

LINKING THE SILOS: A CONSULTATION ON MAXIMIZING EDUCATIONAL PARTICIPATION AND IMPACT IN AN AGE OF CHOICE

SUMMARY

On May 7, one hundred thirty educators, rabbis, communal professionals and lay leaders met in New York under the sponsorship of JESNA's Lippman Kanfer Institute: An Action Oriented Think Tank for Innovation in Jewish Learning and Engagement, to identify strategies to strengthen the connections within and between Jewish educational institutions and to enhance these institutions' responsiveness to the dynamics of consumer choice. This work, now popularly referred to as "linking the silos," has received growing attention since the publication in December 2005 by the Avi Chai Foundation of the Report entitled "Linking the Silos: How to Accelerate the Momentum in Jewish Education Today," edited by Jack Wertheimer. "Linking silos" is increasingly recognized as an important element in enhancing the capacity of educational institutions and Jewish education as a whole to engage more participants, over longer periods, and with greater impact.

In its own study and report, "Redesigning Jewish Education for the 21st Century," The Lippman Kanfer Institute strongly endorsed this endeavor as one key part of its strategy for transforming the design and delivery of Jewish education to make it more learner-focused, relationship-infused, and life-centered. The Institute decided to work with the team that produced the Avi Chai report to promote and concretize the concepts of "silo linking" and "responsiveness to consumer choice" by examining work being done on the ground to implement these ideas and by exploring next steps that can be taken to intensify and expand these efforts. Although these concepts can be applied across the spectrum of educational settings, the consultation focused primarily on two key institutional actors: 1) the synagogue, which is both a major educational provider and a gateway to many other educational experiences; and 2) community-wide coordinating bodies (central agencies for Jewish education and federations), which play key roles in facilitating institutional connections and (potentially) the educational "journeys" of individuals and families.

During the course of the day, participants in the consultation heard four brief framing presentations, took part in sixteen different working groups, and engaged in a final open discussion. What follows are summary notes from these various sessions. The summaries are designed to give a sense of the key points raised during the course of the day; they are not full transcripts. Audio recordings of the four presentations and the concluding session will be available along with other documents related to the consultation on the JESNA website at www.jesna.org. Detailed, but largely unedited, notes from the sixteen working group sessions are also available by request. Please email your request to jwoocher@jesna.org.

Plenary Presentations

Professor Jack Wertheimer, Jewish Theological Seminary of America

- ! The study that became “Linking the Silos” began with wide leeway to explore what is happening in Jewish education. The research team came to realize there were common themes emerging in the various areas they were studying, and one of these was “linking the silos.”

- ! “Linking the silos” is great slogan. The challenge, though, is to figure out how to do it in practice.

- ! What kinds of linkages do we need? Connections are missing in a number of areas. One is the vertical dimension: as young people move through the educational system (and as families make decisions about this), are they being steered, advised, and educated on the range of options available? The answer, we found, is, by and large, “no.” The good news is that we have developed over past decades a panoply of educational institutions in North American Jewish life. But, the very range of these options poses a challenge to families who don’t know how to negotiate their way through these. We need to encourage them to take advantage of the richness available.

- ! There are other types of silos as well. There are silos within institutions. E.g., there are a number of educational endeavors happening simultaneously within synagogues (for children of different ages, families, adults). But, how are they coordinated and connected? Even more difficult is the external siloing. The value of having a range of programs and institutions is reduced when they are not talking to each other or coordinating. Can we build on the benefits of having this range of institutions, e.g., synagogues and summer camps? Are they talking with one another about the same children who attend both? Usually not.

- ! There are serious impediments that stand in the way of doing a better job of linking silos. Most institutions were created as independent institutions, to embody a particular vision. So, there is a natural tendency to focus on “our program.” Enormous resources have been invested to get these programs off the ground. So, getting institutions to look beyond these is not easy.

- ! A second issue is, who is going to do this linking? We need a range of answers as to who can play this role.

