jewish Committee, 1979, p. 30.

¹¹ Steven Huberman, "Conversion to Judaism: An Analysis of Family Matters," *Judaism*, Vol. 30, No. 3 (Summer, 1981), pp. 312–321 and Steven Huberman, "Becoming a Reform Jew: Problems and Prospects," *Journal of Reform Judaism*, Vol. 28, No. 3 (Summer, 1981), pp. 58–67.

¹² Steven Huberman, *New Jews: The Dynamics of Religious Conversion*. New York: Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1979.

¹³ The details of the UAHC plan are in Alexander Schindler, *Presidential Address*. Houston: UAHC, December 2, 1978.

¹⁴ This list of research types is not meant to be exhaustive. I have selected four typical research

organizations which have been studied in any detail are the American Jewish Committee, American Joint Distribution Committee, B'nai B'rith, Council of Jewish Federations, and the New York Jewish Federation. Most individual federations, community relations agencies, family services, bureaus of Jewish education, and Centers have not been properly examined. The author is currently coordinating an in-depth review of an agency with a \$3 million budget in his community, which may serve as a prototype study for other communities. This review is employing qualitative and quantitative methods to assess a Bureau of Jewish Education—its mission, goals, programs, governance, constituency relations, inter-organizational relationships, staff deployment, and future funding.

Although there are few evaluative studies, agencies are moving to develop better internal monitoring mechanisms, Management Information Systems (MIS). These devices are not social research in the sense described in this paper. They are, nonetheless, very powerful administrative tools. An "MIS" may be defined as "an ongoing data collection and analysis system, usually computerized, that allows timely access to service delivery and outcome information."¹⁵ MIS's provide answers to seven questions: Who? Did what? To whom? When? Where? What hap-

pened? How much did it cost? Social work agencies are using MIS's to monitor on an ongoing basis whom they are serving and the results of their interventions.

These statistical systems make program evaluation constant and continuous. They can be designed to yield demographic profiles of agency clients; indications of how clients were referred to the program; preliminary diagnoses of why persons were motivated to enter the program; breakdowns of how staff time is used; and the next steps to be taken with clients. For an MIS to work staff must be trained and retrained in their record keeping skills. Quality control checks must also be done to prevent falsification or improper information logging. Despite these caveats, many of the Jewish agencies which have adopted MIS's testify to their utility in improving agency operations.

The Research Requirements of Jewish Organizations

What are the necessary research directions which should be pursued by Jewish organizations? We have touched on some of the standard subjects of inquiry of interest to planners. What are the suggested next steps? The projects which I believe are of top priority fall under three broad topics.¹⁶

1. Population Studies

Demographic population studies which have been completed need to be placed in central depositories. This includes materials published under Jewish

thrusters to illustrate the pay-offs of action research. Other first-rate studies have been done in the religious-congregational, educational-cultural, community relations, communal welfare, and Israeli-overseas spheres. Readers interested in the structures, functions, and institutional dynamics of organized Jewish polities throughout the world have an excellent archive at their disposal—monographs produced by the *Center for Jewish Community Studies* directed by Professor Daniel Elazar.

¹⁵ Peter Rossi and Howard Freeman, *Evaluation: A Systematic Approach*. Beverly Hills: Sage, 1982, p. 52.

¹⁶ Most of these research proposals are treated in considerable detail in Marshall Sklare, editor, *Understanding American Jewry*. New Brunswick: Transaction Books, 1982. The Center for Modern Jewish Studies at Brandeis University will undoubtedly undertake a selection of the study projects proposed in this text.

and non-sectarian auspices. Communities which desire to embark on their own studies need expert guidance on how to conduct and utilize research findings. Population studies require personnel who are trained in sampling and technical methodology. This has become a "growth industry." Quality control procedures need to be instituted to ensure that communities do not squander scarce resources on studies directed by improperly trained or untrustworthy researchers. Further, communities should recognize the limitations of demography. Demographic studies focus primarily on population size, distribution, and salient characteristics. They do *not* directly analyze the social service needs of Jews, program gaps or duplications, or the quality of agency service delivery.

