

Newsletter of the NETWORK FOR RESEARCH IN JEWISH EDUCATION

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Network Officers

Chair Carol Ingall
Treasurer Shulamith Elster
Secretariat Leora Isaacs
Conference Chair... Lisa Grant
2000 Program Chair..... Alex Pomso

Message From The Chair

The Baton has been Passed:

It's Time to Just Do It

Carol Ingall



I am still on a high after our conference. It was smaller than we would have wished for, but that brought its own rewards: a

sense of shared enterprise, more time to spend discussing papers, more opportunities to chat at length with colleagues. I am frankly delighted (as well as a little terrified) to take over the leadership of this organization. Michael Zeldin, and before him, Stuart Schoenfeld, were wonderful stewards of the Network. I feel energized by the challenge and the standards they have set.

Why do I feel so hopeful about this organization? Almost a decade ago, I served on the original Mandel Commission for Jewish Education. One of its findings, no surprise to those of us in the field, was that Jewish educational research was in its infancy. Today we have an organization with more than 200 professionals who share similar interests and concerns. This group of 200 includes a lively cadre of graduate students.

This reaching out to graduate students is a hallmark of our organization. The Network is generous with its funds, reimbursing a large portion of the expenses of students who attend the conference. The Network is generous with its expertise as well, affording graduate students invaluable opportunities for consultation on their research projects. Two graduate students traditionally serve as members of the Steering Committee and take an active role in planning the annual conference. No small measure of my excitement about the conference derived from the *nachas* I felt as two of my students presented their papers at the conference. We hope to provide additional support these students, as well as young colleagues with doctorates, by offering research grants. Shulamith Elster, our treasurer, has agreed to chair a committee to set up criteria for the grants and oversee their distribution.

Our sessions look less and less like “talking heads” and more and more like the best of educational practice. We have changed the format of our panel discussions/symposia to provide opportunities for interaction with not only the presenters, but with each other. Elsewhere in this issue, Arnie Dashefsky reports on the research agenda suggested by the small groups which met following his Spotlight Session.

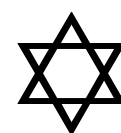
We have affected a successful relationship with CJE so that one issue of The Journal of Jewish Education is dedicated to publishing papers presented at our annual conference.

I have limited goals for my first year in office. I want to continue to grow the organization gently, so we don’t radically change the character of the organization.

One suggestion, made by David Ackerman, is for each of us to reach out to our colleagues in Jewish studies who may share an interest in Jewish education. Another source of future colleagues is the practitioners who are not part of the academy. If each of us invites a newcomer to the conference at JTS (June 4-6, 2000), we can make a major contribution to the vigor of this stellar organization.

I suggest that we examine new categories of presentations that might bring in these colleagues as presenters, as well as attendees. I also want to better articulate our criteria for accepting papers so that there are clearer rubrics to use in determining what constitutes an acceptable paper. I also would like to try to firm up our deadlines so we can give our presenters more time to revise papers and to allow us to disseminate a conference preview a month before the conference begins.

I am grateful for the support of JESNA and our sponsors and delighted to have such an accomplished team to help organize the conference in New York. Lisa Grant, of JTS is conference chair and Alex Pomson, of York University is the program chair. All three of us will benefit from exchanging ideas with a remarkably able steering committee consisting of Shulamith Elster, Leora Isaacs, Danna Kalkstein, Alisa Kurshan, Diane Schuster, Rami Wernick, and Michael Zeldin. I have no doubts that they will cheer me on when my energy flags and pick me up when I trip over my shoelaces. Feel free to contact any one of us with your thoughts about the Network. Best wishes for a *shanah tovah u-metukah*.



Notes From The Conference



Diane Tickton-Schuster

The 13th Annual Meeting of the Network for Research in Jewish Education was held June

6-8, 1999 in Los Angeles. Co-hosted by Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion and the University of Judaism, the meeting convened in three locations:

the Skirball Museum, UJ, and Stephen S. Wise Temple. Diversified locations afforded a variety of settings for plenaries, seminars, meals, and our "gala" 13th Anniversary Celebration.

Meeting highlights included:

- * an interactive plenary session with scholar-in-residence Sharon Feiman-Nemser who used the concept of "teaching dilemmas" to prompt reflection on research and practice issues in Jewish education. Her video of a new teacher sparked dynamic discussion of priorities in research.