- ! Competition among institutions is a reality. They compete for membership. So, there is a hesitancy as to how much conversation and cooperation they are prepared to pursue. They worry that they may harm themselves in the process. The issue, e.g., of helping teens finding the right option for them may raise problems for movements that worry about their teens finding a “home” elsewhere.
- ! So, the practical work we do to link silos must be based on a recognition of these impediments as well as the potential gains if we succeed.

Professor Steven M. Cohen, Hebrew Union College - Jewish Institute of Religion

- ! The research provides the substantive backdrop for the recommendations about linking silos.
- ! The research reveals that many linkages exist already. If we look at behavior over three generations, we find that Jewishly committed grandparents are linked (via parents) to Jewishly educated grandchildren. This applies also to in-marriage and inter-marriage. We see strong inter-generational continuities from one generation to the next.
- ! This linkage can work the other way as well. E.g., we see parents and grandparents (mostly women) going into adult learning programs like the Florence Melton Adult Mini-School because their children and grandchildren are enrolled in Jewish education. We might call this “compensatory” Jewish education: I.e., I recognize that I should know more in order to be a good parent or grandparent. So, we get feedback into the family. (This can work with siblings as well – there are many horizontal and vertical linkages manifested.)
- ! Another linkage: Research shows that people who get Jewish education at any point in their lives are a) more likely to have had prior educational experiences, and b) more likely to get more Jewish education, even many years later.
- ! So, in this respect, Jewish educational experiences are already “naturally” linked. This has implications for recruitment. E.g., if we want to look for more potential campers, we should look first among those already engaged. Engaged populations are more amenable to further engagement.

- ! If we look at impact, research demonstrates that almost every form of Jewish education produces long-term impact (including giving one's children Jewish education). Experiences are cumulative and add up. (The one exception seems to be one day a week programs that seem "worse than nothing" in terms of their impact. This is a challenge for current efforts in supplementary Jewish education.) The impact reflects the fact that education reinforces social ties and norms.

- ! In making the case for more deliberate efforts at linkage, we might consider the example of Rabbi Israel Goldstein and Har Zion Temple in Philadelphia. Har Zion was one of a number of "hotbeds" that produce large numbers of Jewish leaders. Why? The Rabbi was educationally oriented and institutionally generous. He would send young people anywhere to get Jewish education. And, when they came back, they were more engaged. The lesson is that if we send people away to be Jewish in other settings, they will come back to the originating setting more Jewish. We need to get this message out. It's good for them to be linked elsewhere.

Professor Riv-Ellen Prell, University of Minnesota

- ! The research team asked: How is Jewish education embedded in Jewish life, and how is Jewish life embedded in Jewish education? The team looked at family relationships, peer relationships, community relationships, the life course from birth to "Zayde" time. And, we looked at impact over time. In contrast to many studies that look at what is happening in Jewish education per se, we were studying the environments in which Jewish education takes place.

- ! The Avi Chai report could have been titled: "Why a silver bullet never works." Linking silos reflects a systemic, environmental understanding of how Jewish education works, which is what is needed.

- ! There were several key discoveries:

- ! Choice is the key term of American and American Jewish culture. Even Orthodox Jews use this language, saying that "they had no choice" in terms of the Jewish education they give their children. For others, the most important thing was the choices they made for their children. American Jews are consumers of Jewish education, with a tremendous focus on their children, their uniqueness, their needs, their styles of learning. Mothers are driving this concern with choice for their children, seeking what is best for them. This makes the

family unit as a whole the consumer of Jewish education.