2. *Jewish Identity, Education, and Family Studies*

There has already been a sizable amount of literature on the nature and determinants of Jewish identity. Although we do not need any more Jewish identity scales, we could benefit from regular sampling of Jewish public opinion. Such periodic polls could focus on the needs and preferences of scientifically selected samples of Jews.¹⁷ Charles Liebman has written extensively about the religious life of American Jewry. We need more studies, like those done by Liebman, which examine why Jews celebrate and do not celebrate particular rituals and life cycle events. Particular sub-groups require examination. We need to know why young Jews are becoming *ba'ale t'shuvah* (religiously observant), whether their inner conver-

sion is long lasting, and how the major religious movements could promote greater religious piety among their members.¹⁸ Two research deficiencies are now being filled. The Council of Jewish Federations will be releasing a final version of its study on Russian immigrant absorption and Seymour Lipsit and Dora Kass are doing a national study of "Israelis in exile," Israeli emigrants in America.

Turning to Jewish education, we need better statements of school knowledge, skill, and behavioral objectives. These should be stated in short-term, clear, specific, and measurable terms. Recent school graduates could then be tested on the achievement of these aims. Our focus should be less on adult behavior and more on such questions as: How many elementary school graduates can explain, three years after graduation, the customs associated with *Rosh Hashanah*, *Yom Kippur*, and *Pesach*? What factors are responsible for youngsters remaining in a Jewish youth group, attending summer camp for several years, or desiring to go on a trip to Israel? Jewish communities are frequently guilty of castigating Jewish education for its failures. Greater stress should instead be placed on documenting why certain teachers, administrators, programs, and schools are *successful*. These descriptions could provide experimental models to be tested and replicated in other localities.

As noted above, the American Jewish Committee has mounted a family research program. Given the increasing prevalence of divorce and single parenthood, it is hoped that the AJC could give attention to how to lessen the alienation of these two groups from the Jewish community.¹⁹ The Community

¹⁷ An example of public opinion research is Steven M. Cohen, "What American Jews Believe," *Moment*, Vol. 7, No. 7 (July-August, 1982), pp. 23-27.

¹⁸ Charles Liebman, *The Ambivalent American Jew*. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1973.

¹⁹ Chaim Waxman has authored a series of

Planning Department of the Council of Jewish Federations is doing valuable program inventories. Council has inventoried child care programs for preschoolers and services for single parents and working families. Similar inventories of self-help, Jewish family life, and parent education programs would be helpful.

3. *Polity Studies*

Jewish communal organizations could be enhanced by two studies. We need to learn more about our volunteer leadership. These analyses could scrutinize the functions which volunteer leaders perform; their satisfactions and dissatisfactions as lay leaders; what attracted them to get involved in organizational affairs; and what accounts for their sustained participation. This information could help in leadership recruitment, particularly in synagogues which are experiencing a leadership drain.²⁰

The second requirement is for a comprehensive Jewish civil service report. Except for one study prepared for the Council of Jewish Federations, there is a paucity of data on the future staff needs of Jewish agencies.²¹ We hear much informally about Jewish communal workers leaving the field and entering other professions. The reasons for

this alleged defection need to be elucidated. A systematic review of staff recruitment/retention efforts and the efficacy of various training programs need to be undertaken. It would be useful, for example, to compare graduates of schools of Jewish communal service with those from more conventional social work programs. Are there significant differences in their organizational performance and continuation record in the Jewish civil service? Leadership and personnel studies occur in the field of public administration. Such research activities also need to become commonplace in the Jewish communal system.

The Administration of Studies

Who should do all of the projects outlined in this paper? There are two structural options. Research units can be developed within local and national organizations or outside consultants, usually university faculty, can be hired. Outside consultants may advise permanent staff on how to do the research or carry out all or some of it. Another possibility is to hire an outside research organization, such as the Survey Research Program at the University of Massachusetts—M.I.T.—Harvard University, to do the study. Survey research organizations may be academic groups, non-profit associations, or commercial firms.

In deciding which option to pursue, several considerations need to be taken into account.²²

Competency. Research skills are essential. Administrators tend to have confidence in the credentials of academics. Conversely, few academics have ever worked in a Jewish agency. Some are too

Jewish family policy reports, for example, *Single-Parent Families: Challenge to Jewish Community*. New York: American Jewish Committee, 1980. A seminal analysis of Jewish Family Life Education is Bernard Reisman's *The Emerging Jewish Family*. New York: Institute for Jewish Life, 1974.