- * "spotlight sessions" that were organized around key issues in Jewish education and were designed to spark dialogue and broaden thinking. One session, convened by Barry Holtz, focused on the professional development of teachers; Ellen Goldring reported findings about professional development opportunities in five Jewish communities; Gail Dorph facilitated small group discussion of the usefulness of general professional education models for Jewish education. The other session, convened by Arnold Dashefsky, asked: "What are current educational priorities in each of the denominations?" Respondents Michael Zeldin (Reform), Carol Ingall (Conservative), Jeff Schein (Reconstructionist), and Jon Levison (Orthodox) offered comments prior to small group discussions about denominational research needs for the future.

- * text study with Hanan Alexander that included hevruta discussion of Exodus 3-4, Moses' encounter with the burning bush.

- * eight paper presentations that included in-depth discussion of issues raised in the papers as articulated by the session chairpersons. The meeting's emphasis on interactive dialogue in every session provided the opportunity for all participants to "get beneath the surface" on issues of common concern. Abstracts of the papers are reprinted in this newsletter. A forthcoming issue of *The Journal of Jewish Education* will include a number of the full papers.



Carol Ingall & Hanan Alexander chatting at the Bar/Bat Mitzvah Celebration

- * a consultation session that provided doctoral candidate Linda Thal with the opportunity to solicit suggestions from ten colleagues about her dissertation proposal in the area of Jewish Spiritual Development.

- * Jack Wertheimer from Jewish Theological Seminary of America presented a preview of the upcoming article "Great Expectations: Jewish Education, which is to appear in the 1999 *American Jewish Yearbook*.



Prof. Jack Wertheimer - delivering the invited address

* the 13th Anniversary Celebration acknowledging the "coming of age" of the Network. Held on the terrace and in comfortable meeting rooms of Stephen S. Wise Temple, the celebration included an elegant reception and banquet-each befitting the "bar mitzvah" nature of this occasion. David Ackerman presented a meta-analysis of papers presented at each of the previous Network meetings. Isa Aron and Hanan Alexander described the founding of the Network and the early years of building the research community. Diane Schuster reflected on the "culture" of the Network, mentioning the emblematic principles of "rolling deadlines" and collegiality. Network Chair Michael Zeldin described the many accomplishments of the Network during his four years of leadership and graciously turned the gavel over to Incoming Chair Carol Ingall. Prior to assuming her new responsibilities, Carol was joined by Shulamith Elster and Leora Isaacs in the presentation of a "commentary" on Michael's leadership: a spirited musical sing-along tribute to the tune of "Summer Lovin'."



Michael Zeldin, Network Chair, making presentations to Shulamith Elster and Leora Isaacs, Network Officers

The success of the 1999 Conference could not have been achieved without the hard work and support of my wonderful Program Committee. Many thanks to Hanan Alexander, Shulamith Elster, Carol Ingall, Leora Isaacs, Sara Lee, Jon Levisohn, Alex Pomson, Elon Sunshine, and Michael Zeldin. Thank you, as well, to Network members who served as proposal reviewers and to Lois Zachary, who helped plan the Spotlight Sessions.



Sandy Dashefsky, Paul Flexner, Leora Isaacs & Linda Thal enjoying the Bar Mitzvah reception

Membership Benefits!

Such as the discussion list and highlights of future events are only available to all current members.

If you are interested, please complete the enclosed membership form and return it to:

***Shulamith Elster
Hillel of Greater Washington
6101 Montrose Road, Suit 201
Rockville, MD 20852***

Return the form as soon as possible to ensure that you will not miss important notices and

Introducing *The Young Scholars Program* of the Network for Research in Jewish Education

In recent years the Network has made a commitment to working with graduate students to enhance their participation in Network activities and to encourage them in their research pursuits. There is a dues structure that makes membership accessible to students, special registration rates for the annual conference, opportunities to present student work as part of the annual conference program and a forum in which to benefit from the advice and counsel of network members.

The Network also makes travel stipends available so that every year graduate students can attend the conference and meet colleagues in the field.

At the 1999 Conference Michael Zeldin announced that the Network would launch an initiative that would provide modest funding to graduate students in Jewish education to help support research projects. Annual competitive grants are to be announced every year at the conference and grant recipients will be invited to discuss their project the following year and have works reviewed for possible publication in the *Journal of Jewish Education*.

Carol Ingall has appointed a working committee to more fully develop the Young Scholars Program of the Network. Shulamith Elster will chair the committee and work with Network members Burton Cohen, Gail Z. Dorph

Save The Dates

Upcoming Network Conferences

14th Annual Conference

June 4-6, 2000

The Jewish Theological Seminary

New York City

15th Annual Conference

For more information contact Lisa Grant:

Ligrant@jtsa.edu

SPOTLIGHT SESSIONS

Spotlight sessions addressed key issues in Jewish education and Jewish educational research. They were intended to spark dialogue and broaden thinking.