- ! Schools are vehicles for parental education. Early childhood education creates communities among parents. From then on, parents are constantly learning with their children. This presents both challenges and opportunities.
- ! Camps, youth groups, and high school together create identity formation that is in many ways comparable to that of day schools. What this means is that the more portals to Jewish life we make available, the more we create and reinforce Jewish identity. Day school doesn't have to be a magic bullet. Not everyone will go to day school, but we still have lots of ways to reach children and their families.
- ! We are living in the wake of fundamental changes that began in the 1970s. Jews are today a highly dispersed population. This is a tremendous challenges for Jewish communal organizations and education. American Jewry is not about the Upper West Side of Manhattan. There are diverse centers of American Jewish life.
- ! Over time, we can see that education works. Grandparents who have strong Jewish educational experiences pass these on to their children, who pass it on to their children. The investment we make in Jewish education is a good one that pays off.
- ! Above all, we learn from the research the power of understanding environments: family environments broadly defined, communal environments (localities differ). These impact Jewish educational behavior and set the context for individual choices.
- ! On the broadest level, we learned again that research matters. This links our work to those of the central European scholars of the late 19th century who were trying to imagine a future for the Jewish people and use their scholarship to advance toward this future.

Barry Shrage, Combined Jewish Philanthropies of Greater Boston

- ! Boston has been especially committed to Jewish education and to linking the silos as part of that commitment. We've learned that major donors *are* interested in Jewish education. Bringing Jewish education supporters and others together

builds financial support.

- ! Federations have a key role to play vis a vis synagogues. Synagogues are the conductors, the key bus drivers. They are at the heart of things. They see the young families first, and 80% of in-married families will come to the synagogue at some point. Synagogues can deliver message that afternoon school alone will fail. Parents want the truth and to be engaged. Rabbis can speak the truth. They know it and understand it. But, they are often locked in an old paradigm.

- ! Federations can provide incentives to help people focus on new paradigms. They can help fill the silos of summer camping, Israel experience, etc. Individuals can have these experiences in the synagogue context, with the synagogue as the bus driver. Then, we can link these silos.

- ! We need to train rabbis to understand that the nature of congregations must change. Until that is internalized in the staff of congregations, we will have a tough time. But, incentives do help – we can get rabbis to pay attention by providing the financial incentives for adding full-time youth workers, high quality adult Jewish learning, etc.

- ! A second linkage point is on the college campus. The connection between Hillel and birthright israel is now a key one.

- ! We are full of opportunities. The only problem will be if we lose confidence and lose sight of where we are going.

Working Group Sessions

During the course of the day, there were sixteen working group sessions held on a range of topics related to the overall theme as listed below. Each group was facilitated by one or more participants with special expertise in the topic being discussed. The facilitators prepared brief statements to introduce the discussions (the statements are available on the JESNA website). Four guiding questions were suggested as frames for the statements / discussion, though not all followed this format:

- 1. What is the current “state of the art” in your domain, based on existing models?*
- 2. What would “success” look like in your domain?*
- 3. What are the assets and opportunities and the barriers and challenges that affect efforts to be more successful in your domain?*
- 4. What recommendations do you have for moving forward to reach success?*

The discussions in the sixteen working group sessions were wide-ranging. Many specific ideas and recommendations were articulated in relation to the particular topics of the individual sessions. However, there were also a number of ideas expressed repeatedly that reflect broad themes applicable in many arenas where “silo linking” and rethinking of relationships between educational “providers” and “consumers” is taking place. The summary below focuses on these key themes and issues that have resonance in multiple contexts and settings.

List of Working Group Sessions and Facilitators:

- 1. Systemic congregational education: promoting transformational Jewish learning – Cyd Weissman and Marc Margolius*
- 2. Synagogues and summer camping: realizing the possibilities for year-round learning – Menachem Creditor*
- 3. Day Schools and Shuls: Unified Commitment to Educating the Next Generation of Jews – Gil Preuss*
- 4. Maximizing engagement through the teen years – Steven Schauder*
- 5. Making learners the client: defining new roles for community agencies – Robert Lichtman*
- 6. Re-engineering the Jewish supply chain – Jerry Silverman*
- 7. Camps, congregations, youth groups: linking within movements – Carl Sheingold, Erin Hirsh, Amy Small*
- 8. Linking silos in the Orthodox world: issues and lessons – Kenneth Brander*
- 9. Maximizing engagement of children and families in the early years – Harlene Appelman and Mark Horowitz*
- 10. Rabbis and educators as educational guides and gate-keepers – Alan Silverstein and Susan Werk*
- 11. Reaching the consumer: intensive marketing and personalized service – Miriam Prum Hess*
- 12. Integrating education into congregational life – Jessica Zimmerman*
- 13. Building a communal support system for lifelong learning: lessons from the field – Ellen Waghelstein and Avi West*