²⁰ The two manpower proposals come from Daniel Elazar, "The Jewish Community as a Polity," in Sklare, *op. cit.* pp. 201–202. A pioneering leadership study is Jonathan Woocher's "The Civil Judaism of Communal Leaders" in *American Jewish Year Book 1981*. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1980, pp. 149–169.

²¹ Andrew Hahn and Arnold Gurin, "Jewish Federation Professionals: Status and Outlook," *Journal of Jewish Communal Service*, Vol. LV1, No. 2 (Winter, 1979–80), pp. 125–139.

²² Inside versus outside research policies are considered in Carol Weiss, *Evaluation Research*. Englewood: Prentice-Hall, 1972, pp. 10–23.

remote from Jewish communal life, too ivory tower, and too abstract to provide data that can be of practical decision-making value.

Neutrality. Credible research has to be objective. Researchers have to be sufficiently secure in their positions so as not to be tempted to make their findings either look good or bad. Outsiders tend to be more insulated, but there are also internal researchers of high integrity. The temptation of outsiders to sweeten research findings in order to court the support of the agency sponsor should be safeguarded against. One way to minimize this tendency is to monitor carefully the respondent selection and statistical procedures.

Jewish Communal Awareness. It is crucial that a researcher understand the dynamics of Jewish life and the intricacies of communal agencies. A researcher must know the major issues and events which are taking place in the community and within the organization. It is on this account that a strong case can be made for in-house staff. It takes a prodigious amount of effort for an outsider to gain access to and grasp the requisite information.

Implementation. In order for research studies to have a "zero shelf-life," the researcher must help translate information into policy and program recommendations. An internal researcher provides *continuity*. After the research project is completed, he can advocate implementation in organizational meetings and presentations. An insider may be better able to convince his colleagues to implement the study findings, particularly if his associates see that the research is in their own best interests. Agency self-evaluation, designed to foster program improvement, may stand a higher chance of being implemented when done by insiders. On the other side, the prestige of the outsider may cause the organization to pay

greater attention to his recommendations.

One recent estimate is that there are some 2,800 firms and 50,000 practitioners who engage in organizational consultation. The fact that a consultant has academic credentials is obviously no guarantee that he will be effective and reliable. One new study, for example, noted the "ethical pitfalls" of some consultants, such as the misuse of reports and the temptation to continue billing beyond what is needed. In light of the myriad considerations involved in structuring a research project, the answer to inside versus outside research should be handled on a case by case basis. The optimal situation is a cooperative division of labor between inside and consultative staff.²³

Conclusion

Action research is systematic inquiry designed to produce social change within the Jewish community. This applied form of social research has advanced considerably in methodology and scope over the past twenty-five years. Researchers have analyzed Jewish demography, identity, education, family life, institutional structures, anti-Semitism, and inter-group relationships. They have also developed program evaluation and management information systems. In this essay, we pinpointed the state of the field and top research priorities in several of these survey research areas. We concluded with a discussion of the research pro-

²³ Approaches to evaluate consultation effectiveness and practices are summarized in Edward Glaser and Thomas Backer, "Organizational Consultation," in *Knowledge: Creation, Diffusion, Utilization*, Vol. 3, No. 4 (June, 1982), pp. 571-593. The guidelines derive from interviews with eighteen distinguished consultants.

²⁴ Harold Kushner, *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*. New York: Schocken, 1981, p. 56.

cess, considering the strengths and weaknesses of inside versus outside study personnel.

When I ponder the future of Jewish action research, I am reminded of a story about a youngster who came home from Sunday School. He had just learned the Bible story about the Jews crossing the Red Sea.

His mother asked him what he learned in class, and he told her, "The Israelites got out of Egypt, but Pharaoh and his army chased after them. They got to the Red Sea and they couldn't cross it. The Egyptian army was getting closer. So Moses got on his walkie-talkie,

the Israeli air force bombed the Egyptians, and the Israeli navy built a pontoon bridge so the people could cross." The mother was shocked. "Is that the way they taught you the story?" "Well, no," the boy admitted, "but if I told you the way they told it to us, you'd never *believe* it."²⁴

Like the youngster in this story, it is hard to *believe* the tremendous achievements of the Jewish community in America. I am firmly convinced that action research can help our community move forward in frontier areas. The challenges are great, but so are the opportunities.