Professional Development of Teachers- New Findings, New Questions

Barry Holtz

This session was an opportunity to explore key issues in the area of the Professional Development of Teachers in contemporary Jewish education. The session consisted of two parts. In the first section, Dr. Ellen Goldring presented results from a quantitative/qualitative study (conducted by Adam Gamoran, Ellen Goldring and Bill Robinson) of professional development opportunities in five Jewish communities as provided by central agencies for Jewish education and synagogue supplementary schools. What kinds of professional development are available in those communities? How much professional development do teachers actually get? How do we assess the quality of those professional development experiences? The second section of the session was an open discussion, led by Dr. Gail Dorph and Dr. Barry Holtz on the issue of “what the professional development approaches of general education can and cannot teach us in Jewish education?” How appropriate are the general education models for Jewish education?

What is missing if we rely on those approaches? What contribution does the thinking in general education give us that we currently do not have in Jewish education? Participants were invited to explore these questions and others in an interactive way.



Shulamith Elster making presentation to Michael Zeldin. (David Ackerman assising)

Jewish Education and Denomination in American Judaism

Arnold Dashefsky

With the theme of Jewish continuity in the forefront of communal discussions, this session addressed the following three questions, derived from a recent book, *Jewish Choices: American Jewish Denominationalism* by B. Lazerwitz, J.A. Winter, A Dashefsky and E. Tabory (Albany: SUNY Press, 1998), based on the National Jewish Population Survey of 1990:

SPOTLIGHT SESSIONS CONTINUED

1) What are the underlying social sources that led to the emergence of the various denominations in American Jewish Life?

2) What are some of the major empirical findings about denominational preferences and the synagogue membership among American Jews?

3) What are the implications of the study for assessing the relationship between Jewish education and denominational variation?

A set of tables summarized the findings, followed by specific denominational assessments by a panel of experts, who discussed the recent trends in the major denominations. The participants and their topics included Carol K. Ingall (Conservative), Jeffrey Schein (Reconstructionist), Michael Zeldin (Reform), and Jon Levisohn (Orthodox.)

The panel presentations were followed by questions from the floor and four small group discussions focusing on two questions with regard to Jewish education and denominational differences in American Jewry:

1) What would be the significant research questions within each denomination with regard to Jewish education?

2) If we make denomination an independent variable for investigation, what would be the kind of research questions we might ask?



Questions generated by the four discussion groups included:

Regarding Denominational Influences:

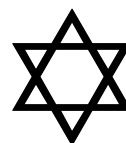
1) To what extent do denominations inhibit involvement and does it influence JCC membership?

2) What are the consequences for adults who are being told that they "aren't Jews" - although they were raised as Jews?

3) What are the markers of the denominational contexts of schools and how do we identify them?

4) What are the factors that shape denominational shifts?

5) What are the consequences for denominational shifts from attending elite denominational programs?



6) What constitutes a "shift"?

-practice/ideology?

-synagogue attendance?

7) What are the attitudes towards other denominations in denominational schooling experiences?

8) Shifts as failures or successes? What are the attitudes of the denominational leaders toward denominational shifting?

9) How do students perceive each denomination?

10) What are the effects of geographic location - (big city, small town) and denominational differences in Jewish educational programs?

SPOTLIGHT SESSIONS CONTINUED



Regarding Pedagogical Concerns and Curricular Issues

1) What is the impact of "mixed-marriage children" on teachers in classrooms? Do they influence the hidden/enacted curriculum?

2) How does the teaching of *Klal Yisrael* vary within a denominational context?

3) What effect, if any, does the presence of non-Jews in Jewish schools have on the curriculum? Students? Staff?

4) What are the attitudes of graduates of denominational schools on their place in their movement?

5) What is the influence of denomination on curricular matters?

6) How do levels of Jewish identification of teachers vary in denominational schools and the JCC?

7) What is the ratio of general studies to Jewish studies and the amount of integration between the two in varying denominational day schools?

8) What is the influence of the ideology of the movement on personal affiliation?

9) To what degree are there articulated levels of understanding of the ideology of the movement in the implementation of the movements' educational institutions?

10) In the teacher training provided, do different movements pay more/less attention to pedagogy, curriculum, etc.?