14. Synagogues and JCCs: exploiting the synergies – *Joy Levitt*
15. The Federation role in fostering linkages – *Sara Nathan and Deborah Joselow*
16. “Anything, Anyone, Anytime, Anywhere”: Synagogue Educational Renewal in an Age of Extreme Choice– *Hayim Herring*

Key ideas and issues emanating from the Working Group Sessions:

- ! We must make sure that the “silos” themselves are “well-filled” and sturdy. Linking weak silos is not going to get us where we want to go. When we work to break down silos, we need to do so with sensitivity and respect.

- ! As we think about moving people along a continuum of Jewish experiences and life stages, we also have to make sure to value the experiences people are having at the time they are having them, and not just as the foundations for future experiences. E.g., we need to value (and design) teen experiences for what they bring to teens at that moment, and not just because they are paving the way for what we hope will be their Jewish lives as college students and adults.

- ! Much of this is about cultivating and strengthening relationships on both the individual and institutional levels. Relationships between: organizations; lay people and professionals; learners and educators; individuals and their own Jewish journeys; individuals and communities; leaders of schools, camps, youth groups, etc.

- ! People play a key, perhaps *the* key, role with respect to linking silos. Professionals (and lay leaders) need to be connected to one another and to understand their roles. This needs to begin from the time of their initial training.

- ! We need to seek shared vision and shared language. This takes time, and can only come from real conversation. Personal relationships matter and need to be cultivated.

- ! There are many opportunities for mutual learning and cross-fertilization across boundaries that we normally think of as separating domains, e.g., the boundary between “formal” and “informal” Jewish education. These opportunities include more creative and collaborative use of personnel.

- ! Keep the focus resolutely on the “client” / learner(s) – their needs and the integration of their experience. A client-centered focus has a number of important implications:

- < We must make an effort to understand where they are and where they are going. This implies a need for better information and for more skillful tracking of the learners.
- < The measures of our success institutionally and programmatically should be defined in terms of outcomes for the learners (although what these outcomes should be is not yet clear and needs further discussion).
- < We need to work on IEPs (individualized educational plans) for a wide range of learners.
- < We need to go where the clients are – physically as well as psychologically.
- < We need to give people tools and trust the process. We should not be imposing our ideas of what learners must come away with.
- < The importance of “staying with” the client. We need to think and to care about what comes next, even beyond the boundaries of our own institutions.

- ! The community has a responsibility to see that all learners are being engaged and supported. This means that learners, not institutions, should be seen as the ultimate clients for central agencies and federations.

- ! There is a need for “linkage facilitators” / “journey facilitators” (whether we use the language of “concierges,” or some other terminology – coaches, guides, etc.). This needs to be someone’s job. Linkages need to be facilitated both between learners and “system” and between parts of the system itself. Filling this role well has a content as well as a process dimension (i.e., the information and guidance provided must itself be Jewishly “credible”). This poses a challenge for those playing this role.

- ! The institutions that make up the “supply chain” for Jewish engagement and learning must work together to meet customers’ needs. This requires shared goals. We need to build a model of the “flow” that we want to see from experience to experience. The current system is not aligned with our goals; it does not promote this flow.

- ! Many synagogues are internally siloed. To address this, synagogues should seek to integrate their activities around core values and to think holistically: How can we support Jewish growth of our members? At the same time, to fulfill this mission, synagogues need to be permeable to what lies outside. (So, silos need to be linked both internally and externally.)

- ! One specific challenge involves moving from peak experiences back into the

day-to-day world (e.g., from camping to year-round learning in the synagogue). How can we connect these, and how can we infuse the latter with some of the intensity of the former?

- ! The barriers to linking silos, such as costs and resource issues, must be addressed squarely. Preaching the desirability of silo linking alone will not produce substantial change unless these barriers are dealt with.
- ! To move this agenda forward we need a “literature of success.” People need to see models and examples. This may require seeding several demonstration projects.
- ! Judaism and Jewish experiences can themselves become “silos,” or at least be perceived that way. People (especially young people) live their lives with a great deal of fluidity between their Jewish experiences and identities and the rest of their lives. So, breaking down silos includes connecting Jewish experiences to the broader world.

Concluding Session: Insights, Challenges, Suggestions for Moving Forward

The concluding session of the consultation was an open forum in which participants were invited to share insights gained during the day, challenges they identified for moving forward, and recommendations of specific next steps to advance the agenda of “linking silos.”

- ! It’s important to define our measures of success. What do we want our young people to know, feel, and do? The tactics will flow from this. This is also a great question to bring lay leaders into the conversation and will build champions for Jewish education.
- ! Linking the silos is not about any particular structure. It’s about building many inter-connected choices, because there is no one definition of success.
- ! There is both a trickle-up and a trickle-down involved. We need to challenge one another inter-generationally to learn more.
- ! Building trust in relationships is critical, since people in the silos feel very vulnerable.

- ! How do we learn about what is going on? (This is part of linking silos.) How are we going to develop communications strategies for efficient access?
- ! Federation does have a special role. Its mandate is different than that of any individual silo. It can initiate this type of action, and we should encourage federations to do this.
- ! We need a mechanism for tracking and for communication among ourselves: what are people doing and what are they thinking and imagining? This will hasten and deepen the process.
- ! Tracking, referring and follow-up with clients is critical.
- ! We need a road show model of sharing best practices among communities.
- ! We need a national conversation about teens.
- ! We need a common language that parents and children, lay leadership will understand. We used psychological and business language. We haven't heard much Jewish language. What's the language that all will understand? What's the metaphor and imagery for bringing this alive?
- ! If we do not have funding, all this will just be a lot of words.
- ! We need to be honest about organizational tensions and issues of authority.
- ! We should try to avoid building more layers of structure and process that will take away from the "doing." We don't want, e.g., to come into the synagogue and strain it even more.
- ! How do we give experiments enough time in order to take root, succeed, and be replicated?
- ! This is not a "one size fits all" situation. Communities are different, so replication cannot take place mechanically.

- ! We're talking about systemic change. How do we ensure that professionals have the skill sets necessary to do this?

- ! We're dealing with the same structural problems with different issues. Before we get to the micro level, we need to bring the movements, federations, and mega-funders together to get some commitment to breaking down the silos.

- ! This involves changing our mind set to think about ends, rather than means. Many potential learners are not participating at all. The central agency can focus on getting more people learning whether through traditional institutions or alternative means.

- ! There is an unprecedented variety of Jewish journeys today. As we try to find organizational responses and link silos, we need to be aware that the variety of learners is growing and changing every few years. We need to adapt to stay with it and the pace of change.

- ! Training is the top priority. We should create a "school without walls" that is tied to the other training institutions and links among them. Start linking silos by having deep respect for the silos themselves. Their strengths could be enhanced by linking them. Train future professionals for this kind of thinking about how Jewish education should take place.

- ! Be a convener. Everyone has a lot to do, and it's easy to forget this part of the vision. Conversation with others is helpful.

- ! Hold a meeting at the GA in Nashville.

- ! A website is a given.

- ! Carry out quick surveys to see what others are doing and circulate the results.