11) Of what significance is the particular ideological perspective people are exposed to as children?

12) What impact is there on the religious practice of teachers who work at a school of a different denomination than they endorse? Does teaching material change behavior of teachers?

11) What is the influence of denominational differences on length of time of Jewish education?

12) What are the denominational differences with regard to early childhood education and special needs?

13) What are the denominational differences with regard to early childhood education and special needs?

14) Are certain denominations more receptive to trends in public education with regard to structure, curriculum and goals?

15) What are parents' motivations for sending children to a particular denominational school?

16) What are the variations in knowledge of the theology of the movements across denominations?

17) What is the distinction between the Conservative movement and Conservative Jews.

18) Do Israelis (in US) define themselves in denominational terms? (Many supplementary ed and day school teachers come from Israeli origin. In Canada, 2/3 teachers are from Israel and don't define themselves by denomination.)

ABSTRACTS

The following abstracts have been edited to less than 250 words in order to fit the constraints of this publication. Consideration has been taken to preserve the original meaning and intent of the author(s).

A Meeting of Minds and Hearts: A Comparison of Affective and Cognitive Models in Structured Encounters between Israeli and Jewish-American Adolescents

Erik Cohen

Mifgashim, structured meetings between Diaspora participants of Israel Experience Programs and Israeli youth, are organized to strengthen ties between the two groups. Two basic models of Mifgashim are offered, one emphasizing cognitive and the other affective means of achieving the same goal. The cognitive-based model has a slightly stronger impact, especially on the Israeli participants. Nonetheless, both fall somewhat short of their potential in impact and satisfaction. We believe that the types of activities are not the source of the encounters shortfalls. Difficulties include the brief time allotted, language barriers and group functioning, in particular adolescent group dynamics. Perhaps the most fundamental problem is a widespread perception that the Mifgashim are conducted primarily for the benefit of the Diaspora youth.

Jewish Education and Denomination in American Judaism

Arnold Dashefsky

With the theme of Jewish continuity in the forefront of communal discussions, this presentation addressed the following three questions, derived from a recent book, *Jewish Choices: American Jewish Denominationalism* by B. Lazerwitz, J.A. Winter, A. Dashefsky and E. Tabory (Albany: SUNY Press, 1998), based on the National Jewish Population Survey of 1990:

- * What are the underlying social sources that led to the emergence of the various denominations in American Jewish life?
- * What are some of the major empirical findings about denominational preferences and synagogue membership among American Jews?
- * What are the implications of the study for assessing the relationship between Jewish education and denominational variation?

A set of tables summarized the findings. Specific denominational assessments followed this initial presentation.

Between Angels and Mere Mortals: Nechama Leibowitz's Approach to the Presentation of Biblical Characters

Howard Deitcher

During her lifetime and up until after she left us, Nechama Leibowitz was known as the "teacher of teachers". She developed a pedagogic approach that is based on clear principles and is designed to draw the reader into an active encounter with the Biblical text and its messages.

One of the most accessible and effective ways of triggering this encounter with the Biblical text is through a study of the actions, thoughts and portrayal of Biblical characters. Leibowitz encourages the reader to closely examine the Biblical characters' actions and to ponder the motives for their behavior. What motivated the patriarchs to act and react as they did? What in their inner worlds and in their personalities impelled them to these deeds? What literary, historical, and other tools does the Biblical text utilize to show the different characters in varied and novel situations?

- * In this paper we have identified four pedagogic approaches to presenting the biblical characters and labeled them in the following way:
- * The Forefathers as sons of Angels (A. Kotler)

ABSTRACTS CONTINUED

- * Justifying the Patriarchs' Behavior (A. Zuta and Y. Azaryahu)
- * Judging the Patriarchs' Behavior (Z. Adar)
- * Understanding the Patriarchs' Behavior (N. Leibowitz)

After presenting the various approaches, Leibowitz's unique approach was highlighted and concurrently, some of its limitations were pointed out.

Portraits of Teachers

Danna Kalkstein

We can learn about great teaching by studying many different teachers. A single teacher can also provide us with insights into how great teachers are made. Based on a series of three interviews and two classroom observations, this paper reveals a portrait of a teacher.

Using in-depth interviewing techniques as described by Seidman (1991), the interviewer learned about the teacher, his history as a student and an educator, and the way he thinks about his teaching today. Extensive quotations allow the teacher's own words to tell his story. The classroom observations that followed served to illuminate how the philosophy of the teacher was put into practice.

The interviews revealed many experiences, both positive and negative, that clearly influenced the way this teacher conducted his classroom. As educators, we can utilize his experience to focus on

areas that were once not thought of being critical to teacher development. We may also identify unexpected sources of recruits. The paper concludes with lessons drawn from this examination of a single teacher.

What is Feminist Epistemology and Why Should We (Jewish Educators) Care?

Jon Levisohn

This paper considers the field of feminist epistemology and attempts to draw some implications for Jewish education. The first section of the paper offers an overview of the three main movements within feminist epistemology, each of which takes a different approach to dealing with the tension between the ideal of objectivity and the situated of actual knowers. The three movements are feminist empiricism, feminist standpoint epistemology, and post-modern feminist epistemology. The second section surveys the strengths and weakness of each of the three positions, and continues with an analysis of Sandra Harding's more sophisticated version of feminist standpoint epistemology. Particular attention is paid to her distinction between the "logic of discovery" and the "logic of validation," and the her concept of "strong objectivity." Finally, the third section draws some connections to Jewish education, focusing especially on the ways in which the concept of "strong objectivity" may be applied to the Jewish community,

and on the implications of treating a standpoint not as an empirical fact but as a normative ideal for Jewish education.

The Teacher as Rebbe

Alex Pomson

Although research has consistently shown that culturally embedded archetypes of teaching powerfully shape the ways teachers conceive of their work and lives, it remains unclear why or how these archetypes continue to exert such influence. Their tenacity has variously been attributed to the power held by those who articulate them, to their context within larger social traditions, and to their tacit character.

This paper explores an alternative hypothesis for the vitality of traditional understanding of teaching. It argues that their strength might be attributed less to the context of their transmission than to their continuing potential for translation as, what MacIntyre calls "not-yet completed narratives."

The data on which this argument is based was generated during the course of a project which elicited accounts from Jewish day school teachers about their lives and work. A portrait is offered of a teacher whose narrative not only bears a strong resemblance to what we characterize as an archetype of the teacher-as-Rebbe, it also seems to articulate a significant transformation of that archetype in terms of the gender of its ideal type and in its understanding of the teacher's role in someone else's

ABSTRACTS CONTINUED

In making evident that traditions of teaching remain vital by generating new literatures of practice, this case points to the appropriateness of pursuing an approach to teacher professionalization founded on a dialectic encounter between the constructions of theory and the embedded knowledge of teachers.

Conflicting Loyalties: Reflections on Ethnographic Research in a Synagogue Setting

Joseph Reimer

This paper is a reflection on a troubling moment in my synagogue research when, as a participant observer I experienced strong emotional reactions to several of the subjects I was observing. These personal reflections are offered to explore a larger problem in the social scientific study of American Jewish life. Most researchers who study this area are themselves American Jews with strong, if varied, Jewish commitments. They are far from neutral about the questions and people they are studying. Often they will be maximally reactive to the behavior and attitudes of the people they are researching. Yet little has been written about handling the emotions that arise in conducting this research and how those emotions may influence the conclusion drawn by the researchers. This may especially be true when the research question deals, as in this case, with Jews who have chosen to marry a partner of another faith.

As these types of questions are commonly dealt with in the ethnographic literature, the paper draws on the insights of several anthropologists, including Barbara Myerhoff, E.M. Bruner, David Fetterman, and Clifford Geertz, to bring perspective on the conflicts facing a Jewish researcher in a synagogue context. The paper explores how the researcher's strong emotional reactions may be a guide to understanding underlying emotional currents alive within the population under study. Emotions can also be data when carefully attended to and understood in context.

Portrait of a Teacher: Allison Kahn, Scholar, Teacher of Talmud

Rhonda Rosenheck

This paper is an example of portraiture, a style of ethnographic research developed by Sarah Lawrence-Lightfoot in which carefully crafted prose paints a picture grounded in observations, interviews, and examination of artifacts. The research begins and concludes with questions rather than hypotheses. The paper offers a richly descriptive, authentic representation of Allison Kahn, a new seminary teacher of Talmud. Its purpose is to draw readers into the process of wondering and learning about new teachers of Judaic subjects. Questions and associations, such as those which, emerge from the details of the portrait and can be tested by readers in their

Why has Allison chosen to become a Talmud scholar and teacher? How does her passion for the subject inform or affect her formulation of what it means to teach Talmud to beginners? Who is Allison the *teacher*? What does she think about teaching and learning, and from where did these views emerge?

Finally, some literature from the field is brought in, but only to help the author frame the process and

Editors:

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